

HABAYIS

MAGAZINE

To Be a Hero

The fascinating journey from the shackles of mental illness to the light of freedom.

A Glimpse into the Matzah Bakery

A tour into a real-life matzah bakery light of freedom.

Experiencing Pesach

The Present-day Paraoh in our daily lives.



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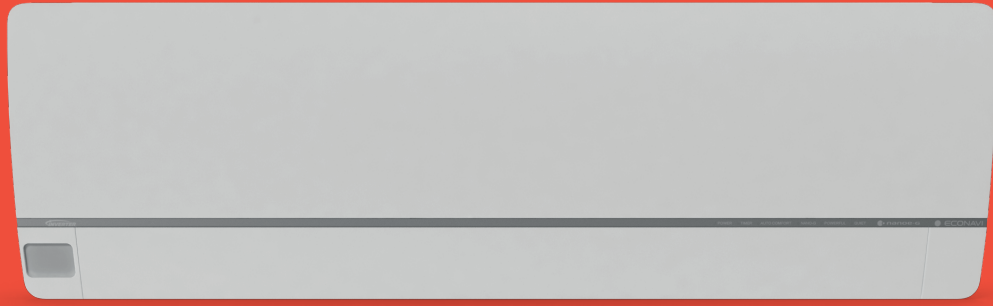
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By: D. Wilder

Joyful Reminiscing

Mommy, when is Pesach?"
"Mommy, how much longer till we get to find the *chometz*?"
"This is soooo much fun!"

"Mommy, when are you going to put all the goodies out on the counter for us to finish off before Pesach?"

These are all questions that my family loves to hear every year without fail. The joy in the air intensifies and the atmosphere is jolly as we prepare for the upcoming *yom tov* Pesach. I have pictures of my son when he was a young boy, happily sitting inside the kitchen cabinet finding the oatmeal flakes hiding in the corners. This was his treasure! No prizes necessary. The home burst with love and excitement during this once-a-year opportunity! We were ever grateful to join together as a team and conquer the work, getting the house ready to celebrate the miracles that Hashem performed for us when He freed us from bondage.


As I bask in the *simcha* and listen to the squeals and giggles coming out of our super-secure corner designated for the remaining *chometz*, clearly attesting to the fact that my munchkin

was enjoying the treats, I realize that my faith, my *emunah* in Hashem, is what was carrying me through. My *emunah* allows to me to experience such joy in this *avodah*, because I know that Hashem is helping me every step of the way. And, I thank Him that my family associates Pesach preparations with such extreme joy.

Now that I have drawn a picture of my family relaxedly and joyously cleaning, packing dishes, *kashering*, unpacking Pesach dishes, etc., I want to share one anecdote of a year when, although everything was done. Hashem showed us Who controls this world, and there was suddenly so much left to do!

It was right before Pesach. The house was gleaming, ready for the big *chometz* search, and we were very contentedly awaiting the upcoming *chag*. And, then Zaidy called. He told us that his expected host for Pesach had changed his plans last-minute, and that he, Zaidy, decided that it was time to enjoy Pesach at home. As soon as we heard that, we all had the same exact thought. But, it was my son who was brave enough to voice our mutual opinion. He piped up and said, "I want





to go to Zeidy's for Pesach!
Please can we go? Please??"
Our mutual feelings on this won us all over and we found ourselves calculating the effort and time involved in packing everything up and travelling the far distance to our Zaidy. We figured that if we hurried, we would be able to pack the car up with all the Pesach food and paraphernalia. Then, if we drive all day and into the night, we should be able to make it to Zaidy's house for *bedikas chometz*. That would be a real treasure! We hurried and rushed to pack the car and quickly - but safely - made our way through traffic to our Zaidy's house. It was a close call, but we made it just in time for a real memorable Pesach.

Boy, were we exhausted! But, everything was, indeed, ready on time. And, yes, we davened a lot, scrambled and tried our hardest to stay calm as we hurriedly set everything up. And, Baruch Hashem, the preparations were done with the familiar singing, *simcha* and feeling of gratitude to Hashem for giving us these awesome *mitzvos* to perform while preparing for Pesach with Zaidy!

It is my deepest hope and biggest prayer that all future generations enjoy this special time as much as we do!



Pesach prep



by:
S.L. Fried

I don't believe it's Chanukah!
Time goes by, oh, so fast!
I must start off my "Pesach Cleaning"
Before Kislev is all past.



No corner will escape me,
All that *chometz's* gotta go!
My husband don't relate to me,
But, hey! That's how it goes.

I'm stocking up on toothpicks
On St. Moritz and on bleach.
Of course, the breaks we're gonna fix
Even all that's outta reach

My hubby's, too, got work galore,
That starts on "Erev of".
To weight the matzah and *maror*
After grating that with gloves.

Look where all this talking's gone
The month of Shevat is almost through.
I've got a list two miles long,
And everything left to do!

The ETA's next Adar
If I clean at this slow pace.
How will I show guests through the door,
And at Seder show my face?

"Well, well, well," my man declares,
"It looks like you're confused
It seems that you've forgotten where
Your *kochos* should be used

"Why don't you put your list aside
And take up your Tehillim instead?
Just get right off this crazy ride
And put inside your head...

"That you just do *hishtadlus*
And Hashem will do His part
And don't forget *hisbodedus*
And a *tefillah* from the heart.

"I'm quite sure that you will see
(Without a doubt, you will!)
A good kosher Pesach guaranteed
And *kochos* leftover still!"

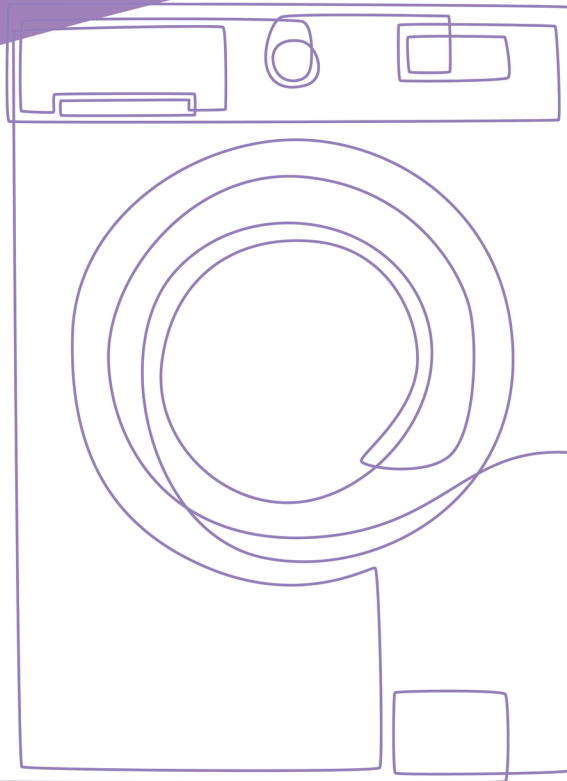
A happy Purim you've all had
And a kosher Pesach, too...
But just make sure your Pesach's glad
And be a happier you!

The Power of Tef



ver Millah

by:Y. Silber



It had been a long day. My seventh graders were edgy with spring fever, the grocery was out of lettuce and peppers, the soup burned, and my sheitel *macher* just canceled tonight's appointment. The smell of charred onions mingles with roasting chicken and potatoes – at least the rest of supper will turn out okay. I hope.

I glance at the clock. Forty minutes until my husband comes home. I throw in a load of laundry, set the table, nick my finger while cutting up a salad, and decide to tackle the looming pile of חומש tests that are threatening to become antique.

Through the mind-numbing haze משה, אהרן, אהרן, בני ישראל, I suddenly become aware of a peculiar dampness at my feet... Oh no! The washing machine! I look around and find myself in a veritable *river* of water that is flowing from my washing machine *all! across! the! room!* Under the chairs, around the table, under the bookcase, all the way to the front door... and it's only ten minutes until my husband comes home from

kollel, to a house that looks like three rains flooded it! Tears come, unbidden, and thoughts of *why do such things always happen to me?* and *where was my head?* and *why didn't I check on the machine?* and *our brand-new furniture is going to be ruined!* take over my mind and spill over my cheeks.

"Stop crying," I tell myself fiercely, but of course it doesn't help. I swipe furiously at my cheeks, willing a preparatory smile for my husband of two months who will walk through the door in five minutes... I so badly want to greet him with a smile... but I had such a hard day!

"Help me, Hashem", I beg through my tears. "Help me be happy when he comes home... Help me be happy... I so badly want to be happy... Help me, please!" Tears continue to stream down my cheeks as I get a pail, a mop and a towel to try to sop up the water that is, *my goodness!* all over! Hashem, what should I do?! There's water everywhere and I want to be happy!

I don't even know where to start. I bend down and dip the towel into the water that surrounds me, squeeze it out over the pail, and repeat. It's hopeless. I'll never get rid of all this water. My tears drip onto the floor and into the pail. But I so badly want to smile. Hashem! I turn on music and try to sing along; through it all I am crying, pleading, "Help me be happy!"

I hear a car door slam and footsteps coming down the stairs to our basement apartment. Happy, happy, happy, PLEASE, Hashem!

My husband knocks and walks in the door. Suddenly, inexplicably, a smile breaks through my face and lights up my face as I think of what a sight I must be to my bewildered husband, his still very new wife standing ankle-deep in water, with

a towel in hand and a pail nearby. Laughter fills my heart and bubbles through my lips and then I am laughing, laughing, laughing almost too hard to even say, “Hi! How was your day? Would you like to help me do sponga?”

Thank you Hashem for showing me that you are there for me and making me happy in the nick of time.

As heard from H.Y.

I had pledged to raise money for a poor family in my community. Armed with a credit card machine and a money pouch, I set out to reach my goal. I asked all the people I knew to contribute: family members, *chavrusas*, and friends. Slowly, it was adding up.

I began coming to shul early and leaving late so that I could ask fellow מתפללים for contributions. Minyan after minyan, I asked random people for צדקה. Day after day, I added up the money that came in, both on the credit card machine and the money bag. Dollar by dollar, I was coming closer to my goal.

You know those mornings when you oversleep and rush, rush, rush through your morning routine to start your day, and you barely catch your breath until lunchtime? Yes, one of those. I overslept and had to hurry out to the nearest minyan factory. No time to ask people for צדקה before davening, surely surely no time to stick around afterwards.

One thing I did do, though; I placed the credit card machine on the table near me, right at the aisle, so that anyone passing by would be able to donate. As I did that, I whispered a short תפילה, “Please help me make \$200 by the time I leave shul.”

At various points during davening, a few people stopped by the machine and donated money – small money. After שחרית, as I was hurriedly rolling up my תפילין, a friend of mine passed by and asked me what I was collecting for. I explained the story behind it, and he turned to a couple of his friends, asking, “I want to donate to this cause. Will you match my donation?”

To my surprise, three people agreed to match him, one of them up to \$20 and two of them up to \$50. My friend took out his credit card, and with a big smile on his face, entered his donation amount: \$50. On the spot, I made \$170 from the four of them.

I glimpsed at the daily total before turning the machine off and saw that I had made \$193 so far! I swiped my own card to donate the remaining \$7, and would you believe it? In a few short minutes, through little effort of my own, I had made \$200! Hashem had answered my תפילה to the tee.

As heard from S.C.



Pesach Pearls

By: B. Wildey






What is Pesach? Our children ask us this question every year, and we tell them the story of how our ancestors were freed and about all of the miracles that were performed for us. But let us ask another question - what does Pesach have to do with me? We know from the Haggadah that every person has to see himself as if he personally went out of Mitzrayim. And the Haggadah also says that had Hashem not redeemed us, we and our children's children would still be enslaved to Paraoth in Mitzrayim. A person may inquire as to what the message here is for us. I have so many pains, trials and tribulations in my life. How does this relate to pyramids and pharaohs?

The Torah is timeless, and the messages of Pesach are immeasurably valuable to every person. Rebbe Nachman of Breslev says in *Sichos HaRan* that Pesach represents the redemption of speech. The word "פֶּסַח" comes from "פִּה-סָח", the mouth speaks. The speech referred to here is talking to Hashem in our own words and conversing with Him, sharing everything. We start with thanking Hashem for everything we have to be grateful for. Then, afterwards, we beg Hashem for everything we need and tell Him anything that bothers us or weighs down on our hearts.

A person should talk to Hashem just as he would talk to his dear father, for we are all the beloved only child of Hashem. And, Hashem loves when we call out to Him. This is called "*hisbodedus*", and whenever a person engages in this practice, he feels much better, because he knows that Hashem loves him and is listening to his every word. Even a person who is physically alone doesn't feel lonely, because he knows that Hashem is right there with him. In the Hagaddah we say, "And we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our ancestors, and Hashem heard our voice..." This is how we ended



Hashem loves when we call out to Him.

up leaving Mitzrayim. Only through talking to Hashem and calling out to him in *hisbodedus*.

What does Mitzrayim mean to us today? If we're supposed to call out to Hashem when we are in Mitzrayim, what does that translate to in today's days? Mitzrayim is when we experience a time of darkness - we have problems, sorrows,

tribulations and pain, and we begin to feel hopeless. That is when we are in Mitzrayim. And that is when we should call out to Hashem in *hisbodedus* and *tefillah*. The Haggadah gives us tremendous encouragement when it says, "וְהָיָה שְׁעַמְדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ שֶׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלִבָּד עָמַד עֲלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ תִּינוּ אֵלָּא שֶׁבְכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עֲלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם," It wasn't just one person in our history who stood up against us. In every single generation there are those who seek to destroy us. And, generation after generation, *tzarah* after *tzarah*, Hashem saves us from their bloodthirsty hands. The Haggadah is telling us that when a person finds himself standing in the midst of his personal Mitzrayim, and he feels as though he is about to be destroyed, he shouldn't despair. Hashem loves us and will save us just as He has come through for us time and time again. All we must do is call out to Hashem, Whose love for us is both unconditional and completely boundless, regardless of what a person has done and where he might currently find himself. With much persistence and patience, we will find our way out of Mitzrayim into Hashem's open, caressing, loving and caring arms.



A Glimpse into the **MATZAH BAKERY**

By: S Feldman

The long-awaited *yom tov*, Pesach, will soon be upon us. We all know that Pesach is not just a celebration of our freedom, but also the culmination of a lot of *tefillah*, coordination and hard work. Taking center stage on our Pesach table is the matzah, a food that symbolizes so much and is chock-full of meaning. However, the production of this matzah is no easy feat. Just like miracle of Pesach, the matzah also symbolizes quite a bit of *tefillah*, coordination and hard work. To get a glimpse of the fascinating process, of which many of us are unaware, we have the privilege of having R' Aaron Meyer here with us. He is a long-standing *mashgiach* in Lakewood's largest matzah bakery.

Habayis: A gutten erev Pesach, R' Meyer. We're happy to have you here today. For starters, can you share with us for how many years you've working in a matzah bakery?

AM: I've been in the line for eighteen years, baruch Hashem.

Habayis: Wow! That's the better

part of two decades! What has your primary position been throughout the years?

AM: My official job description is to be the *mashgiach* over the matzos. This job includes inspecting every single matzah individually and making sure that it is kosher and fit to be present on our Pesach tables. Take into consideration that we are talking about a mass

A Glimpse into the MATZAH BAKERY



production of matzah that produces approximately thirty pounds of matzah per round. In our fast-paced bakery, we're able to make about 8 rounds an hour. That means we're talking about approximately 1,000 matzos per hour that each need to be individually inspected.

Habayis: That's mind-boggling! Sounds like a lot of hard work! Just for clarification, when you say that you inspect the matzos, what exactly are you inspecting them for?

AM: We're looking for folds or bubbles in the matzah that might render it unfit for Pesach use.

Habayis: Have there ever been any major mistakes or mishaps in the bakery while

you were working there?

AM: One story does come to mind. We once had a certain *chabura* come to the matzah bakery to make their own matzos. This particular *chabura* held the highest standards and strictest *chumros*. The head of the *chabura* had us all hitting our heads against the wall with the many extra steps that weren't generally practiced in our bakery. They really overtaxed the staff with all the extra requirements, pressure, stress and *chumros* that they were insistent upon. When the *rosh chabura* finally saw the wagon full of his own matzos, he was so overtaken that he grabbed them with joy ... not realizing that his hands were still sticky with *chometz* dough. In a flash, he managed to render the entire batch of precious hard work completely unusable for Pesach!

Habayis: Ooh, that's a serious let-down. He must have been beside himself. You mentioned that a *chabura* came to make matzos. What does that mean, exactly?

AM: A *chabura* is a group of men who come to bake their own matzos in the bakery. In the past, the way it worked was that the *chabura* would do all the work by themselves using the bakery's facilities and supplies. Nowadays, however, the bakery's workers are all much more professionally trained, so we do the bulk of the work for them, and the *chabura* just partakes in the work to add their own *chumros* such as doing a more thorough clean-up in between rounds or making sure the dough doesn't sit idly for even a fraction of a second, etc.

Habayis: Sounds interesting. For those of us who are clueless as to how matzos become matzos, can you describe for us the matzah-baking-process from beginning to end?

AM: Sure! Many people do indeed think that matzah simply comes packaged in the box, ready to eat. And, in truth, it does! However, this ready-packaged matzos that everyone brings home only attests to the very last step of the process. Generally speaking, matzah bakeries begin the process of the coming year's matzah on Shavuot of the previous year. That means that when most people are still lingering in the memories of the previous Pesach and are knee-deep in summer preparations, matzah bakeries around the world are already preparing for the coming year's Pesach. At that time of year, we go to the fields and cut the wheat necessary for the flour. Before we cut it, we need to make sure that it hasn't rained for a few days prior and that the sun was burning strongly so as to remove any *חשש* of wet wheat that might bring problems of *chometz*.

Then, the wheat is cut and goes through all the steps that we learn about in the, *ל"ט מלאכות. קוצר*.
....*מעמר, דש*... The wheat is cut in the fields, gathered into bundles, separated from the chaff (outer part



A Glimpse into the MATZAH BAKERY

that can't be eaten), etc. When it arrives at the bakery, the wheat is no longer recognizable, as it comes as ready-made flour. And that's when the real fun begins. Flour and water are mixed by hand. These are the sole components of any matzah you'll ever eat, since according to the Shulchan Aruch, even just adding salt would instantly render it *chometz*. Once it's well mixed, the dough is sent to the kneaders who further work the dough until it's ready to move on. From there, it's formed into a long log and cut into slices. These slices are passed to the "rollers" who roll them out into matzos. These round matzos then get passed on to the next where they're pierced with holes to prevent them from bubbling up during baking. If not for these holes, the matzos would look more like pitas. The matzos are then put onto long sticks and passed over to the coal-burning ovens. At approximately 1000 degrees Fahrenheit, it's a

pretty sweaty job to have.

When the matzah is finally ready and out of the oven, **בסיינתא דשמיא**, it cools for a short while before my turn comes into play. I need to check every single matzah by hand to make sure that they're each certified "Kosher for Pesach". Once they pass inspection, the matzos are weighed, boxed and packaged. This is the stage everyone is aware of, because this is how they are sold and brought home **לכבוד פסח**.

Habayis: Wow! Those matzos have had a long journey by the time they reach the table! Do you have any stories of a time when the matzah became chometz?

AM: Not really. The reason is because, *baruch Hashem*, things are done so quickly, that there really isn't any time for matzah to become *chometz*. There's also, b"H, a very good system in place, and





the process generally just moves along seamlessly without any glitches along the way.

Habayis: Do the workers ever have fun or joke around while on the job?

AM: Generally, no. It's a very high-pressured job. We all need to make sure that our part of the process gets done well. A matzah bakery is very similar to a factory. Just, it's all by hand.

Habayis: Just like everything was back in the day! That was a very fascinating process to hear about. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with us. Working with the matzos for so long,

maybe you have something about the significance of the matzos that you would like to share with us.

AM: Firstly, Rebbe Nachman of Breslev said, "אז מ'האלט מצה אין דער האנט, האלט מען, גאט אין דער האנט" when we hold matzos in our hands, we are really holding Hashem in our hands. The Rebbe is reminding us that the matzah is very *heilig*. When we hold it, it's not the same as holding a piece of bread. When we hold matzah, we are holding G-dliness.

The Rebbe also tells us that "מצה" is *rosbeiteivos* for "מ'כל צרה ה'צילנו". We can be saved from all calamities and *tzaros* by eating the elevated and *heilig* matzos.

As we know, matzos need to be matzos *shmuros*, "watched" matzos. Ideally, they should be watched from the time of cutting the wheat, "שמורה משעת קצירה". In the Rebbe's days, however, it was virtually impossible to watch the wheat from that stage under the circumstances. Therefore, they settled on matzos that were watched from the time of the baking, "שמורה משעת אפיה". However, the Rebbe says, "מצה שמורה זה שמירת הברית". Being *ehrllich* is even more important than having many *shmuros* in the matzah.

Habayis: Thank you, R' Meyer, for taking time out of your day to teach us about this special part of Pesach and giving us a stronger connection to the matzos and to Hashem. May we all be zocheh to eat our matzos together with the ירושלים in קרבן נסח with עיר הקודש משיח צדקינו. Amen!



1

Translated by: S. Leser

The story we are about to relate is not just another interesting tale. It is actually a very exalted story, the first of the thirteen famous stories told by the Rebbe Nachman of Breslev in his *sefer*, "Sippurei Maasios". Rebbe Nosson writes in his introduction to the *sefer*: "One should not think that these are simple stories, *chas v'shalom*, because these stories were told by the *heilige* Rebbe, *zt"l*, with the intention of teaching us how to acquire *yiras shomayim*. If only we would glean a bit of understanding about these exalted stories, we would truly become upright Jews and merit the *geulah*, speedily in our days".

The Rebbe once said, "While I was traveling, I related a story. And, all who heard it were awakened to do *teshuva*".

There was once a king who had six sons and one daughter. This daughter was very precious to him, and he loved her dearly. On a certain day, while he was alone with her, he became angry at her. "May the Evil One take you away!" were the words that slipped out of his mouth.

That night the princess went to her room as usual. In the morning, she was gone. No one knew where she was. Her father was beside himself with grief, and he sent search parties all over to find her. The king's viceroy saw his sorrow, and he offered to go search for the lost princess. He requested that he be given a servant, a horse, and some money for the expenses, and he set out on his way. The viceroy searched untiringly for a very long time until he finally found the lost princess. We will now tell all about his searches and how he ultimately found her:

The Lost Princess

Rebbe Nosson writes in his introduction to the *sefer*: "One should not think that these are simple stories, *chas v'shalom*, because these stories were told by the *heilige* Rebbe, *zt"l*, with the intention of teaching us how to acquire *yiras shomayim*.

The viceroy traversed the world for many years, crossing deserts, fields and forests. Wherever he went, he searched for the lost princess, but to no avail. She seemed to have disappeared off the face of the earth. Once, while traveling in a desert, he noticed a path leading off to the side. The viceroy thought to himself, "It has been such a long time that I have searched in the deserts, and I still haven't found the lost princess. Perhaps I should try to follow this side path and see if it leads to a place of habitation".

Don't Fight the Yetzer Harah Head-on

Mohorosh, *zt"l*, explains that when fighting the *yetzer harah*, it

is often necessary to take a 'side path' instead of fighting him head-on. This is the path that the Rebbe shows us, as he himself once expressed himself, "I am leading you on a new path which leads back to the old one". There are many who ridicule this way, saying that "this goes against the

ways of our *mesorah*", and similar such comments. Indeed, the Rebbe says, "When a person is far from the truth, he will mock the righteous and consider them fools". But if a person is strong, listens to the *tzaddik* and does not pay attention to what others say, he will ultimately succeed in his mission of finding his lost *nesbama* and returning to Hashem.

The viceroy traveled along this path for a while until he finally came to a beautiful castle. It was surrounded by uniformed troops all standing in fine formation. The viceroy was afraid that the soldiers would not let him enter the castle, but after some thought he decided,



The Lost Princess

"I will go ahead and see what happens".

All Fears are an Illusion

Oftentimes, when a person wants to be good and become closer to Hashem, it seems to him that he will not be allowed to return to Hashem and that no one needs him; it seems as though he is only being pushed further away. But as soon as a person has *yishuv badaas* and remembers that there is nothing in the world other than Hashem, then he realizes that all his fears and complexes are really an illusion. Nothing and nobody can keep him back from doing *teshuva*, as long as he has a strong will.

The viceroy left his horse and entered the castle. None of the soldiers stopped him, and he wandered freely from room to room. After some exploration, he came to a large hall which seemed to be the main ballroom. To his surprise, he saw the king himself sitting there with a crown on his head surrounded by his personal bodyguards. A full orchestra was playing festive music, and the entire room was merry

with joy. Everything seemed beautiful and pleasant. The viceroy stood there, waiting to see if anyone would tell him anything. But neither the king nor anyone else asked him any questions.

Ignoring Another is a Sign of No Good

This was the kingdom of the *yetzer harah* and the *klippas*, i.e., evil forces. The fact that no one questioned him was the first sign that this was the place of 'no good', because any upright

Even when a person finds himself in the clutches of the *yetzer harah*, he must also try to grab some Torah and *tefillah*.

person will acknowledge and greet a stranger who enters. It would have been proper for anyone who noticed him to have welcomed him and maybe

offered him something to eat. A person should always be the first to greet another and make him feel comfortable.

He saw delicacies and fine foods, and he helped himself to some of the delicious food.

Food that Lasts Forever

What was the food and drink that he took? He took food for the soul, that is, Torah and *tefillah*. Even when a person finds himself in the clutches of



the *yetzer harah*, he must also try to grab some Torah and *tefillah*. Every person understands that he must eat in order to feed his body. Similarly, he must remember to feed his *neschama* with Torah, *tefillah* and mitzvos. The Rebbe teaches us that in the World to Come there are so many pitiful, naked souls begging for clothing. But when they are offered clothes, they reject it, saying, “No, this is not what we need! Give us Torah and *mitzvos* with which to clothe ourselves!” Then there are other souls begging for food, and when they are given to eat, they cry, “No, no! This food won’t help us; we need only Torah and *tefillah*!” Therefore, it is crucially important to remember to feed our *neschamos* now, while we still can. Even when a person feels like he is deep in the pits and far from Hashem, he should grab whatever ‘food’ he can, be it one *tefillah*, a small *mitzvah*, or a few words to Hashem in his own words. This is everlasting food for the soul.

Then, the viceroy went to lie down in a corner to see what would happen next. Soon, the king issued a command to bring the queen. As she was brought in, there was a great uproar of loud cheering and rejoicing in the hall, and the orchestra played and sang merrily. The viceroy took one look at the queen, and he immediately recognized the face of the long-lost princess!

In Those Deeply Dark Moments... Don't Despair!

We see that precisely when the king's second-in-command entered the darkest of places and fell into the clutches of the evil forces, he still partook of the ‘food for his soul’. And at that precise moment, he found the lost princess. This is very strong *chizuk* for every Yid. If a person still learns and davens as much as he can even in the darkest of moments, when he feels caught in the clutches of the *yetzer harah*, that is precisely how he is *zoche* to find the lost princess, i.e., his lost *neschama*, and eventually return it to the King of all kings.

To be continued...



Yom Tov Hero

By: Z. Gelbwachs

Thanks for hosting me. It was really beautiful!", my mother intoned emotionally, as tears welled up in the corners of her eyes. "There's something special about your home. It's so peaceful, so..." Her voice trailed off in the air, and her gaze seemed far away. She stood in the doorway with her suitcase in tow as she groped for the right words to say.

I took a slow, deep breath. Her words created an emotional maelstrom inside me, but I quickly composed myself.

"Sure Mommy! It was my greatest pleasure! I'm so happy you enjoyed Yom Tov at my house." I found myself giving her a very genuine smile. We embraced warmly, and she quickly headed outside to her taxi that was honking impatiently.

"Bobby, please don't go back home. I love it when you're here!" A little voice suddenly piped up from behind me. My little son ran after his beloved Bobby and was clearly disappointed when the taxi door was firmly closed the rest of my kids piled out the door, and we all waved our goodbyes until she was out of sight.

"It really had been a beautiful Yom Tov", I thought to myself, still in a daze. The entire Yom Tov flashed through my mind in a collage of happy memories. My mother was put in the spotlight the entire time, and she basked in the attention of being the "Bobby" in the house. She doled out treats to the younger ones and my older kids relished her attention. I went to great lengths to make her feel comfortable and at ease, and I cooked her favorite dishes.

Still, I was in awe of myself that I'd had the courage to host her.

The idea of inviting my mother for Yom Tov had taken root in my head a few weeks earlier after listening to a shiur on *kibbud av v'eim*. At first, I dismissed the thought as a wild thought. Too wild. But the thought persistently came back like an irritating fly buzzing around my ear. I decided to ask Hashem for direction, because I really wasn't sure if I was emotionally ready for this step yet. Our relationship had developed nicely and blossomed over the last few years, and I actually found myself feeling sorry for her that she'd stay home alone for Pesach.

My parents divorced a couple of years ago, and I always hosted my father for Pesach. I was the eldest in my family as well as being the only daughter, so I naturally shouldered the responsibility of caring for him. My mother, on the other hand, was all alone and took care of herself. She was the skeleton in the closet about whom we rarely spoke. My 6 married brothers wished she never existed, and, truthfully, I also wanted to forget about her. Until that turning point in my life when everything changed.

I grew up in a family that looked perfect. Perfect, As if it had been plucked out of a fairytale book. I lived in a beautiful house that was the nicest on the block, and I always wore fashionable clothing. My father was the CEO of my grandfather's marketing business. We were financially comfortable.

My family did everything society did. We went on family outings throughout the year. Summers were spent vacationing in the Catskills. On Sundays, we went shopping in all the expensive malls, and we celebrated our birthdays with lavish parties and expensive gifts.

My father was a very well-respected figure in our shul and community. His soft-hearted personality and easygoing nature earned him many friends. My mother was also regarded very highly in the community. She was a high school math teacher, and her sweet personality was well-known to all. She wasn't very social, but she was creative, academically smart, and was always dressed to perfection. In her spare time, she made sure to do lots of *chesed* and help out the local *bikur cholim*. I remember watching her in the kitchen as she cooked up delicious meals for *kimpeturins*.

However, behind closed doors, far away from the public's eye, lay a dark and ugly secret. Nobody knew that inside our beautiful home was a reign of terror. At home, my mother was a completely different person. She was explosive and went into a rage for every little thing my siblings and I did wrong. If I spilled my soup or if I didn't follow her instructions to the tee, I got physically and verbally abused. There was no such a thing as ever making a mistake in our luxurious home. Since I was the eldest and only girl in the family, I helped her a lot. But, I was the scapegoat for everything that went wrong in the house, and I bore the brunt of her anger.

Even when I really *tried* to please her, I was never good enough; she always found ways to criticize me. Oh, in public she bragged about me, always saying that I'm her right hand and that she would never be able to manage without me... But, those "in public" sessions were the only positive words I ever heard from her about me. She often called me horrible, degrading names, and my innocent heart exploded in pain. Many times,

when I did something she didn't like, she waited until Shabbos when the entire family was comfortably seated around the table. She would then degrade me in front of everyone. I was forced to sit silently in my seat and listen to her tirade, while my face flamed in shame. I always looked at my father pleadingly, hoping he would save me from her wrath, but he never made eye contact with me. He would stare at his plate and stir his food aimlessly. There were a few times when he took the courage to stick up for me, but it wasn't worth it. The results, were that became the next victim of public shame. It was very painful for us children to watch. There were times when I didn't let myself be trampled, and I tried to protest. But it never ended well. I always got another harsh treatment of her physical abuse. I remember a time in fourth grade when I wasn't even able to write in class for a few days because my fingers were too swollen. To all the curious questions at school, I fabricated a story that I slipped on the staircase at home. Another time, I was embarrassed to show my face in class with black and blue marks all over my right cheek. When my friends asked about it, I nonchalantly laughed it off, saying that a heavy book had fallen on my face. I never breathed a word about the truth to anyone, because in my mind it was quite clear that I was a naughty girl who deserved to be punished. Why did I feel this way? Because every time after I got abused, my mother made herself into the victim. She would cry bitterly that I cause her so much anguish. She would say that she has innumerable sleepless nights because of me. She wore such a pained expression on her face that it was enough to really convince me that it was all my fault! I always hung my head in shame and felt extremely guilty after such episodes. She would then continue to threaten me that Hashem will take revenge if I don't apologize right away. That really scared me. I didn't want Hashem to be angry at me. So, I dutifully apologized for misbehaving, but deep inside my heart, I was very angry at her for abusing me. It never began to cross my mind that something was wrong with *her*. I was young and innocent, and I thought that all mothers behaved this way.

Between my parents, as well, the situation was always

a rocky storm. My father, with his gentle personality, was too weak to stand up for his rights. He faded into the woodworks of our walls and became her puppet. He was almost never home during the week, but on Shabbos and on Yom Tov - those exact times that are supposed to be enjoyable family times, is when all the *shalom bayis* problems erupted like a live volcano. And it was always in the presence of the children. I remember my father being locked out of his room one night. He slept on our living room couch.

Every time my mother was angry at my father, she took me as an ally against him. Making sure I was present, she would scream at my father about what a bad person he is, and I was forced to agree with her, while my heart pounded in my chest in sadness and confusion. My father always remained silent. But, to my ears, his silence screamed louder than my mother's accusing voice.

My mother would often cry to me, seeking my pity that my father abuses her and deprives her of a normal life, and she still doesn't know why she was married to him... It made me very confused. I didn't think my father was a bad person, and I always tried to figure out what he did wrong. She must have managed to brainwash me against my father, because I remember telling my little brothers that "Tatty is bad". I was still a child then, but the pain and confusion I was going through was beyond anything another person could imagine.

At home, I was quite anxious and withdrawn, but in school I was a different person. I was fun, talented and popular. In class I was a good student, and outside of the classroom setting my great talents were recognized.

I was chosen to be in many extra-curricular activities, and I shined. School was my only escape. It was the only place where I was free of my mother's shackles. And I thrived. Nobody in my school suspected anything, because I went along with the flow.

As I grew older, I began to hate being home. The air was so stifling that I could have sliced it with a knife. I developed a little more understanding, and I began to realize that my mother was much stricter than most mothers. My friends were allowed to get together on Sundays and have fun. But I was never allowed to join. This was a very hard realization for me, since I was a real social butterfly. But, it was a lost cause. Every time I needed to go out of the house, I was given an exact time of when to be back. If I came home even a little later, my mother would corner me and interrogate me as if I were a criminal. She needed an exact explanation as to why I was late and where I had been. If she wasn't satisfied with my explanations, she would accuse me of doing the worst crimes behind her back. As much as I cried to her that it was a mistake, my pleas for understanding fell on deaf ears. There were many times when I wasn't even given a chance to explain myself, as I got physically abused immediately upon crossing the threshold of our magnificent, suffocating home. Whenever I ran errands for her, she demanded that I give her the remaining change. She always counted the money, and woe to me if any change was somehow missing. I was accused of pocketing the money, and the results were too painful to retell. Plenty of times, my mother calculated her attacks, and she didn't lash out at me immediately. She waited for a later opportunity



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when she would shock me out of the blue. It was always very traumatizing. I remember once being pulled out of bed in middle of the night and getting badly beaten for something I had done during the day.

When I was 12 years old, I began to have questions. I was a deep thinker and it didn't make sense to me. Why did I get such harsh punishments for small mistakes that I made. Something didn't match up. I also felt like I was getting punished as if I were a small child, not like a girl my age. However, I still carried around plenty of guilt. I felt that everything I did wrong was completely MY fault, and it was I who made my mother's life miserable. I was still too young and naïve to realize the truth.

I didn't get abused every single day. There were also some normal days. It was like a seesaw that swung up and down. On those days, my mother was in a cheerful mood and there wasn't a trace of her dysfunctional behavior. She was happy and hummed to herself while doing her housework. However, my instincts were constantly on high alert, and I never allowed myself to trust her good moods. I walked around on eggshells, afraid of the next explosion.

Life at that point was very confusing and miserable. I hated my mother for being so unreasonable, and I hated myself for causing so much trouble. Life was so unfair and I really felt like a horrible person. I cried myself to sleep almost every night. When I reached my teenage years, everything skyrocketed. At that time, I had a mind of my own, and I began rebelling and sticking up for my own rights. It didn't help; it only fueled the fire. My mother felt like she was losing her grip on me, and that caused her to abuse me even more. My home became a battlefield, and we constantly clashed. I got thrown out of the house a good number of times, and I roamed the streets feeling like a piece of garbage. I remember having suicidal thoughts. I wished a car would crash into me, or a *goy* would kidnap me and take me far, far away.

One night, she locked me out of the house. I was left out on the streets in the pouring rain. It was very late at night, and I was afraid to be outside all alone. So I went to the back entrance of our house and slept in

the storage basement with the dirt and mice. The next morning, I went to school as usual, carefully masking my feelings of how I had spent the previous night. I could have reached out for help. But I couldn't. I was terrified of my mother. If she would find out that I had told someone about the situation at home, I would have been in seriously bad shape. And there was no keeping secrets from her. She had her ways of finding everything out.

Once, when I was on the phone with a friend, I mistakenly slipped, and told her that my mother was very strict. Unfortunately for me, my mother overheard those few words, and I got viciously beaten and abused. Lesson learned. From then on, I made sure to keep my mouth sealed, and I never again breathed a word to anyone.

Another reason I didn't reach out for help was because I was embarrassed to become the community's next *nebach* case. I was great girl at school, and I had many friends; I was imply not interested in ruining my reputation. I was even afraid to seek help from my extended family, like my grandmothers, aunts or uncles. Our family made a good impression, so no one never suspected anything. Sadly, I was forced to suffer in silence. Deep inside, I was depressed and I loathed myself. At home, I retreated into a shell and I barely spoke, and in public, I continued being the same cute, popular girl that I had always been. It took a lot of emotional strength to live a double life.

At 14 years old I started having thoughts of running away from Yiddishkeit. Life was too suffocating, and I was fed up. I thought that running away from Yiddishkeit would finally be my escape to freedom. The outside world looked so dazzling, and I deeply craved some love and freedom. I would often stare out the window for hours and watch the *goyim* pass by. They looked so carefree and happy. How I wished to be like them! When I walked the streets, I looked at all the inappropriate billboards, hoping I would find some satisfaction in them. Subtly, my *tznius* became more relaxed. I opened up my top buttons, rolled up my skirts to make them shorter, and began styling my hair much more casually.

All this didn't smell right for my mother, She immediately tightened her controlling vise around my neck. She now kept a scrupulously watchful eye to make sure that I wasn't doing anything she didn't approve of. Every so often, she searched my personal belongings, drawers, pockets, and schoolbag, to check if I was hiding something "forbidden". And if she found something she didn't approve of, she would confiscate it. She called me a bum and continued acting very abusively towards me. Oh! And, it was always MY fault. After all, I was being a bad girl.

The mountains of guilt that I carried around with me all the time grew larger and larger.

All the phone conversations I had with my friends were overheard on the other line in my parents' bedroom. Predictably, I was forced to cut off any and all contact with any friend she didn't approve of. When the friend would inevitably call back, she told them in a sweet voice that they shouldn't call back again. I was mortified when she did that, and I lost most of my friends.

Even the letters I got in the mail were screened and scrutinized by her.

My mother often boasted to me that if not for her good *chinuch*, I would've gone off the *derech*. In her mind, she was being an amazing mother who was protecting me from bad, outside influences. She praised herself highly for knowing how to raise her children properly. She considered herself a good person with very solid *hashkafos*. But, I cried myself to sleep every night, and awoke in the morning to a pillow soaked with tears. Nobody in the world cared about me. I felt locked up in a jail.

It was when I was 16 years old when I began to realize that something was wrong with my mother. I realized that her behavior was simply not typical. But, I was still extremely confused; in public, she was well-mannered and got along nicely with everyone. Not only that. She spoke negatively about other people in our community who treated their children badly. Hearing her two-faced words, I would think to myself, "Doesn't she realize that she's doing the same exact thing to her own kids??" Her actions and speech contradicted each other many times, and I became ever more confused.

My mother is a spiritual person, and spoke about Hashem all the time. She davened *shachris* and *mincha* every day with much emotion, and was often immersed in her Tehillim. She perfected her *tznius*, and often preached to me about being a good girl with good *middos*. But, then, she would abuse me and cry pitifully to me that I'm causing her pain. She threw a mountain of guilt onto my shoulders.

So who was the bad one? Me or her? These thoughts plagued me and thrashing about in my head constantly. As I got older, I only became more and more confused. I repeatedly asked myself, "Am I really such a bad girl?" After some introspection, I realized that I never teased my siblings or called them degrading names. I never went into a rage when my siblings misbehaved. In school, I was well liked by my friends, and I was very sensitive to other girls' feelings. My teachers always complimented me, and I never went against the school's rules.

But at home I was bad, bad, bad.

Then, one day Hashem sent me the answer to all my



To Be a Hero

questions.

I was reading the local newspaper, and I came across an article on Borderline Personality Disorder. Suddenly, the wool was pulled from my eyes, as I saw my mother being described in the article. I read that the people with BPD have 2 opposing personalities. In public, they present a good personality, while at home they show a sinister, animal-like personality to their close family members. It explained that they control their victims with terror and then they twist the blame onto the victim to make them feel guilty. It explained further that people with BPD will never acknowledge that they have a problem, because in their mind's eye they're always perfect.

Clarity arrived. The sun rose high in the sky. It became abundantly clear to me that my mother was suffering from a real mental illness. I remember sitting in a daze for hours, reading and rereading the article again and again. And I felt my mind being liberated from prison. I finally realized that I was not the problem here.

There was a big shift in my mind after reading that article. However, the situation at home didn't shift at all. I was still getting badly abused and I hated being exploited. Life became even more miserable and lonely, and I felt like I was stuck in a dark tunnel with no way out. I couldn't bare it any longer. In school, I became more subdued, and my easy-going, fun personality evaporated into oblivion. My teachers and friends questioned my sudden change, but I remained silent. I didn't divulge a single detail. The terror my mother had instilled in me for years was still active inside me, and I was afraid of her terrible abuse. Also, I didn't want to be a *nebach* case. With all that, I shut my mouth and didn't give a word of explanation to my drastic change. During that time I began to seriously think about my life and my future. On one hand I so badly wanted to find myself a boyfriend and leave Yiddishkeit far, far behind. At that time, it looked like the perfect solution to all my problems. But on the other hand, my inner *seichel* warned me that it would be a death trap. I had seen plenty of girls who left the fold, and I realized that they only looked happy and "chill" on the outside. I was sensitive enough to see the pain that bumbles inside

of them. I saw them drink alcohol and take drugs as a quick-fix to numb their ever-present pain. In my eyes, the end result of such a lifestyle looked devastating. After much thought, confusion and doubt, I came to the conclusion that running away from the Torah lifestyle would not make my pain disappear. I realized that the pain would only follow me and get much worse. I also came to the realization that just because my mother is a negative example doesn't mean that Yiddishkeit is inherently bad. I saw many good, stable Jewish homes where I saw genuinely happy parents with genuinely happy children. I therefore made up my mind to remain *frum* and fight my struggles together with Hashem. I told myself that I would become a super hero if I took this path. I reminded myself that I would get married very soon, and make an abrupt halt to the dysfunction with which I had grown up. I knew that I'd establish a healthy, beautiful home of my own, and that it would bring me real happiness.

Reflecting back, the *seichel* that I had then was simply a miraculous gift from Hashem, because it saved me from making the wrong choice in life. From then on, I embraced Yiddishkeit and brought Hashem back into my life. I turned to Him for help and for comfort. When I got abused, I would cry to Him like a little child. I would beg Him and tell Him that I wanted to marry a caring husband who would love me and treat me nicely. I knew that He listens to every word I say, and it felt so good to share my pain with Someone Who cared. These one-sided discussions gave me the inner strength necessary to survive my constant challenges at home.

Life moved on. I graduated school and found a good job at a local insurance office where I threw myself into my work. The abuse at home continued full-force, and made its ugly mark on me. I disconnected myself from my emotions and feelings, and went about my daily life like a robot. But the double life I played became increasingly difficult to keep up. It began to developed into severe social anxiety. I was very nervous to show my face in public, deathly afraid that other people saw my inner turmoil and were judging me negatively based on it. However, since I have always been a fighter by

nature, I plowed on with all my strength and continued playing the game.

I entered the stage of shidduchim, and was *redt* many good suggestions. My family and I had a great name, and I got engaged in no time. I was on a high! My *chosson* came from a well-respected family, and I had heard glowing reports about him. I was very excited to start my new life, and I counted down the days to my wedding with growing excitement. I recall that period of time as like an oasis of happiness amidst my challenges. However, there was also a dark side to my engagement. An acutely painful side. My mother now used my *chosson* as a pawn to hurt me to the core. She continually ranted, that she has so much pity on my *chosson* because he's getting married to a problematic girl. She also ranted and tried to convince me that I would be an evil wife and that my husband wouldn't be able to live with me. Scarcely a night went by without me crying to Hashem under my covers. I told Him that I'm really a good girl and begged Him that my husband show me love. I always felt so much better after sharing my pain. Unfortunately, her disparaging remarks worked like an earthworm and wiggled their way into my mind. I began to really worry that my emotional baggage would take a toll on my marriage. I hoped and sincerely davened for the best.

Around that time, I became very friendly with one of my coworkers. We were both deep thinkers and we enjoyed having long conversations together. During one such conversation, my coworker opened up to me, and told me that her mother is abusive, and that she's

suffering tremendously from her. Her words were like balm to my aching heart, and I finally revealed - for the very first time in my life - that I was going through a similar situation as well. Finally, I found someone who understood me, and she became my best friend and confidant. We supported each other during our difficult times, and our friendship solidified, still standing strong until today.

At long last, the awaited wedding day arrived, and I got married. My life made a complete turnaround, and I became blissfully happy. My husband was everything I davened for. It was like a dream come true. I was no longer getting abused! I felt like a bird who was set free from its cage! However, since I was no longer faced with the constant challenges of abuse, my close connection to Hashem slowly faded. It niggled slightly at my conscience, but not enough for me to do anything about it. I was happy, and that was all that counted at the time.

After 4 months of floating on the clouds, my life suddenly screeched to a halt and crashed. The double life that I had successfully played for years now crumbled before my eyes. I no longer had the emotional strength to continue playing my fun-loving outer self to my husband. Now, my true, broken inner self emerged, and it threatened to engulf me. I became very depressed and I retreated into my comfortable shell. At night, I would cry into my pillow, desperate to continue living my blissful married life. My husband was very keen and detected my sudden change, but he hadn't the slightest clue to figure out what had triggered it.



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Despite my dismal state, I was extremely reluctant to reveal the truth about my past. My mother's degrading words rang loudly in my ears. I didn't want my husband to be a *rachmannus*... And I didn't want to burst his bubble of happiness and disappoint him about his new wife. But, after some time, I reached a point where I could no longer languish in silence, and I disclosed my traumatic past to him. He was very shocked, but he comforted me, telling me that he'll do everything in the world to help me pick up the pieces of my shattered self.

My best friend, who had gotten married at around the same time as me, started therapy right away and urged me to do the same. She was very confident in the fact that therapy would heal my emotional scars. I inquired about going to therapy and eventually scheduled an appointment with a renowned therapist. My meager salary couldn't afford the expense, but I made it work for the first appointment. With a landslide. My first session was a crying session where I shared my past and the therapist listened, nodded sympathetically and then told me to stay away from my mother, not touching her even with a ten-foot pole. After the session ended, I walked out of the office and felt like the ever-present mountain had rolled off my chest.

However, my relief was short-lived. The pain and sadness resurfaced again with a vengeance. My therapist put me on antidepressants and reassured me that, although, due to the severity of my case it would take longer for me to heal, if I were to stick it out, I would eventually be healed of my traumatic past. Therefore, I decided to continue therapy with the hope that it would be the road to my recovery.

For the next 2 years I continued therapy, and my therapist worked on healing my inner child. She uncovered the abuse I had experienced as a child and worked on correcting the damage. In the process, I developed an even greater hatred towards my mother for having ruined my life. I didn't want to have any connections with her. So, I cut her out of my life completely. After each session, I walked out of the office feeling amazing and hopeful. But to my disappointment, the feelings of hope and happiness

never lasted. I was left with a big void that I couldn't fill. I was very bothered by the fact that I still hadn't made any true progress even after having paid so much money for a top therapist. At that time, we were living on a very tight kollel budget, and my therapy sessions drained us financially. We barely had bread on the table. The money was washed down the drain to afford the monstrous cost of my therapy.

After a year and a half, I still didn't feel any better, and it troubled me to no end. My patience ran thin, and I began to despair. I was sure that my life was doomed forever. New anxieties began to fester in my mind, and they plagued me to no end. I feared that perhaps I shouldn't have children of my own, because I'd surely perpetuate my childhood abuse with them. I also feared that my fragile nerves would break down under the heavy weight of my issues and that I'd end up in a mental institution. These depressing thoughts kept me awake every night for hours until I'd finally fall into a disturbed sleep. I didn't know what else to do with my life, and I sank into an abyss of despair.

One day, Hashem, sent a miracle to my door in the form of a *tzedaka* collector. He looked like a regular young chassidish man collecting money, and I gave him some spare change that I had in my pocket. When I was ready to close the door, he quickly handed me a USB and then about-faced and left. I stared at the USB in my hand and wondered what it was. When I opened up the files inside it, I saw that it was chock-full of many *shiurim* from the renowned speaker, Harav Yoel Roth. I was intrigued about the *shiurim* and decided to listen to one. I became instantly hooked. Every word that I heard was like a beam of light illuminating the darkness around me.

From then on, my life shifted gears and the miraculous journey to my recovery began in earnest. I connected to all his fascinating *shiurim* on *emunah* and *tefillah*, and I found my *neshama* slowly being awakened from its deep slumber. I began to realize that Hashem is standing behind my tough challenges and that I simply need to reach out to Him for help. The *shiurim* taught me how to reach out to Hashem. They gave me an amazing skill: Talk to Hashem like you would talk to your very best

friend.

It wasn't a newfound skill for me, since I had also spoken to Hashem as a girl when I suffered from the horrible abuse. But I now learned how to use this skill on an entirely new level, and it changed the course of my life. I began talking to Hashem in my own words throughout the day. I firmly believed, and still continue to believe that He's next to me and listening to every word I say. At the very beginning, the waters were still very choppy; when I spoke to Hashem I felt like I was talking to a wall, not a best friend. It's very hard to have a one-sided conversation. But I was stubborn. I continued talking to Hashem until I broke down all the barriers, and developed a close relationship with Him. Gradually, my life transformed into a much more meaningful life. At home, I spoke to Hashem while I cooked supper, folded laundry and tidied up my house. Even at work when I sat in front of my computer, I silently spoke to Hashem. Wherever I was, whether in a car, in the grocery store, or in a shopping mall, I spoke to Hashem. It always felt amazing to share my personal worries, doubts and thoughts with the Master of the World whenever I wanted to. The more I spoke to Hashem, the closer I became to Him, and the stronger I felt His presence in my life. I began to see Hashem in everything that happened in my life, and I gained a clarity that nothing in my life can happen without His express permission. I developed a rock-solid *emunah*, and my weak emotional state became stronger and stronger.

I soon realized that I had become best friends with

Hashem, and I turned to Him for every little thing I needed. I always thanked Him for His help, and I also made sure to thank Him for all the good things I had in my life. Being thankful to Hashem made me feel very indebted to Him, and I began to view my life as one big gift from Hashem. Finally, I began to feel a true inner happiness in my life. I finally felt at peace with myself. I no longer needed the antidepressants that my therapist had prescribed. My elation at not being dependent on them is indescribable.

Why did I finally feel truly happy after having struggled with depression for so many years? Because now my *neshama* connected to Hashem and I was finally happy and content. Until now I had been connected to a therapist, completely forgetting about Hashem. My *neshama* wasn't satisfied. The happiness that I felt after each therapy session was artificial, and that's why it never lasted. At that point in my life, I decided to drop my therapist. I "hired" Hashem as my therapist instead. I came to the stark realization that therapy is a shady business that plays on people's feelings. Therapists are also human beings just like us. They are imperfect and can make mistakes with their clients. Too often, they mislead their clients and ruin their lives. Also, therapists unfortunately have their own personal interests in mind. They have a business that, like every business, needs to thrive. Therefore, they take their clients for a long, drawn-out ride in order to squeeze out the maximum amount of cash from them.

And, truthfully, therapists have challenges of their own, just like everyone else in this world. When they have a



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problem in life, they also need Hashem's help. After all, challenges come directly from Hashem, and, therefore, only He can help. Even if therapists have years of training under their belt, and even if they have a lot of experience, it won't help them cope better with their own challenges, because only Hashem can help. So if therapists can't help themselves, how could they help others?

I came to the final conclusion that I might as well go directly to Hashem, the greatest therapist in the world, the Master of all creations. I would turn to Him for help. I allowed myself to trust completely in Hashem and know that He'll always help me and never mislead me. Hashem is perfect; He never makes mistakes. He gave me the challenge of a difficult childhood, and He understands my heartache and pain better than anyone else in the world.

I began having deep conversations with Hashem almost every single day, in the same way that I had previously had with my therapist. A big difference was that now our sessions were free of charge and unlimited in time. And I took full advantage. I cried to Hashem like a helpless young child, and I opened up my innermost private feelings to Him. It wasn't embarrassing to share everything with Hashem; I knew that He knows everything about me anyway. I begged and begged Hashem from the depths of my pained, shattered heart to have pity on me and to heal me from the past pain. These heartfelt conversations drew me ever closer to Hashem, and my *emunah* rose to greater levels. As a result, my emotional well-being became even stronger than before. My confidence grew by leaps and bounds,

and I developed a healthy self-esteem.

My life began revolving around the *shivrim* I constantly listened to, and I began to solidify my *emunah* more and more. I learned that Hashem is our Av Harachamim, our loving father Who sends us challenges to arouse us to do *teshuvah*. When we truly repent, then our neshama gets cleansed and we get a lot closer to Him. *Teshuva* means asking Hashem for forgiveness in our own words. When we suffer bitter challenges in life, we can't question Hashem's ways, because He has a perfect plan, and we must believe that everything He does is for our absolute best. We never know if our challenges are due to sins we committed in our previous *gilgul* that now need to be corrected and done *teshuvah* upon.

Once I internalized these concepts, I saw my life through very different lenses. I realized that Hashem gave me a difficult childhood so that I would do *teshuvah*, so that I would return to Him and build an everlasting relationship with Him. Until now I had blamed my mother for my difficult childhood, and I had built up a fortress of hatred against her for destroying my life. Now I realized that my difficult childhood had nothing to do with her at all. It was all about ME. Hashem challenged ME with a difficult childhood, in order for ME to correct my ways and to do *teshuvah*. My mother was simply a messenger from Hashem. It took some time for these new concepts to resonate in my mind and I began really doing *teshuvah*. I stopped blaming my mother for my problems, and the deep-rooted hatred that I carried in my heart against her gradually subsided. I was now able to view my mother as big *rachmanus* who is enslaved to a chronic illness. She'll never realize



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the truth about herself, and, therefore, she'll end up *suffering* the most.

After some time, I felt ready. I felt strong. And I decided to make peace with my mother. We hadn't been on talking terms for years, but I now wanted to do what Hashem wants from me and fulfill the *mitzvah* of *kibbud eim*. Also, at that point, I already had little kids of my own, and I didn't want to show them a negative example of *kibbud av v'eim*. I knew that young children pick up on everything their parents do, and when they grow up, they naturally copy their parents. I didn't want my kids to excommunicate me later on in their life the same way I did with my mother.

Armed with lots of *tefillah*, I began to rekindle our relationship. At first it was grueling work, since my mother ignored my friendly attempts. Understandably, she was extremely wary and didn't trust me. However, I didn't give up, and, after lots of *tefillah*, I gained her trust. She slowly came forward, and we developed a cordial and respectful relationship. My mother was still her same old self, but now I was able to step around her dysfunction without getting effected by it. We communicated mostly over the phone and if she ever spoke abusively to me, I turned the phone away from my ear and I asked Hashem for forgiveness for all my sins. When she calmed down, I apologized to her for the sake of peace.

I learned an important skill in life: I can apologize to my mother even though I didn't do anything wrong. And, when I apologized, I didn't feel like a loser next to her. If anything, I felt like a hero. This amazing skill saved our relationship from possibly getting destroyed many times. After I made the courageous move to make peace with my mother, my emotional wellbeing became rock solid. My anxieties left me, and I was no longer afraid of others. I knew that I'm constantly surrounded by Hashem Who controls my life. I only need to fear Him. I learned that we only worry when we feel in control of our lives. If we internalize that Hashem is the One in control and that nothing happens without His permission, then where does worry even come into the picture?

A while later, my parents divorced and my relationship

with my mother hit a big snag. My mother blamed me for the divorce and refused to talk to me for a very long time thereafter. But I didn't bat an eyelash at her accusations, and I continually asked Hashem to help me rebuild our relationship for the sake of *kibbud eim*.

One day, seemingly out of the blue, the miracle occurred, and she stepped forward again. At that point, she probably felt beaten at all fronts. All of her children shunned her other than me. At this point, I had to rebuild our relationship from scratch. It was a lot harder to regain her trust. But with a lot of *tefillah*, I persevered, and we began speaking again. Baruch Hashem, we continue to enjoy a very close relationship to this very day.

My close friend who urged me to go for therapy years ago is still lightyears away from where I stand today. She's onto her fourth therapist, and she's still trying to make sense out of her turbulent life. She sees my beautiful life and envies it. But she still sticks to her strong belief in therapy, even though she finds herself stuck in the rut. I often encourage her to talk to Hashem, and I explain to her that it's the only solution that will really help her. But she doesn't completely believe in with her whole entire heart. She's missing that *temimus* that I have.

In the world, people use the term 'survivor' to describe a person who's made it through a difficult challenge and come out victorious. However, when I look at myself, I don't see a survivor.

I see a hero.

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