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Wishing you a Kesiva v'Chasima Tova!

Message from the President: Dinner with Lazer

I met Lazer Grunman* some forty-five years ago when I lived in a Jewish community in the western United States. Lazer was a tough, combative, and occasionally vulgar young man who was very sensitive to any real or perceived slight on his personal *kavod* (honor). This was completely understandable, as he had a very abusive father who would not hesitate to mete out a harsh rebuke and/or corporal punishment for any and all infractions — including slights on *his* personal honor.

Somehow Lazer and I developed a friendship that has managed to survive, despite great differences in our personalities and hashkafic views, as well as very little face-to-face contact. Lazer calls me every few months, with our conversations pretty much following the same script: a greeting, followed by a series of mild insults such as “You are a legend in your own mind,” or “You’re a shmekel and a pekel”; then a segue into a polemic against “holier than thou” from Jews whom he deems hypocritical because they appear to be put off by Lazer; followed by a tirade against messianic Jews, missionaries, anti-Semites, and — of late — Moslems, Netanyahu, and the Israeli Supreme Court. I usually don’t get to say too much during the course of these conversations, which may last as long as half an hour. While Lazer’s irreverence can be somewhat amusing and entertaining, the experience of speaking with him is not especially relaxing or pleasant.

This past year, Lazer called when I was sitting *shiva* for my brother *a”h*. I told him that I was not up to speaking with him then and that I would try to reach out to him at a later time. Unfortunately, due to a subsequent hospitalization, my life was overcome by events and I did not honor this informal commitment.

A few months later, Lazer called once again while I was driving to New York with my wife. Since we are *B”H* very busy people, it is a relatively rare occurrence for us to spend time alone together. As a result, I decided not to take his call. That was a big mistake. Lazer assumed the worst — that I had permanently blocked his number because I no longer wished to be his friend. His reaction to this perceived slap in the face, fueled in no small part by the fact that I did not “keep my promise” to call him back, was swift and violent.

Some of the milder accusations in Lazer’s subsequent text message included:

You never, in my opinion, will reach the level of Rabbi X or Rabbi Y...You give me the impression that you think you are doing me a favor — like I really need your friendship...The problem is that you are a legend in your own mind...You’re a fake and a phony — you were never my friend...

* Not his real name

My response was firm and controlled: No, I did not block his phone number; I did not return his call after *shiva* because I was hospitalized; I certainly did not think I was, in any way, shape, or form, a legend or a facsimile thereof. I also rebuked him for being quick to hurl terrible accusations and end a relationship of forty-five years without giving me any semblance of the benefit of the doubt. We subsequently apologized to one another, but there was lingering hurt — certainly on my part — and I seriously considered writing Lazer out of my life.

Upon further reflection, however, I had to admit that he was right about a couple of things: It was unlikely that I would reach the level of Rabbi X or Rabbi Y. More importantly, I *did* feel that being Lazer's friend was an act of great magnanimity on my part and that, by speaking with him, I was doing him a big favor. There had been rolling of the eyes where there should have been respect and compassion.

I gave some thought to all that he had endured over the course of his childhood and adult life. Instead of being annoyed or offended by his sassiness, I began to feel privileged to have earned the trust of someone who had been brutally betrayed by the people closest to him and whose capacity for trust was, as a result, so severely compromised. In that light, his violent overreaction became completely understandable and, with that understanding, I was able to completely overlook the insults and move on.

Recently I had the pleasure of learning two very practical *perushim* on how best to prepare for the *Yomim Noraim*:

1. *Sichos Musar, "L'Kras Yom HaDin"* (Greeting the Day of Judgment): *Ma'mar Kof* – 100, by HaRav Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt"l*, and
2. *Yegheh Chachmo, "Hachanos v'Eitzos L'Din"* (Preparation and Advice for Judgment Day), by HaRav Yitzchok Feigelstock *zt"l*.

Both referenced the famous *gemara* (*Rosh Hashana* 17b):

רָבָא אָמַר : כָּל הַמַּעֲבִיר עַל מַדוּתָיו — מַעֲבִירִין לוֹ עַל כָּל פְּשָׁעָיו,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר : "נוֹשֵׂא עוֹן וְעוֹבֵר עַל פְּשָׁע" . לְמִי נוֹשֵׂא עוֹן — לְמִי שֶׁעוֹבֵר עַל פְּשָׁע.

Rava said: Whoever overlooks his dealings [with others for injustices done to him], [the heavenly court in turn] overlooks punishment for all his sins, as it is stated, "He bears sin and forgives transgression." (Michah 7:18)
Whose sins does Hashem bear? The sins of one who overlooks and forgives transgressions committed by others against him.

Rav Shmuelevitz points out that, even if such a person has not achieved atonement for his *aveiros* (sins) and is still considered a *choteh* (sinner), the attributes of justice and punishment give him a "pass." The *Mishnah Berurah* points out (*Sha'ar HaTziyun* 606:8) that Hashem overlooks even those *aveiros* that were committed with intent and rebelliousness. However, the *gemara* adds an

important caveat: this circumvention of strict justice only works for those who are genuinely humble.

This suggests that Hashem will not overlook our *pesh'a'im* (transgressions) if we try to decrease our hurt and irritation by belittling the person who is aggravating us. If we take the approach that the person in question is emotionally disabled and has such grave character flaws as to preclude the right to be taken seriously, we will awaken — not suppress — *Midas HaDin* (the divine attribute of strict justice).

Therefore, “choose life”: Take the humble approach, as recommended by Rav Feigelstock and as discussed in the *Michtav M'Elياهو* (Vol. 4, p.243). Simply stated, this means putting oneself in the other person's shoes and genuinely trying to understand, in a non-judgmental way, the reasons for inappropriate, irritating, or hurtful behavior. This, Rav Feigelstock suggests, will go a long way towards becoming *maavir al middosav* (one who forgoes his honor and assumes the perspective of others). This is not meant to suggest that bad behavior is anything other than bad behavior. It does convey, however, that when other people behave badly, they still deserve to be taken seriously. It also means that when one's feathers are ruffled, the moral order of the universe has not been violated. Rather, ruffled feathers are a call to growth.

Recently, my wife and I vacationed out west and used to the occasion to contact Lazer and take him out to dinner. I am not a prophet, nor the son of prophets, but I don't think Hashem heard Lazer's inappropriate comments and polemics. I think He heard the joyous song of someone with a bruised and broken heart who, at that moment, felt valued and loved. I hope and pray that He also saw an attempt by a simple Jew trying to do the right thing.

May we all be blessed with a good, sweet year,

Rabbi Yosef Singer

Introduction from the Director

It is a pleasure to introduce yet another exciting issue of the Journal of the Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington. The goal of the Journal is to share timely and inspirational Divrei Torah, coupled with articles related to contemporary matters facing our community and the national scene. This issue of the Journal does just that.

We begin with articles from three of Greater Washington's rabbis — Rabbi Meir Bulman, Rabbi Eliezer Kreiser, and Rabbi Hyim Shafner — who each highlight a key *tefillah* of the Yamim Noraim, explaining its meaning, import, and impact on our prayers as we gather on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

In the section we call **Careers in Chinuch**, we asked three prominent local *mechanchim* — Rabbi Yitzchak Charner, Mrs. Sima Jacoby, and Mrs. Esther Dziadek, whose careers have spanned over four decades dedicated to teaching Torah — to share their insights, reflections, and thoughts about Torah education in the past, present, and future.

In **Working for the Klal**, we are privileged to include an essay from an individual who has dedicated countless hours and enormous time and effort to strengthening the Jewish community, both locally and nationally. We thank Mr. Dennis Berman for sharing his perspectives with us.

And finally, a real *nachas* section: We highlight two individuals who grew up in Silver Spring — Mr. Maury Litwack and Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank — who have gone on to have an enormous impact on the greater Jewish world. We asked them to share their experiences growing up in our community and to reflect on how their upbringing in Silver Spring shaped their thinking, aspirations, and goals in life as they contribute to the broader Jewish community.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the Journal. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with me with your feedback and suggestions.

Wishing you a *Kesiva v'Chasima Tova*: a year of *berachah*, *hatzlachah*, and *geulah shleimah*!

Moshe Walter

Zichronos: Realizing Our Potential

Rabbi Meir Bulman

Southeast Hebrew Congregation – Knesset Yehoshua

It is not called *Rosh Hashanah*, nor is it called *Yom HaDin*. The Torah, in referring to this special and awesome day, puts aside the “new year” aspect and does not mention the judgment of the day — instead, the Torah calls it *יום זכרון תרועה*, *the Day of Remembrance through the Sound of the Teruah*.

This focus on Hashem’s remembrance is apparent in our *tefillos* as well. In the *Shemoneh Esrei*, we refer to the day as *יום הזכרון* — *the Day of Remembrance*. We repeatedly beseech Hashem: *זכרנו לחיים* — *remember us for life*. Finally, *Zichronos* is one of the three integral sections of our special *Musaf*. Clearly, Hashem’s remembrance of us and the world is the essence of this remarkable day.

But there is something seemingly inappropriate about attributing *זכרון*, remembrance, to Hashem, because the ability to remember is predicated upon having the capacity to forget. Describing Hashem as remembering implies that Hashem has forgotten or overlooked something — which is obviously not true.

What is even more puzzling is that, in the *tefillah* of *Zichronos* in *Musaf*, we state:

אַתָּה זֹכֵר מְעֵשֶׂה עוֹלָם...

You remember everything that ever existed or happened...

Yet, in the very next sentence, we declare:

כִּי אֵין שְׂכַחָה לְפָנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ...

For there is no forgetfulness before the throne of Your glory...

If He does not forget, what is the meaning of the *זכרון* (remembrance) of Hashem?

As one goes through life, one has countless interactions, interfaces, thoughts, and feelings. We are constantly experiencing and learning new things about our world; we process those experiences and ideas and integrate them into ourselves. While so much of what we experience, hear, and see is seemingly insignificant and therefore quickly forgotten, it is not lost. Every single stimulus to which we are exposed makes an impression upon us and is incorporated into the very fabric of who we are. Small or inconsequential events and interactions may not be accessible to our cognitive minds — but they are not destroyed or lost. They are buried deep within ourselves and have the potential to have *זכרון* occur. They can be “dug up” and reclaimed in our conscious minds.

While the colloquial meaning of זכרון in the human realm involves “forgetting” and then recalling, זכרון can be more accurately defined as the unearthing and reclaiming of that which exists but which was inaccessible. As a new year begins and Hashem sits in judgement of His world, He operates within this framework of זכרון.

Everything in our world was created with an innate purpose and capability — and it is our mission to ensure that the purpose of each person, place, and thing is realized. Our task in this world is to discover the potential that lies within ourselves and the world around us and to develop it, with the goal of actualizing that potential. At the start of every year, when HKB”H judges us and His entire world, He is not merely assessing how many *aveiros* we have committed or *mitzvos* we have performed over the past year: He is looking at our lives and judging the trajectory of our development.

On the *Yom HaDin*, Hashem’s זכרון mines the inner recesses of our *neshamos* and sees who we *can* be and how we *can* impact the world around us — comparing those measures to who and what we actually *are*. Those who are on their way to actualizing their inherent potential will be successful in their judgment. Those who pay no attention to their innate capabilities and refuse to focus on their self-development will, ר”ל, fail in their *din*. And so we proclaim:

אַתָּה זֹכֵר מַעֲשֵׂה עוֹלָם...

HKB”H accesses all that we and the world can be — even that which we have not yet discovered within ourselves — because:

כִּי אֵין שְׂכַחָה לִפְנֵי כֶּסֶא כְּבוֹדָךְ...

Nothing eludes Hashem.

HKB”H knows the possibilities that He built into each of us and who we *should* be. While that creates a great fear of Hashem’s *din*, we have hope: because He also built into this day of זכרון a way for us to succeed. The Torah makes it clear that the זכרון of the day is concentrated in the sound of the *shofar*: יום זכרון תרועה – *a Day of Remembrance through the Shofar*. The blowing of the *shofar* recalls, and allows us to relive, the moment at which Hashem blew the initial breath of life — the *neshama* — into Man. Through the *mitzvah* of *tekias shofar*, we are given the opportunity to experience a creation of sorts — much like *Adam HaRishon* at his creation — and a renewed awareness of one’s *neshama* and mission.

On *Yom HaZikaron*, Hashem reveals our inborn potential — not only for His use as He sits in judgment of us, but for us to recognize and tap into as we rededicate our lives to the service of Hashem. This peek into ourselves occurs on the first of the עשרת ימי תשובה (*Ten Days of Repentance*) because *teshuvah* — one’s return to the person one really should be — begins with an accurate sense of all one *can* be.

While so much of our *avodah* (spiritual work) on *Rosh Hashanah* is internal and focused inward on our sense of self, there is another message in the day's זכרון that should not be overlooked.

From the perspective of an eleven-year-old years ago, there was nothing unusual about my father z"l inviting a young man with an awkward, purple silk yarmulke to our *seudah* on the first night of *Rosh Hashanah*. Our shul, located right next to the George Washington Bridge, was frequented by many Jews who were lost in the *galus* of New York City; my parents were known for their open home.

Listening to the small talk on the way home, I gathered that our guest with the interesting accent was from Panama. He was proud of his Jewish heritage and was not going to miss the first night of *Rosh Hashanah* in *shul*. We sat down for the *seudah* and our guest was clearly familiar with the *minhagim* of the apple in honey and the head of a fish — but he still seemed rather fidgety and uncomfortable.

As the main course was served, the atmosphere changed. There was an intense discussion about *teshuvah* and the ability everyone has to change the course of their life. I was not listening that closely — but when the words *40 kilo of cocaine, not my car, and jumped bail* came up, the conversation had my full attention. Noriega's Panama and Washington Heights in the mid-1980s were hubs of the drug trade, and it soon became clear to all of us that we were harboring a fugitive from justice.

My mother took my sisters into the kitchen and was desperately trying to get *bentching* started. My twelve-year-old brother and I went into the kitchen as well — and smoothly returned to the table with steak knives up our sleeves (I had a grapefruit spoon in my pocket too). But my father — as though oblivious to the potential danger of the situation — kept impressing upon our guest the love Hashem has for all of His children and how ANYONE can do *teshuvah* for anything.

I don't recall how much longer the *seudah* lasted; at some point our fidgety guest stood up and quickly bolted. I did wonder for the next few weeks if our guest would return because "we knew too much," but we never heard from him again.

Much of that *Rosh Hashanah* night was unforgettable. But after all these years, when I recite the *Zichronos* in *Musaf* on *Rosh Hashanah*, my mind conjures up the absurd scene of my father pleading with a bail-jumping drug dealer to do *teshuvah*. My father was not seeing what the rest of us were seeing. On that יום הזכרון, he saw a Jew with a *neshama* — one with both purpose and potential. He saw everything that young man *could* be and was tenaciously begging him to see that in himself.

On this *Rosh Hashanah*, may we be *zoche* to see in ourselves and in others the untapped potential that Hashem's זכרון makes accessible, and may we dedicate ourselves to our mission of self-realization and self-actualization with *beracha* and *hatzlacha* in all that we endeavor.

The Power of *Aleinu*

Rabbi Eliezer Kreiser

Ezras Israel Congregation of Rockville

The *tefillah* of *Aleinu* is quite familiar to us. We recite it each day as part of the conclusion of *Shacharis*, *Mincha*, and *Maariv*.

On Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days on our calendar, *Aleinu* takes on a significance far loftier than in our daily prayers. *Aleinu* is recited on Rosh Hashanah during the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Musaf*, the central *tefillah* of the day. Its prominent placement in the section of *Malchios*, in which we confirm Hashem's sovereignty over all and "crown Him" (as it were) over us, serves to highlight *Aleinu's* exaltedness. Rav Hai Gaon (939–1038, Iraq) relates that *Aleinu* is the most exalted of all praises of our Creator and there is no prayer similar to it; one should therefore focus carefully on the words (*Teshuvos Rav Hai Gaon*). The Rokeach (Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, 1176–1238), further elaborates that one should concentrate intensely during the recitation of *Aleinu*, as it is the *Shir HaShirim* — the Song of Songs — of praises to Hashem (*Siddur Rokeach – Rosh Hashanah*).

Throughout our history, *Aleinu* has been a declaration of faith and an expression of praise emanating from the lips of our brothers and sisters as they prepared themselves for death *al Kiddush Hashem* (in sanctification of Hashem's name). This was most recently recorded by eyewitnesses to the massacre of an *ir v'eim b'Yisrael* (a center of Jewish Torah life) during the dark days of the Holocaust. The *talmidim* and faculty of the Kelm Yeshiva, the bastion of the *mussar* movement known as the Kelm Talmud Torah, were led to the edge of a killing field on the outskirts of the town. Surrounded by Nazi and Lithuanian murderers, they recited — in unison, as one man with one heart — the soaring words of *Aleinu L'shabei'ach*. And with those lofty words on their lips, their *neshamos* soared heavenward in purity as they perished *al Kiddush Hashem*.

Aleinu was composed by Yehoshua bin Nun after leading *Bnei Yisroel* across the Jordan River into *Eretz Yisroel*. The *Rishonim* discuss the precise point in time at which Yehoshua composed this *tefillah*. Opinions vary: upon entry into the Land of Israel, after the conquest of Yericho, or upon completion of the conquest of the Land and its division among the tribes. Regardless of the exact timing, Yehoshua composed *Aleinu* as an expression of *שְׁבַח וְהוֹדָאָה* (praise for and gratitude to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*) for the treasure of our Torah way of life, in response to the perversion and worship of worthless idols endemic among the Canaanite nations.

עֲלֵינוּ לְשַׁבַּח לְאֲדוֹן הַכֹּל
לְתַת גְּדֻלָּה לְיוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית...

*It is incumbent upon us to praise Hashem, who is the Master of all,
the One who molded all creation...*

In the first paragraph of *Aleinu*, we express our gratitude for the inestimable kindness Hashem has bestowed upon us by selecting us as His Chosen Nation and bringing us closer to serving Him. We acknowledge, as well, the essential and eternal role that we, the Jewish nation, serve in the world He created (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, 1707–1746, *Ma'amar HaChochma La'Ramchal*).

עַל כֵּן נִקְוָה לָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ
לְרֵאוֹת מְהֵרָה בְּתַפְאֵרַת עֲזָךְ...

*Therefore we place our hope in you, Hashem, our G-d,
to speedily see the glory of Your strength...*

In *Aleinu's* second paragraph, we pray that Hashem will reveal His sovereignty over the world. Our *tefillah* is that the entire world will acknowledge Hashem's omnipotence and accept His kingship. The *Chasam Sofer* (1762–1839) asserts that this fervent prayer is a testament to *Klal Yisroel's* immense love for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, indicated by our passionate desire that His kingship be recognized and accepted by all nations of the world (*Siddur Chasam Sofer*).

It was at the start of the *Second Beis Hamikdash* era that the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* incorporated *Aleinu* into the *Musaf Shemoneh Esrei* of Rosh Hashanah (*Siddur HaGra Ishei Yisroel*, according to the customs of the Vilna Gaon). There, *Aleinu* serves as an introduction to the *pesukim* that comprise the *Malchios* section. As we declare the kingship of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, we begin with *Aleinu*, praising Hashem for separating us from the nations of the world and bestowing upon our people the unique role of crowning the Almighty.

The incorporation of *Aleinu* at the close of our daily *tefillos* dates back to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, who instituted its recitation after the destruction of the *Second Beis Hamikdash*. Rabban Yochanan did so to ensure fulfillment of the Torah dictum:

וַיִּדְעַתְּ הַיּוֹם וְהִשְׁבַּתְּ אֶל לְבָבְךָ
כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים...

*And you shall know today and take to your heart
that Hashem, He is the G-d...(Devarim 4:39)*

We are exhorted to have complete, uncompromised faith in Hashem imprinted upon our hearts. The recitation of *Aleinu* at the conclusion of *Shacharis*, *Mincha*, and *Maariv* serves to strengthen our faith on a daily basis.

Aleinu should be recited with intense concentration (מטה משה רי"ב, אליה זוטא או"ח קל"ג:א), (משנה ברורה מ"ב קלב ס"ק ח פמ"א), for as we recite *Aleinu* on earth, Hashem — and the entire פמ"א, the entire heavenly sphere — declare:

אֲשֶׁרִי הָעָם שָׁכְכָה לוֹ,
אֲשֶׁרִי הָעָם שֶׁה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

*Praiseworthy is the nation for whom that is so,
praiseworthy is the nation that Hashem is their G-d. (Tehillim 144:15)*

The Bach (Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, 1561–1640) teaches that reciting *Aleinu* at the end of our *tefillos* serves to fortify our faith and trust in Hashem and to strengthen us to follow our Torah way of life. This is especially relevant as we conclude our daily *tefillos* and engage in the necessary and commonplace interactions of the workday with the world around us (*Orach Chaim* 133:1).

Aleinu is an integral part of the *tefillah* of two of the most important days of the year, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, introducing the section of Kingship. And yet, *Aleinu* is also an integral part of the daily prayers throughout the year. Its inclusion in these disparate settings — on the holiest of holy days of the year and on each and every weekday of the year — conveys a timeless lesson:

The words of *Aleinu* are a vital guidepost for us, whether once a year on Rosh Hashanah as we crown *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* as the King of Kings — or each and every comparatively mundane weekday throughout the year, as they fortify us in preparation for our daily interactions with the world at large. Such is the unique power of *Aleinu*.

Asher Aymatecha: The Objects of His Desire

Rabbi Hyim Shafner

Kesher Israel: The Georgetown Synagogue

My favorite *piyut Yomim Noraim* (High Holiday liturgical poem) usually appears in the Ashkenazic *musaf* of Yom Kippur and is entitled, *Asher Aymatecha* (Your Awe). It is medieval in origin and its authorship is unclear, although some attribute it to Rabbi Eliezer HaKalir (many of whose poems appear in the *kinnot* on Tisha B'Av).

Each acrostic paragraph first describes in four phrases how G-d, surrounded by many varieties of heavenly angels, is the object of their awe and praise. This is followed by the conjunctive letter *vav*, meaning “but” or “yet,” and the words, “G-d desires praise from, etc.” Then each section concludes with four phrases which describe human beings in the lowest of physical terms.

For example:

אֲשֶׁר אֵימָתֶךָ.
בְּאֲרָאֵלֵי אֲמֹן. בְּאֲבִירֵי אֲמֶץ. בְּבְלוּלֵי קָרַח. בְּבְדוּדֵי קָדוֹח.
וּמִוֶּרְאֵךְ עֲלֵיהֶם :

וְאֲבִיתָה תְהִלָּה.
מִגְלוּמֵי גוֹשׁ. מִגְרֵי גֵיא. מִדְּלוּלֵי פֶעַל. מִדְּלֵי מַעַשׁ.
וְהִיא תְהִלָּתֶךָ :

Your fear is upon:

*Faithful angels, mighty with strength, intermingled in the firmament of ice, uniquely ablaze —
and Your awe is upon them.*

But You desire praise from:

*Clods of earth, lowly dwellers, whose accomplishment is meager, whose works are poor —
and that is indeed Your praise.*

(This last line, repeated at the end of each section, could alternatively be translated as, “And due to *that* You are praiseworthy.”)

The *piyut* may be understood from two vantage points: the Divine and the human. From G-d’s perspective, as it were, He is in the Upper Worlds, surrounded by many types of angels, perfectly praised all the time. But G-d’s “heart” is somewhere else. Situated Upon High, G-d longs instead for the human being’s prayers — and not those of a high and lofty human but, rather, those of a very lowly one. What G-d, as it were, wants is precisely what G-d does not have in His place Above. In this sense, the “movement” of G-d in this poem is from Above to Below. The human being on Yom Kippur — who may feel sinful, weak, and small down Below — is the object of G-d’s desire and focus.

From our human perspective, Yom Kippur is all about sin and frailty: the human being as a passing shadow who returns to dust. But the poem *Asher Aymatecha* moves us from Below to Above. It perfectly captures the paradoxical tenor of Yom Kippur. On this awesome day, we long to be angels, hoping G-d will see us as such and forgive us. But the poet tells us that, actually, it is *not* the angels whom G-d wants. Rather, G-d desires and lusts

for our lowest humanness — and that desire for the lowly is G-d's most praiseworthy attribute. Ironically, says this *piyut*, though G-d desires to be in a different place than He typologically "exists," we are exactly where we should be. Our "Below" thus becomes the highest of places.

The theme of this poem, that the highest belongs in (or longs for) the lowest, is reminiscent of a *gemara* (*Shabbat* 88b) in which Moshe ascends into the Upper World to get the Torah from the angels. He asks the angels one question after another, based upon the *Aseret HaDibrot*, the Ten Commandments. In each example, Moshe points out to the angels how physical the commandments are and, in this sense, how irrelevant the commandments are to angels On High. For instance, the fifth commandment is to honor your father and mother. Turning to the angels, Moshe says, "Do you have fathers and mothers, that you can honor them?" In this way, Moshe wrests the Torah from Above and brings it to its "better" place Below.

If the Torah does exist among the angels, and is observed there in a perfect angelic manner, why does the G-d Who is so lofty want the Torah to be placed among imperfect humans? Why does G-d desire the prayers of the lowly?

In a 1963 lecture to the Rabbinical Council of America, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik points out that the Rambam and the Ramban disagree about the nature of the obligation to pray. The Rambam holds that there is a positive precept from the Torah to pray daily (*Hilchot Tefillah* 1:1). The Ramban, on the other hand, states that the primary biblical obligation to pray devolves upon us when we are in pain or trouble, at a time of *tzara* — i.e., distress (Ramban, *Strictures to Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot*, Positive Precept 5).

Rabbi Soloveitchik proposes the following understanding of this disagreement:

The views of Maimonides and Nachmanides can be reconciled. Both regarded prayer as meaningful only if it is derived from a sense of *tzara*, distress. They differ in their understanding of the word. Maimonides regarded daily life itself as being existentially in straits, inducing in the sensitive person feelings of despair, a brooding sense of life's meaninglessness, absurdity, lack of fulfillment. It is persistent "tzara," which exists "bekhol yom," daily. The word "tzara" connotes more than external trouble...Certainly, the Psalmist's cry, "Min hama'amakim karati Kah," "Out of my straits, I have called upon the Lord" (Tehilim 118:5), refers to an inner, rather than an externally induced, state of constriction and oppression...Out of this sense of discomfiture prayer emerges...Real prayer is derived from loneliness, helplessness, and a sense of dependence. Thus, while Nachmanides dealt only with surface crisis — "tzarot tzibbur," public distress, Maimonides regarded all life as a "depth crisis," a "tzarat yachid." (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Reflections of the Rav*, pp. 80-81)

In this vein, we can understand *Asher Aymatecha* as reflecting two slightly different aspects of prayer. When it comes to praise of G-d, the angels certainly have a "leg up" on humans, but true prayer is *bakasha*, request out of need. Within this element of prayer, angels have no place. The *bakasha* of the human being is greater and more G-dly. It is the everyday, existential anxiety of the human being — the consciousness of being temporary, always in flux — that is, in a way, more G-dly than the stolid perfection of the angelic. Angels make no decisions; like automatons, they do what they are told. Like humans, however, G-d in the Torah makes decisions, has regrets, loves, and hates.

This Yom Kippur, as we recite this *piyut*, let us reflect upon how lucky we are that, although we may feel sinful and dejected, we truly are the objects of the highest Divine "desire."

Principles of a Principal

Rabbi Yitzchak Charner

Founder and Headmaster Emeritus, Torah School of Greater Washington

When Rabbi Walter asked me to share my thoughts on a career in *chinuch*, I found the proposition quite daunting. How does one present a lifetime of experiences and what should be included in one relatively short article? Nevertheless, as Rabbi Walter felt strongly that this would be important and of interest to the community, I acquiesced.

It is always helpful to start from the beginning. Who, what, and why were the main influences in my life? In fact, one of the first points I present when teaching Navi is the importance of determining the factors that led a person to achieve his/her mission.

I was very fortunate to be raised in a home dedicated to learning and teaching Torah, as well as inspiring and influencing others to become *shomrei mitzvos*. My parents, Rabbi Tuvia and Mrs. Ida Charner z"l, were among the pioneers in the field of *chinuch* in this country. In 1953, with the guidance and backing of Torah Umesorah, they founded a day school in Louisville, Kentucky. Although my parents were not preachy, their sense of responsibility, dedication, love, and caring for others communicated volumes to me. One of my earliest memories is waking up early each morning and hearing the beautiful tune of my father learning Daf Yomi (before it was in vogue and decades before Artsroll). Beyond his role as principal, my father always taught the highest class in Eliyahu Academy, the Louisville Jewish Day School. In fact, he was my *rebbe* in first, second, third, fifth, and sixth grades (and my mother taught me in kindergarten). My father transmitted a love for *Talmud Torah* and *shemiras hamitzvos* through his vibrant personality. It was obvious that he cared about and loved all his *talmidim* (even me). He individualized instruction for his students and was creative before his time.

Alongside their school functions, my parents were always performing *chesed* and sharing Torah with adults. Throughout the decades, adults and children frequently came to our home for learning, guidance, advice, and my mother's delicious food and pastries. Particularly on Friday nights, our house was full of people eager to grow from my parents' knowledge and understanding. One of my father's community classes deeply impacted me: On Sunday mornings, he taught adults (especially parents in his school with little Judaic background) how to read Hebrew and, then, how to *daven*.

In 1960, my parents made a decision that, on many levels, left an indelible impression upon me. I had graduated from sixth grade and the school was not continuing into seventh. Despite the great *hatzlacha* my parents would have continued to have if they had remained in Louisville and the love they had for the community, my *chinuch* was of primary importance to them. We therefore moved back to New York that summer. While this momentous decision clearly had a positive effect on my development as a *ben Torah*, there were a number of additional fundamental lessons that I learned from this move. I would like to share two of them, as they have always been guiding lights for me.

First and foremost, it demonstrated the primacy of proper *chinuch* and the appropriate environment for youngsters (and adults). Second, it reverberated in my mind as a message that the needs of one's own children must play a major role in life decisions — even when those choices may not be the best solutions for the needs of the parents. Our sons and daughters were given to us by Hashem with the responsibility to love and do our best for them.

In New York, my parents continued their work in *chinuch*. Over the ensuing three decades, my father continued to lead schools and direct programs. In fact, I have met numerous *talmidim* of my father who said, “Your father really set me straight.”

My other main mentor was my Rebbe and Rosh HaYeshiva, HaRav Henschel Leibowitz *zt”l*. The ultimate goal of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim was and is for *talmidim* to dedicate their lives (after learning in Yeshiva Gedolah and Kollel for at least a decade) to *harbatzas haTorah* (spreading Torah knowledge). Rebbe always spoke about this: the great *zechus* to spread Torah, with “people all waiting for us” to give meaning and purpose to their lives. He taught us that the depth of learning in which we were involved and the Yeshiva’s focus on *mussar* (ethics) would prepare us well for this important endeavor. My Rebbe’s pedagogical skills, his ability to engage each and every *talmid*, and his understanding of every individual have had a major impact on me.

Aside from tutoring and giving Bar Mitzvah lessons during my years in Yeshiva, I began my first formal teaching in 1973. I was learning in the Chofetz Chaim Kollel in Eretz Yisrael and, for two years, taught on the Beis HaMidrash level. With HaRav Moshe Chait *zt”l* and HaRav Avrohom Kanarek *zt”l* as Roshei Yeshiva and my guides, I gained so much during this time. I learned how they inspired others and the methods they employed to assist *talmidim* who had academic and/or behavioral issues. I also had the privilege of growing in my own learning and outlook on life, studying *b’chavrusa* with both Rabbi Chait and Rabbi Kanarek.

I must include two other major “players” in my life and career. My father’s brother, Rabbi Dr. Moshe Charner *z”l*, with whom I was very close, was — as my father put it — a “principal’s principal.” He was always available to me for short or long ongoing consultation.

Rabbi Yoel Kramer, who is known for his wisdom, insight, and teaching methodology classes, has been a major influence in my approach to *chinuch*. Even today, fifty years after I attended two years of his classes, he is still gracious and available to guide me.

Very crucial in all of my life’s endeavors were those who influenced my wife. First and foremost, her parents, HeChaver Shimon and Mrs. Hilda Dreyfuss *z”l*, were her role models. Her father and mother were also among America’s pioneers in *chinuch*. They were founders of a day school in Vineland, New Jersey and were always leaders in vital areas of Yiddishkeit. Their integrity, honesty, and commitment to *talmud Torah*, *shemiras ha’mitzvos*, and *taharas ha’mishpacha* influenced countless people. My wife’s main *moros* were *talmidos* of Sorah Schenirer *a”h*, whose *hashkafos ha’chaim* (life philosophy) remain at the core of my wife’s *derech ha’chaim* (way of life).

My dear wife, known to the world as Morah Rochel, has played a key role in all our efforts. Her positivity, encouragement, wisdom, clarity of vision, and focus on acting according to the *ritzon Hashem* (the will of G-d) have enabled both of us to successfully deal with all the vicissitudes of life.

I must also add that our wonderful children, with whom Hashem has blessed us, have also done their best to keep us on the “straight and narrow.” (I am not entirely sure they feel that they have been successful.)

Both my wife and I have truly been blessed with outstanding mentors whose direction has made major impacts on our lives. In fact, we continue to have the *berachos* of knowing, and having as friends, great people whose guidance is invaluable to us.

I have taught for over fifty years at all levels and have led schools since 1980. Most of my career has been spent in Silver Spring, where I have had the *zechus* to be a founder and headmaster of the Torah School of Greater Washington since 1994.

Among the multitude of lessons I've learned and conclusions to which I've come (not in ascending or descending order) are:

- I have spent a good deal of my life (as both child and adult) in communities outside mainstream Jewish life (e.g., Louisville, New Orleans, and Dallas). As such, I have met many people from all walks of life and varying levels of religious observance and have learned many lessons. One critical lesson I have absorbed is to genuinely respect and admire people of all “stripes” and backgrounds for whom they are and for their accomplishments. Having high regard for others is crucial in developing deep relationships with them.
- As an administrator, NEVER expect to accomplish what you have planned for a given day. Your time is not your own. You MUST be available for teachers, students, parents, visitors, and any issue that may pop up. There are often multiple unanticipated issues that will arise simultaneously and which require immediate attention. It is essential to deal with all of this with a calm, upbeat attitude; set priorities; and find other blocks of time to get everything else done. An occasional *tefillah*, *perek* of *Tehillim*, or a good joke can help one manage all of the above. (My Rebbe said that a good sense of humor is a requirement for success in *harbatzas haTorah*.)
- Many times, it is the small gestures that make a world of difference. Decades ago, I started standing at our school's front door to greet parents and students each morning. My initial intention was to ensure safety, with cars driving into our lot while students entered our building. I did not anticipate how meaningful these daily greetings and small talk would be to students, parents, and staff alike. Lesson: Never underestimate the power of even a small personal connection.
- It is crucial to view and treat parents as partners in the *chinuch* of our children — because they are. Wonderful things happen when schools and families work together and have the same goal: helping the kids.
- Part of the job is hearing and dealing with complaints and criticism. How you approach this is critical, as it can make or break relationships, as well as the education of our precious *neshamos*. Step one is to overcome the initial reaction of being upset and to listen carefully to what the person is saying. We must remember that the critique may be justified, and a child may be suffering. We must see things from this parent's or teacher's point of view. Next, we must respond with a plan of action and implement it immediately. We must keep in mind that if a child or adult is unhappy — even if it is not justified — we must take action to help the child or adult. *Tiferes Yisrael* on *Pirkei Avos* 4:1 stresses the need to take criticism to heart.
- To be successful with the above issue, we must develop relationships with parents, students, and staff members in which they recognize that the child's academic, personal, social, and physical needs are OUR number one priority.

- Sincere *tefillah* is a critical element in our success — an outcome which comes only through the beneficence of HaKadosh Baruch Hu.
- We must ALWAYS consciously recognize that being successful is only a result of *berachos* from HaKadosh Baruch Hu and that ONLY HE can extract us from a difficult situation.
- We must transmit to our *talmidim* and *talmidos* that it is not the A or B grade that is the mark of success. Rather, it is the full effort and the *simcha* with which we do things that bring about *hatzlacha*. Rav Pam zt"l always said that success in *talmud Torah* is a by-product of *simcha*.
- Never jump to conclusions about yourself and, thereby, limit your own capabilities and accomplishments. When I left Kollel in 1977, I was certain that I could only teach at high school level or above. After all, I had just been studying in great depth for years and had taught post-high school young men and women. I was certain that I could not get any satisfaction from teaching younger children. Well, guess what? Since 1977, except for five years, I have taught at the elementary school level. What happened? I discovered that I could derive personal fulfillment from helping children grow at any level.
- Always remember that HaKadosh Baruch Hu loves our *Tashbar* (*tinokos shel beis rabban* — our precious schoolchildren who learn Torah) and that *berachos* for *hatzlacha* are bestowed upon us in *their* merit. Think of all the times when seemingly impossible-to-resolve problems fizzled suddenly. This is because of Hashem's love for our children. When our efforts and intentions are *l'shem Shamayim* (for the sake of Heaven), we can continue to hope for His salvation.

These are just a few takeaways from my personal thoughts and experiences.

I would like to share one more issue that I and many other *mechanchim* (Jewish educators) consider to be of primary importance. We all agree that a major facet of our jobs, both as parents and as teachers, is to help our children grow to be independent thinkers and doers. Nevertheless, the trend today is to “protect” our sons and daughters from any difficulties and to step in by handling the issue ourselves or “dumbing down” the responsibility. This causes children to grow up without grit and without the mindset and ability to solve problems. While children obviously need our help to work through difficult situations, the tendency today is for parents to go too far in easing tasks for children. This will not help them grow into adults with the courage and resolve to deal with difficult situations. Schools and families need to work hand in hand to allow students to problem solve on their own — with adult guidance in the background.

Finally, it is an unbelievable privilege to be involved in the *chinuch* of our precious *neshamos*. I am eternally grateful to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for providing me with this *beracha*.

Why a Career in Chinuch?

Mrs. Sima Jacoby

General Studies Principal Emerita

Yeshiva of Greater Washington-Tiferes Gedaliah, Girls Division

Growing up, I did not think that I would enter the field of *chinuch*. My father, Aharon Twersky z"l, was a teacher and principal. He loved what he did, but I sometimes resented how he was treated, that we moved many times, and that I felt poorer than and different from many of my classmates. I certainly did not think that *chinuch* would be *my* future.

I graduated from Maimonides High School in Greater Boston in 1961, went on to Brandeis University, and had the good fortune to spend my junior year in Israel. This was to be a transformative year for me on many levels. Studying with renowned Torah educator Nechama Leibowitz, noted medieval Jewish history scholar Chaim Hillel Ben-Sasson, and others, I was exposed to a stimulating new level of Torah learning. In addition, family and friends imparted a spiritual legacy of *Ahavat Yisrael* that I treasure to this day.

In 1967 my husband Danny and I moved to Silver Spring. He had just graduated from law school and had accepted a job with the government. I had been doing sociological research in Boston. When I applied for a position here, a potential employer looked at me and said, "Your credentials are excellent, but you are expecting a baby, will probably have more, and we are not interested in hiring you." Today that likely would not happen, but I believe that Hashem was protecting me at the time.

A year later, a friend who taught Ivrit in the Yeshiva of Greater Washington Girls Division asked me to substitute when she went on maternity leave. The school was tiny, in a house near Kemp Mill, and Rabbi Anemer z"l was in charge. I taught Ivrit, as well as Chumash, Navi, and other subjects. I earned a master's degree in education from American University and went on to teach and become an administrator at the growing school. Looking back on my career, I feel very grateful for all that I have gained.

In any school, and especially at the Yeshiva of Greater Washington, the goal is not only to transmit information but to help young people grow and develop as students and individuals who want to continue to learn. In such an atmosphere, teachers continue to grow and learn as well. Being in a Torah atmosphere forced me to learn and master new subject matter — something that I love. What you teach stays on your mind and literally goes home with you. Your Shabbos table is enhanced by what you teach.

I truly value the relationships that have been fostered by the school environment. The teachers' room is an oasis and the location where friendships are formed that have spanned generations. Former students are now both my colleagues and my teachers. I feel very fortunate to have

learned so much from so many, including the renowned speakers and special personalities who have impacted me so positively during their visits.

The school calendar is perfect for raising a family. *Chagim* and school vacations are all in sync. If one has a baby or is ill, everyone tries to be understanding and supportive. Even non-Jewish teachers have remarked that the school is like a family — supportive, caring, and there to help one flourish.

When I see former students playing leadership roles in schools and communities around the world, I feel deep pride in the career I have chosen. Sometimes a former student will share something she learned in our school and I truly feel that “my cup runneth over.” We have graduated students who are very accomplished: They are doctors, lawyers, delivery room nurses, writers, and mothers — and some still searching for their mate or path in life. There were definitely moments that were less than memorable and students who were not success stories. These are painful; we hope that we can all learn and grow from our failures. There are former students for whom I continue to daven and some who, after many years, have returned and have given us all *nachas*.

For many years, I have taught a senior year class entitled “Jewish Life Cycle,” which covers topics from birth to death. More than one student has told me that the class inspired her to eventually join a local *Chevra Kadisha*. What can be more rewarding than making a difference in the lives of *Klal Yisrael*? The ability to impact students and, through them, improve the world is very exciting and certainly helps one get through the difficult times.

The world today presents many new challenges. Veteran teachers agree that many children and adults today have shorter attention spans and expect education to be more entertaining than hard work. Use of media, especially post-Covid, poses numerous difficulties. These are topics of particular concern in a Torah-focused world.

There is an international shortage of teachers. What can be done to improve the salary, benefits, and status of teachers to encourage talented young people to enter this field? Solutions seem to be emerging slowly — too slowly. But as I look back on my career, with the knowledge that most of my children and grandchildren have chosen this path as well, I feel very fortunate. I hope many others will choose a career in *chinuch*. The rewards are real.

Teaching *Tefillah* to Adults

Mrs. Esther Dziadek

Retired Elementary Limudei Kodesh Teacher, Berman Hebrew Academy

After teaching second grade in the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy (MJBHA) for forty glorious years (1975-2015), I decided to retire. I had taught this grade for 54 years overall (including 14 years at the Ramaz School). I spent the next six months making scrap books — photo albums of my last few years of teaching. Then what? I had to decide what I was going to do in the future.

IDENTIFYING A CHALLENGE; DEVISING A SOLUTION

Over the years, I had noticed a number of women davening in English in shul on Shabbat. I didn't know whether they knew Hebrew or not, but it bothered me. Although prayer is acceptable in any language, the preferable language is certainly Hebrew. Now would be the time to assess the situation and offer assistance!

I approached Rabbi Leigh, founder of the Golden Network, an initiative that provides education and connection to seniors, when he came to learn *mishnayot* with my home-bound husband, Fred *a"h*. I asked Rabbi Leigh if the Golden Network would sponsor a class to improve Hebrew reading. I was not interested in teaching Hebrew reading from the start — just working with adults who had learned but were not fluent enough to keep up with the davening in Hebrew. Rabbi Leigh thought it was a good idea.

My next step was to find a Hebrew reading book that would be geared to adults; I did not want them to be “embarrassed” to learn from an elementary-level book. Someone suggested “Zoom in on Kriah,” a book used in MJBHA for older students who needed to improve their reading skills. It appealed to me for two reasons: it was a higher-level skills book and it included rules for reading.

Rabbi Leigh advertised the formation of the group across Kemp Mill, Woodside, White Oak, and Potomac. It was to meet in Young Israel Shomrai Emunah on Wednesday mornings at 9:30. He ordered about twenty copies of the book.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

On the first day of the class in January 2016, twenty men and women showed up! They all said they had learned to read Hebrew in the past. Great! But how would I test the level of each person's skills? It had to be a quick test.

I had them turn to a page near the back of the book, which contained multisyllabic words from the *siddur*. I chose a line to be read and we went around the room to test the level of each participant. As I had anticipated, everyone except one person read with mistakes. “You belong here,” I told them. The person who read perfectly — but slowly — decided to stay as well.

We completed the book in four months. Correct reading was our primary goal and most participants achieved that, to varying degrees. Slow reading was still an issue, but was necessary if one needed to focus on correct reading. Quicker speed would come in time.

The goal of the class was to improve reading so one could follow and pray in Hebrew. I expected to listen to the reading of the prayers and make corrections when necessary. Not much work on my part, right?

One day, a participant approached me to ask if we would go into depth on the prayers. Depth? I did not have that in mind. "I'm retired; let me take it easy," I thought. At home, I started looking at some of my books on prayer and was fascinated by what I read. Thus began our in-depth study of the *tefillot*.

I had attended Central Yeshiva High School for Girls and Teachers Institute for Women, both Yeshiva University schools. At that time, *Bi'ur Tefillah* (explanation of the prayers) was not taught. We understood the words — but that was just the beginning. By teaching *tefillah* in depth, I was going to learn it myself, as well.

How to begin? Set goals!

INCREASE VOCABULARY

In addition to improving mechanical reading skills, I thought it important to focus on words that repeat in *tefillah*. By increasing familiarity with the language and the basic roots of words, each new *tefillah* did not have to be looked upon as totally "new territory." Beyond learning roots of words, both **nouns and verbs**, we also learned **tenses of verbs**: past, present, future, command and infinitive. As some parts of the davening are taken from the Torah, I included the **Vav Hahipuch**, the letter *vav* that changes future to past (*va'yomer* — he said) and past to future (*v'haya* — it will be).

BROADEN TORAH KNOWLEDGE

We studied much more than the *tefillot* themselves. Areas covered included:

- When we studied "*Ata Kadosh*," the *berachah* of *Kedushat Hashem* (the holiness of G-d) in the weekday *Shemoneh Esrei*, we discussed holiness of time, place, and thing. In connection with this topic, we researched the different levels of holiness, what needs to be put into a *genizah* (buried), what needs to be wrapped before being thrown away, and *sheimot* guidelines.
- When we reviewed "*Et Tzemach David*," the *berachah* in *Shemoneh Esrei* requesting the coming of the *Mashiach* from the House of David, we also learned about the difficult early life of King David, growing up in his family, and the support he received from his mother, Nitzevet.
- In the *berachah* requesting the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash ("*Ri'tzei*"), we studied the *mishkan*, its vessels, the clothes of the *Kohen Gadol* and the other *Kohanim*.
- Relating to *Kiddush* on Shabbat: four words denoting Creation and sources in Chumash.

- Kabbalah, the Tree of Life, and the Ten *Sefirot*. We invited the Chabad rabbi to discuss the topic.
- The Seven *Mitzvot of B'nei Noach*
- Levirate Marriage: *yibbum* and *chalitzah*
- The various names of G-d
- The Messianic era and the World to Come
- The *Parah Adumah* (red heifer)
- The *neshamah*: levels of soul consciousness
- The prophet *Yechezkel*

I also forwarded to the group *Divrei Torah* that I believed would enhance their knowledge of Judaism. I receive these *Divrei Torah* from various sources such as the OU, YU, Aish, and Rabbi Weinberg's Erev Shabbat *D'var Torah*.

PROVIDE PRINTED LESSONS TO REINFORCE LEARNING

As a senior myself, I know how difficult it is to recall the content of *shiurim*. I therefore usually take notes — but many people do not. After each *shiur*, I typed up the day's lesson and emailed it to the class. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my limited goal was expanded by the participants themselves, several of whom printed out the *shiurim* and shared them with family members at their Shabbat table. Of course, printed *shiurim* also allowed someone who missed the *shiur* to review the content they had missed.

ENHANCE SPIRITUALITY

I believe this came as an outgrowth of the previous goals set for the class. Participants have shared with me that they now pray daily; that they understand much of what they say when they pray; that they can even understand a good part of new *tefillot* they have never learned; that they feel a closeness to Hashem that they never felt before; and that their observance of *mitzvot* has increased.

PROMOTE FRIENDSHIP AMONG THE MEMBERS

I did not have this goal in mind, but it occurred organically as a result of our shared experience in learning.

HEIGHTEN MY PERSONAL GROWTH: IN LOVE FOR ALL JEWS, IN KNOWLEDGE, AND IN SPIRITUALITY

The only benefit I thought I would personally gain in this process was an in-depth knowledge of the *tefillot*. My main goal was to help others grow. As time went on, I realized what an impressive group of people I was teaching — so motivated to learn and to grow intellectually, spiritually, and in their observance. Initially, the students were mostly quiet and passive, while attentive. As time progressed, there was a lot of give-and-take. If I didn't understand something, I presented it to the group and they usually came up with very good answers. They

come from different backgrounds and their ideas reflected this. If no one could contribute a good answer, “Rabbi” Google was called upon, right then and there.

My *neshamah* is inextricably bound up with theirs; I cannot leave them. So, although I am now living in *Eretz Yisrael*, I look forward to continuing to learn with them on Zoom, *bli neder*. In fact, when I shared with them two years ago that I was planning *aliyah*, they were disappointed — thinking that I would be leaving them. After “blaming” them for the spiritual growth that led to my decision to move to Israel, I reassured them that I would continue to study with them remotely.

TEFILLOT COVERED TO DATE

- **Shacharit of Chol:** Introductory section, *P’sukei D’zimrah* (*Baruch She’amar, Ashrei, Yishtabach*), *Shema* and its *berachot* before and after, *Shemoneh Esrei, Aleinu*
- **Tefillot of Shabbat:** *Nishmat*; extra sections before *Shema*; *Shemoneh Esrei of Maariv, Shacharit, Musaf, and Mincha*; *Mizmor Shir L’Yom HaShabbat*; *Birkat HaChodesh*; *Kiddush*; *Havdalah*.
- **Berachot:** *Birkat HaMazone*; *Berachot Acharonot* (*Beracha Mei’Ayn Shalosh*; *Borei Nefashot*); *Birkot HaNehenin* (before eating and drinking); *Berachot* of smell; *Berachot* for *mitzvot*; *Berachot* of thanks (seeing and hearing); and various other *berachot*.
- **Adon Olam**

UP NEXT

Next, we will study *Yigdal*, after reviewing the Rambam’s Thirteen Articles of Faith (*Ani Ma’amin*), upon which *Yigdal* is based.

HAKARAT HATOV

I have deep *Hakarat HaTov* to **HaKadosh Baruch Hu** for granting me success in teaching this wonderful group of people. I will always be indebted to **Rabbi Leigh of The Golden Network** for enabling us to learn together on a weekly basis these past several years. And I am extremely grateful that our journey together will *iy”H* continue — even from *Eretz Yisrael*!

Mrs. Dziadek’s Siddur Class from Israel meets on Wednesdays, 9:00 am Eastern, on Zoom. For more information, please visit goldennetwork.org.

How to Treat the Fundraiser

Dennis Berman

I was asked to write about communal engagement, with the suggestion that such an article would hopefully inspire others to increase their involvement in such activities. My problem with such a broad subject is that, whenever someone relates his or her own story, it is easily dismissed by others as something that may not be achievable by anyone else, due to the specific resources and capabilities which the writer may possess. I therefore chose to write about a related topic: *tzedakah*. The facet of *tzedakah* I wish to discuss is completely free: how to treat the fundraiser. This aspect of communal responsibility can be performed by anyone.

We all know that we are supposed to give *tzedakah*. We all also know that we are supposed to treat everyone in the manner in which we would wish to be treated. But ask anyone who raises money about this issue: it is not for the weak of heart! The fundraiser has to live by the salesman's motto: each "no" is one step closer to a "yes." We, as the givers, have no requirement to give someone whatever they ask. Our requirement, though, is to treat them well, accord them respect, and give them something — even if the something is only a *prutah* (certainly worth no more than a quarter).

When my children were growing up, I involved them in the giving process. When the doorbell would ring (which was often), one of the children would answer, bring the *shlichim* (usually two to four at a time) into our kitchen or den, and offer them water, possibly fruit, and use of the bathroom. If no adult was present, the oldest child would take a form I had prepared and ask each *shaliach* questions to record the information necessary to send a donation. Most of the time I was there and I would speak with each one for a few minutes. I could always tell that they really appreciated being listened to, rather than just being given a few dollars and sent away.

One day, one of my children brought three *shlichim* into our den. My youngest, age three, came over and asked if they would like water. Without waiting for an answer, she ran into the kitchen, pulled a chair over to the counter, climbed up on the counter, and got one glass. She climbed down, filled the glass from our cooler, and brought it to one of the men. She then repeated this twice more. One of the *shlichim* even commented that it was like being with Rivka at the well!

By 2005, the number of *shlichim* coming to our home had increased to about 225 per year. The kids were grown and rarely around; often no one was home. I hired Debra Kurtz as my assistant and director of my foundation; her main job became meeting with the *shlichim*. I told her that the most important *tzedakah* was to treat these people well. This was like "preaching to the choir," as Debra's email address was "Empathy Queen!"

Over the years, the number of *shlichim* increased to about 500 each year. Debra always spoke to them respectfully, listened patiently to their problems, and offered water, fruit, granola bars, and use of the facilities. She would then write a summary of the conversation for each *shaliach*. I would read them all. A typical summary might read:

He has nine children, ka"h. Two children are in shidduchim and need funds for their

weddings. Two other children have special educational needs. His wife has been in and out of the hospital. He makes a meager living as a janitor, but it is nowhere near enough. Please help!

This was fairly average. Many were much worse. The *shlichim* generally did not receive from us all they really needed monetarily, but they left feeling that they had been heard and respected.

In Miami in 2009, just after *sheva brachos* at the end of one of my children's weddings, a *shaliach* appeared and attempted to solicit me for his cause. I was tired and rather irritated that this was occurring while I still had many family members in the room with whom I wished to interact. I told him simply that he needed to contact me through my office. Shortly thereafter, I regretted that I had been short with the man and I asked if anyone had seen him. Many people had indeed seen him, but when I looked for him around the hotel, I could not find him. I had a sinking feeling: Perhaps Hashem had sent me Eliahu HaNavi and I had sent him away! Over the ensuing days, I continued to track him with the limited information I possessed. After about a week, I found him. It turned out that he had been to my office a few days prior to the wedding and we had already sent him a check. While he was not Eliahu HaNavi, I took the episode as a warning to myself to try not to do that ever again. And I sent him another check!

Over the years, I (like most of us) have received thousands of phone calls. If I receive a voicemail message asking for a return call, I have always tried to do so quickly. It saddens me that, numerous times over the years when I have returned a call, the first response has been, "Wow! You returned my call." The fact that this is a common response unfortunately speaks volumes. All of us wish that our calls (nowadays, including texts and emails) would be returned promptly, so we should do the same. [My *posek* informed me that this does not apply to mass communications such as mass mailings, email blasts, etc.] Even if it is someone whom I plan to turn down, it is better for both of us if I contact the person promptly and just say "no."

When the doorbell would ring — and it was often — I would sometimes say, "Oh no, not now!" Before I went to answer, I would try to collect myself and remember that I would much rather be in *my* position — getting asked and being annoyed — than in the position of the person(s) on the other side of the door. If the *shaliach* is fundraising for a yeshiva, he is constantly dealing with the need to make payroll. If the person is an individual, there are always *parnassah* issues, often compounded by health concerns, mental challenges, and/or the need to marry off children. Reminding myself of the difficulties confronting the *shaliach* would greatly ease my momentary frustration. I was often relieved when the "only" issue was that the person needed money to marry off a child. My typical response to these was a hearty "Mazal Tov!" Immediately, the person would typically brighten up, his face changing from a depressed frown to a smile!

Even if one can afford only five dollars, handing it over while looking into someone's eyes with empathy goes a very long way.

The bottom line is this: While we may not be able to give the person at our door the amount that is being requested, it is within the power of each and every one of us to display a pleasant face, speak kind words, and offer encouragement — along with something simple like water, fruit, and

use of the bathroom — in order to demonstrate that we care for our fellow human being, the person standing before us.

Treating the fundraiser with dignity and compassion is but one of a broad array of communal engagement opportunities that can be performed by almost anyone — virtually unrelated to one's resources and abilities. Other examples include *bikur cholim*, running *gemachs*, serving as a board member of a school or shul, *chesed* for the elderly, performing *taharas*, etc. It is easy to say to oneself, "I would do so and so — if only I had such and such." That is the *yetzer hara* speaking! We all have the ability to become involved and to do so with the compassion and love instilled in each and every one of us.

Unleash Your Inner Changemaker: Uncover the Power of Klal Work

Maury Litwack
Managing Director, Public Affairs of the Orthodox Union
Founder: Teach Coalition

Are there programs that you wish you could create to make a meaningful difference in your community?

Are there organizations whose work you believe you could take to the next level if you were involved?

Are there ideas that you have, uniquely yours, that could potentially change your neighborhood, your shul, or your school in a tangible way?

These feelings are experienced by those interested in participating in ‘*klal* work’: the work of helping the community. I once felt this urge to help and didn’t exactly know what to do with it. I had volunteered with the Eruv, the Chevra Kadisha, and in Young Israel Shomrei Emunah...yet I still felt that the itch hadn’t been scratched. So I launched a series of *shiurim* and invited local *rabanim* to present them. While this was moderately successful, I envisioned building an entire series of community programs and daily learning opportunities.

Before I embarked on this next stage of *klal* work, I thought it made sense to consult with Rabbi Gedaliah Anemer *zt”l*. Rabbi Anemer listened to my big, ambitious plans and then told me about Shlomo Katz, the author of *HaMaayan/The Torah Spring*. This publication, distributed since 1987, is an insightful weekly compilation of Divrei Torah. Rabbi Anemer pointed to the success of *HaMaayan* as an example of what one person can do when they put their mind to something for the *klal*. He cautioned me not to focus on too many things simultaneously and recommended that I stick to one idea and execute it masterfully. He further advised that my efforts could become my *chelek* in *klal* work — my personal contribution — leaving a serious mark through what I was trying to accomplish.

I quickly failed.

Most of my initial programs didn’t work; people didn’t show up. Yet my passion remained. I had caught the *klal* work “bug” and now I couldn’t shake it.

I had begun to accumulate some small victories. Rabbi Rosenbaum encouraged my efforts and we launched a series of popular Motzei Shabbos programs. I helped start a Shabbos *chaburah* (Torah study group) that met regularly for over a decade, long after I stopped going.

When the Greater Washington Community Kollel first came to town, I had another opportunity to build something. My friend Yaakov Lipman and I hosted the first Kollel Shabbaton in Kemp Mill. Rabbi Kalman Winter zt"l was incredibly supportive of my efforts, always expressing a genuine interest in my projects and applauding my drive, regardless of whether my plans were successful.

Many people find that part-time *klal* work isn't sufficiently satisfying. While they long to volunteer on a full-time basis, they often must wait until retirement or for a massive cash windfall before actualizing their dream of engaging the *klal* full-time.

Fortunately for me, I didn't have to wait until I was collecting Social Security to embark on full-time work for the *klal*. I was offered a full-time position with the Orthodox Union (OU), which is the *klal* work equivalent of being drafted by the New York Yankees. With more programs and community initiatives than I could ever have imagined, I was provided a creative playground in which to visit communities and embark on initiatives, with all the support and resources of this major organization.

In this new position, I merged my affinity for politics with my passion for *klal* work. In my first few years with the OU, I succeeded in bringing over one hundred elected officials to Jewish communities nationwide. It was thrilling work and made me feel like I was making a real difference. Concurrent with these successful full-time *klal* efforts, I worked on an initiative to start a low-cost school in Silver Spring, with the idea that it could serve as a model to significantly lower tuition for parents.

It failed.

We didn't get enough enrollment and frankly we didn't know what we were doing.

But then, my friend Sam Melamed encouraged me to combine my passion for tuition affordability with government advocacy. Sam was one of many lay leaders around the country encouraging me to lobby local and state governments for more funding, services, and benefits for our local parochial schools. I took Sam's advice and we, along with many other community advocates, pursued an initiative to provide subsidized busing to the local community. A pilot program had successfully begun.

And then it failed.

But the concept had caught on around the country and we were seeing successes everywhere. New York State passed programs to subsidize the cost of *limudei chol* (general studies) instruction in parochial schools. New Jersey passed the largest security allocation for private schools ever. Florida broke new ground in providing \$8,000 per child in scholarship funding. Things were working. Our ideas were being actualized.

For the first time, I could feel my impact in the realm of *klal* work expanding and gaining momentum.

In all of the work I have pursued for the *klal* over the years, I believe that two themes repeat themselves, helping me not only to keep dreaming, but to achieve success: mentorship and perseverance.

Mentorship: Whether in the form of rabbinic mentorship like Rabbi Anemer or lay mentorship like Sam Melamed, having people who believed in and advised me was invaluable. Today, I am fortunate to be mentored by OU Executive Vice Presidents Rabbi Moshe Hauer and Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph and OU President Mitchel Aeder. In communities across the country, I also seek the advice and guidance of communal rabbis, heads of school, executive directors, and lay leadership. Their direction guides me on the right path and their *chizuk* and support are indispensable.

Perseverance: I am open about my failures because it is disingenuous to behave otherwise. No business has a perfect earnings report. No batter bats a thousand. And nobody in *klal* work is successful all the time. Experiencing failures and struggles enables us to learn what works and what does not. These challenges are what motivate us to improve upon our work; it is crucial to persevere and keep going.

I encourage you to consider *klal* work. Once you begin to get involved, internalizing these lessons will only help you to be a greater volunteer, a better advocate, and a more successful *mashpia* (influencer for good).

The latest Pew Report notes that nine out of ten Orthodox Jews donated to *frum* causes. On what other issue does the community agree, and impart equal importance to, at this high rate? These findings underscore that our community is extremely passionate about efforts on behalf of the *klal* and wants to invest in them wholeheartedly.

We need to match our community's passion with those who will drive those programs and initiatives.

We need individuals who are going to work in all capacities to help the *klal*.

We need people who have that drive to change the world for the better.

We need you.

Maury Litwack is Managing Director, Public Affairs of the Orthodox Union and founder of the Teach Coalition, which advocates on behalf of 90 percent of Yeshiva and Jewish day school students nationwide. Regularly named to City and State Magazine and Insider NJ's annual list of the most influential people in New Jersey and New York politics, Maury is a regular contributor to Mishpacha Magazine with his column, Halls of Power.

Growing Up in Silver Spring: Lessons for Life

*Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank
Magid Shiur, RIETS (Yeshiva University)*

The Silver Spring of my youth had a culture of innocence and simplicity. Growing up, I didn't know a single person who owned a fancy car. The community valued honesty and spurned cynicism; if anything, we were naïve about the ways of the world. It seemed unimaginable that a religious person could commit fraud — or even litter. As I look back on my youth, I appreciate that this uncomplicated culture shielded me from some of what was really going on outside my bubble (and even inside it). Thus, the memories that follow reflect the innocence that my upbringing allowed me to maintain.

A Talmudic aphorism states (*Bava Basra 24b*):

קִידְרָא דְבֵי שׁוּתְפֵי לָא חֲמִימָא וְלָא קָרִירָא
A dish belonging to partners is neither hot nor cold.

When a pot is owned by a single person, that person will ensure that it is nice and hot. But when a partnership is responsible, nobody sees it as their problem; everyone leaves it for someone else. The result is that what needs to get done does not get done (a variation on the tragedy of the commons, in which individuals who have unlimited access to a limited resource will use it to the point of depleting it).

Most communities — especially those run by volunteers — suffer from this problem. As a youngster growing up in Woodside in the 80s and 90s, however, this never seemed to be an issue. Everybody had a job. Everybody did what they were good at. Everybody volunteered. And, most remarkably: everybody cared.

I remember the pleasant feeling when I awoke one winter morning to see the ground covered with snow. No school! Endless possibilities for activities! A couple of minutes later, Mrs. Rishe was on the phone asking me to shovel the driveway of an elderly person. That seemed normal; I was off with my shovel in no time. I thought nothing of the incident at the time. Looking back, I appreciate the impact of that call. I was being told that I was old enough to start thinking about other people. To contribute to the community. To take responsibility.

Everything in Woodside was done by volunteers, from setting up *shalosh se'udos* to sending shul invoices. Although it was never expressly stated, this was a culture of service. If someone needed help, it was always taken care of — quietly, and with dignity.

Our Sages teach that דָּרֵךְ אֶרֶץ קִדְמָה לְתוֹרָה — *good manners and character traits are a prerequisite to observing the Torah*. The *chinuch* I received in Woodside began with *chesed* and then proceeded to Torah. It was a place of incredible Torah scholarship. We were of course led

by Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz, whose brilliance was only eclipsed by his humility. But there were so many other scholars: Rabbis Dickstein, Landesman, Schick, Fleischmann, Goldwasser, Kawiari, Berliant, and Silver, as well as many others who did not have the title of “rabbi” but were worthy of it. Each generously shared his wisdom. Rabbi Landesman gave us a *gemara shiur* when I was in fifth grade. In sixth grade, it was Dr. Kermaier — and so on and so forth. Before I left home, I thought that this sort of thing was normal. Only later did I appreciate how fortunate I was to grow up in a community of scholars.

My teachers, both formal and informal, were incredible instructors of Torah. They didn’t just teach material: they taught us to learn Torah, love Torah, and live Torah. Crucially, they had faith in us, their students. They believed we could handle the complexity of the issues at hand. They would challenge us to expand our horizons.

I remember, at age twelve, meeting Rabbi Breitowitz at Youlus’s bookstore and asking him to suggest a *haggadah* to purchase. To my surprise, he suggested I purchase Rav Ovadia Yosef’s *Chazon Ovadia* — even though I was Ashkenazi. A couple of years later, we were discussing the Torah’s prohibition against abortion. Rabbi Breitowitz challenged me to consider what would happen if the United States reversed *Roe v. Wade*. Might the replacement law prohibit halachically sanctioned abortions? He did not whitewash controversies. Instead, he trusted his congregants — even kids — to arrive at their own conclusions after examining both sides of an issue.

When I was in eleventh grade, Rabbi Aaron Lopiansky began teaching at the Yeshiva of Greater Washington. Although I was young, he warmly embraced and mentored me. He overlooked my immaturity as well, encouraging me to contemplate vantage points and thinkers I had never before considered. He exposed me to thoughtful living, in which everything one encounters can be and should be interpreted through the lens of Torah. Many people study history, but Rabbi Lopiansky taught us how to *derher* (דערהער) the past: to dig below the surface and examine, in depth, what was truly behind the headlines. He showed us that being a *talmid chacham* means much more than mastery of a corpus of texts; it is a way of life and a perspective upon the universe. Overall, the message transmitted by my teachers was to seek sophistication and embrace complexity; stereotypes were shunned.

Of course, not everyone was learned. The characters that made up our community were far from monolithic. (One might even say we were a motley crew.) Remarkably, no one felt a need to conform. Everyone was respected as they were. Members of our community were appreciated for what they could add to the pot.

When pondering the shul of my youth, I am reminded of a fascinating insight suggested by Rabbi Nissim ben Reuben of Girona (c. 1310-1376), better known as the Ran, about the sweet-smelling incense offering, the *ketores*. The Talmud (*Kerisos 6b*) notes that one of the ingredients in the *ketores* did not actually smell good: “Any fast that does not include the sinners of Israel [in its prayer services] is not a fast. Because the galbanum (*chelbona*) had a foul smell and was nevertheless included in the spices of the *ketores*.” According to the Talmud, *chelbona* produced

a foul odor, yet the spice was nevertheless included in the incense offering of the Temple service. Thus, the Talmud deduces that, just as the incense offering is invalid without the galbanum, so too every fast that does not include the sinners of Israel is incomplete.

The Ran, in his homily on creation (*Drasha 1*), elucidates the parable of the galbanum in a remarkable manner. The Ran suggests that this teaches us that a community is complete only if it has diversity. To achieve viability, we must incorporate all elements of society — even those which, on their own, are undesirable. This is because a community must strive for moderation. To do so, it must incorporate different extremes which will counterbalance each other, thereby leading to the ideal position. That is exactly what happened in the Silver Spring of my youth: everyone was different; everyone had a role; everyone participated; and everyone was appreciated.

Growing up in Silver Spring afforded me incredible educational opportunities. While the limitations of this journal do not allow me to name the dedicated teachers I had at the Hebrew Academy (not yet called Berman) in first through seventh grades and subsequently at the Yeshiva — they are many. Their personalities, even more than their teachings, remain etched in my mind.

In my youth, many of us actively considered both schools, with many switching between them over the course of middle and high school. Indeed, it was probably the healthy and respectful competition between the two schools that made each institution so much better: *kinas sofrim tarbeh chachma* — competition among scholars increases wisdom (*Baba Basra 21a*). My father, who served as president of the Academy, used to say that the Judaic studies at the Academy were better because of the rivalry with the Yeshiva, and the secular studies at the Yeshiva were better because of the Academy.

And yet, even those who were highly educated had no airs about them. Despite valuing education, school was relaxed, wholesome, and fun (to the extent that one can use that word about school). School culture allowed us to be playful and somewhat mischievous without undermining the broader goal of instruction. This was only possible because of the incredible teachers and administrators at both schools.

Regrettably, I don't have a chance to visit Silver Spring often. My parents have moved to New York and life keeps us busy — yet I frequently think about my roots. While most of my students have not had the good fortune to grow up in Silver Spring, I try when teaching them to pass on the heritage of my youth, employing the same methods and imparting the same lessons learned from my wonderful teachers and *rabbeim*.

As I have aged, I have come to appreciate how the values communicated, both overtly and covertly, have shaped me immeasurably. I will be forever grateful to the community that raised me. I hope I live up to its legacy.

Most people probably think that the place of their upbringing was special, different, and even unique. In my case, I believe it is absolutely true.

* * *

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