



A Monthly Publication to Empower Unique Kids



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The Kaiser Clan

Were You Bored?

Yonah Klein & Blumy Abenson

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FROM THE EDITOR...

Dear Readers,

A while ago there was an article in STRONGER that mentioned the upsides of divorce. Receiving two gifts for special occasions was mentioned as one of the upsides.

I also wrote an interview once, for a different magazine, in which the interviewee discussed her parents' divorce with me. One thing that she mentioned was that she was appreciative to get two of things.

Two expensive jewelry pieces for her bas mitzvah...

Two grandiose parties...

That was in the pre-STRONGER days, so I knew that the girl hadn't read about acceptance of that sort anywhere. (She also told me that she hadn't.)

I was floored to hear this girl's perspective. Growing up, I'd never received two of anything – as that wasn't my family situation at all – but even the "one" that I did receive, and it was a glorified only-child sort of pretty "one" (of whatever item you can imagine), I hadn't particularly appreciated either.

Speaking to that girl and reading that article, I was reminded of the day that I started sixth grade. Which is why I'm writing about the subject now, as it relates particularly well to the beginning of the school year.

Back to my first day in sixth grade. I sat there at my desk, with my brand-new briefcase, brand-new pencil case, brand-new sharpener, brand-new everything when suddenly I heard whispers from behind me.

"Look at Chaya Sara's sharpener if you want to know what's in style. She always has the newest and nicest of everything." (Just for the record, it was a sharpener with tiny heart-shaped erasers in it.)

I turned around to see who had spoken, and the girl who'd said the words – she meant them honestly, not snidely – was one of the more popular, put together girls in my class.

Weirdly enough, she was pointing at shy, hardly confident enough, little me as the girl who knew what type of style was 'in'.

I was stunned. And then I had a very eye-opening moment. I noticed that of the over twenty-five girls in my class not

even half of them had everything new. New uniforms, yes. New shoes, probably. And likely a new briefcase as well. But for everything to be new. Every single year. No. Not every girl in my class was like that.

Not by a long shot.

The other girls had siblings and two parents and homes that were complete, which meant that their parents were juggling with a lot and so it was only natural that one or two items would slide.

At least that's what I thought at the time.

And my thoughts didn't make me appreciative in the least. Instead of being happy about having everything new, so that even the popular girls had noticed and wanted my stylistic opinion, I was consumed by a dark and ugly thought:

I have so much physically because family-wise I'm lacking. If I had two parents living together, siblings, and a home that was complete then I'd gratefully forgo all the worldly bounty.

Like anyone was asking me...

Like anyone was presenting me with a choice over my life's circumstances.

Today, I know that the only choice that a person has is a choice over the way that they look at things, not over what those things are.

Some people, like the girl whom I interviewed, naturally see things more optimistically—but those who don't, can certainly learn.

Our article on jealousy by Penina Steinbruch, is a great game changer and a great read for Elul and the beginning of the school year.

Rosh Hashana is less than a month away, you'll want to check out Tova Younger's article, "A New Year Note" for ideas on whom to write notes to and how to go about writing them.

I bless you with a wonderful school year and to always be able to see the good in your life's circumstances.

כתיבה וחתימה טובה
Chaya Sara Ben Shachar



STRONGER Magazine welcomes all comments, feedback, and letters to the editor.

We'd love to hear from you! Email us at:

editor@strongermagazine.com | **Subject:** Letter to the Editor.

Jealousy

Penina Steinbruch



In my last column I told you we would discuss jealousy, and we will, but first I want to tell you a story.

When my daughter, Kayla, was about nine years old, she was best friends with a girl whose father ran a school with a big campus. Let's call that girl Sarah Gold. My daughter loved playing with Sarah all over the campus. There were ladders going up the side of the dorm buildings so workers could get to the roof if they needed to fix something there. Next to every ladder there was a sign with big red letters:

IT IS FORBIDDEN TO GO UP TO THE ROOF!
Students who violate this rule will be expelled.

One day, Kayla and Sarah were playing ball. One of them threw the ball a bit too hard and to their dismay they watched it land on the roof. What should they do?

They knew they weren't allowed to go to the roof, but they had no other way to get their ball. They looked all around and when they were sure no one was watching, they shimmied up one of the ladders and hopped over the low wall surrounding the roof. They crouched down so no one would see them, and they got their ball.

But before they could get back over the wall, they heard a man's voice. Someone was talking on the phone on the floor below them. They sat on the roof, behind the wall, and waited for whoever it was to walk away

so they could climb back down without being caught. They waited and waited. But the person kept speaking near where they were hiding. They couldn't pass the time by talking or playing, because they were afraid the person would hear them and they'd get caught.

How long were they going to be stuck on the roof?

Maybe the person wasn't on the same side of the building as the ladder?

Maybe the person was standing somewhere where he wouldn't be able to see them climbing down?

The girls decided to peek over the little wall to see where the person was standing just as the man looked up at the roof. (I bet he heard them whispering and they weren't as quiet as they thought, but who knows?)

"What are you two doing up there?" He bellowed up at them. "Get down right now."

My daughter and Sarah grabbed their ball and scurried down as fast as their legs would carry them.

"Didn't you see the sign?" The man yelled, pointing at the big red letters.

The girls showed him the ball they had gone to get, but he was not impressed. "It's dangerous to go up to the roof, and you could have damaged something. You had no business going up there for any reason. I'm going to march you into Rabbi Gold's office this very minute and tell him what you've done. He's very strict about people obeying the rule not to go onto the roof. We'll see what he does with you."



"Rabbi Gold?" Sarah asked, trying to hide the smile that had started to play on her lips. "You're going to take us to Rabbi Gold?"

"Why are you asking? Do you know him?"

Now Sarah couldn't hide her smile anymore. "He's my father."

"Oh," said the man. "Well, uh, just don't go up to the roof again."

It's been many years since this story took place, but Kayla told me that there hasn't been an Elul since that she hasn't thought about it.

When Elul begins we prepare for the Yamim Noraim by thinking about what we've done and what we need to do teshuva for. Those can be scary thoughts. But then...

But then there are the words that Sarah said:

"He's my father."

Who are we asking to forgive us? Our loving Father!

The Hebrew letters of the month אלול stand for אני לי לדודי ודודי לי I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me. Hashem is very close to us right now. Let's remember our special relationship with Him.

Avinu, Malkeinu – Hashem is our Father and our King. He loves us no matter what we've done, and He wants us to be better and better. Like it says in the Yamim Noraim davening: we pass in front of Hashem kvnei maron – like sheep under their shepherd's staff. We are Hashem's special flock, and He is our caring Shepherd.

We're preparing for a special time; the birthday of the world. Another year has passed since Hashem created His world and on Rosh Hashana the whole world will come together to declare and celebrate Hashem as our King.

At the same time, Hashem will look at us. Are we doing the job He put us in the world to do?

He looks at each one of us, one at a time because we each have a special job in this world. No one else can do the job that you've been put here to do. It's a big responsibility and Hashem makes sure that we each have the exact tools that we need to do our job.

Now, back to the topic of jealousy.

Imagine, there's something you want very, very much. You wish you could have it, but there's no way you can get it.

You wish your parents lived together like your friends' parents, but that's not doable since they're divorced...

You wish you and your siblings could spend the summer months doing 'normal' activities like everyone else, but instead your summers are divided in half: One month with your father, one month with your mother...

You might be happy that your friends have it so seemingly easy, but even if you're on a level where you can think, "I'm so happy he has such a warm family, good for him." It's also very likely that you'll feel jealous. Some people might even feel so jealous they don't feel happy at all for the other person.

Jealousy is a very painful emotion.

One way to overcome the pain is to remember that Hashem gave us the exact tools that we need for our job in this world.

My oldest son is in college; when he leaves the house his bag is packed with notebooks, his laptop, a calculator, pens and pencils. Another son is a volunteer for Hatzalah; his bag is packed with bandages, ointments, a blood pressure cuff and all sorts of medical equipment. Their younger brother in Yeshiva has sefarim and everything he needs for dorm life like pajamas, clothing, and a toothbrush.

Now stop for a moment and imagine those three boys trading bags.

What will happen next?

The yeshiva bachur will pull out a stethoscope in the middle of the beis medrash, while his brother in a college classroom will pull out a pair of pajamas. Some distance away, a poor little boy who has fallen off his bike will be staring in dismay at the Hatzalah volunteer who has showed up to bandage his cuts with a calculator!

Such a thought might make you laugh, but, hopefully, it will also help you remember that Hashem has given you exactly what you need for your special mission in this world.

No matter how much another person has, that person can never take your place and do your job.

There's a lot more to be said about jealousy, but for now let's focus on our special relationship with our Father, our King, remembering that this means that each of us is His beloved son and prince.

Shanah Tovah u'Metukah!

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Penina Steinbruch was born and raised in Atlanta, GA and now lives in Yerushalayim with her family. She's Logistics Coordinator at Jewessence, a program for girls from frum homes who left observance and are looking to reconnect.

TRUST



Rosally Saltsman

Dear Rosally,

Maybe I'm a bit young to be saying this, but I feel like I've totally lost faith in people. I honestly feel that I can't trust anyone anymore. My mother says she'll do things with or for me, or buy me things, and then says she's sorry but she can't or she forgot or maybe later. My father often cancels when he's supposed to come pick me up or spend time with me. Once, I waited the entire day, while he kept postponing our outing and then cancelled it altogether. Even my teachers— there's one who promised to help me with a project I was having trouble with and then she said she didn't have time. I have a couple of siblings who are always promising to come for Shabbos or have me for Shabbos, but more than likely don't show up or cancel. My parents are divorced, in case you can't tell from my introduction, but the worst part about the whole thing is that I feel like I can't have faith in anybody, because people are always letting me down. It's a terrible feeling!

Down and Out

Dear Down and Out

Trust is the basis of all relationships and the closer you are to someone, the more important trust is. So I can't fault you for losing faith in humanity, when so many of your relationships appear to be void of trust. And yes, it's a terrible feeling!

There's a reason we say, *bli neder* (without promising), or *b'ezras Hashem*, when we make plans. So often things out of our control happen and we have to change our plans. Unfortunately, sometimes people use this as a loophole to get out of doing things they've committed to. In general, I agree, there are people who don't value their promises as much as they should. And this is a bad thing. It says in the Torah, 'Distance yourself from falsehood'. And we should be very careful to do

that. When promises aren't kept, this makes us feel insecure because we don't know what to expect. Hashem made the world with predictable patterns – day following night, spring following winter, etc. and our life ought to follow a form of predictability as well.

When something happens over and over again, it's called a pattern. Negative patterns are there to teach us something about how we need to act or view the world. You have decided that the message of the negative pattern in your life is that you should stop trusting people. Well that may be true for some people, and some situations, but before you write off humanity altogether, let us explore some other possibilities



disappointing and frustrating situation.

Let's start with you. "Be the change you want to see in the world." That's a quote attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, but it's sourced in the teachings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. If you want there to be more trust in the world, start with yourself. Make sure that you always keep your promises, fulfill your responsibilities, and don't disappoint other people in any way. The more trustworthy you are, the more trustworthiness you will attract in your life.

Also, make sure that you don't have unrealistic expectations of people and what they say they're going to do. Sometimes we hear things differently than people say them. It's a good idea to repeat any promise someone makes you, to make sure you understand it. "So I just want to confirm, you're saying you'll pick me up on Tuesday, at four o'clock, at school to go shopping for an hour?" The more concrete a plan is, the less vague, the less it can be subject to misinterpretation. Listen for disclaimers like "maybe", "hopefully", or "if I can". These aren't promises, they are ambiguous statements.

The examples you mentioned in your letter are truly disappointing and unfortunate. But before you take away your trust from someone, first be sure that you are judging them correctly. Is it true that they never keep their word, or does it happen once in a while, when something happens that's beyond their control, and other times they are, in fact, trustworthy? Is it something they do only to you or to other people as well? Is it only in a particular situation or across the board?

Another thing to keep in mind is that sometimes we see a certain thing because we're focused on it. Like if you got a new pair of shoes that many girls are wearing, you'll feel you see them everywhere, because you're focused on it. So here you're focused on people's trustworthiness, which may be why the issue seems to crop up all the time. What I'm recommending you do is be a bit of a detective and do some fact gathering. Keep a chart of promises or commitments people make to you (and you to them) and see if others are really falling short. Also write a comment near each instance about what "reason" the person (or you) gave for not fulfilling their commitment. If, for example, you were supposed to go ice skating with a friend but she canceled, that's breaking a promise. However, if it's because there was a giant snowstorm the night before and she can't get out of her house, that's certainly not her fault.

Having now gotten your information in an objective way, you can check if your assumption is correct. So, if a particular person usually keeps their promise/word/commitment but it happens once in a while that they can't and they have a reasonable reason, then maybe you can be a bit more understanding and forgiving. After all, things happen and

they don't always happen to our liking.

Most of all, you should express your gratitude when

for you and don't take it as a given. That will make them want to always do things for you. That's one of the reasons we express so much gratitude to Hashem in our brachos, because we want Him to continue bestowing His blessings on us.

If, however, your theory is proven right about someone and they really can't be relied on, then it's appropriate to withdraw your trust. If a teacher promises to help you again and again and doesn't, don't ask her again; your expectation is misplaced. Do not believe someone who has demonstrated they really can't be trusted.

If it turns out that one parent is in fact unreliable, discuss it with your other parent and try to work out a plan that allows less opportunities for disappointment.

Before you write someone off, or dismiss them as unreliable, talk to them. You can talk to your parents, or your siblings about how disappointed and hurt you feel when they disappoint you. Sometimes, honest and calm communication is the key. Perhaps they haven't been aware of what they've been doing.

Having done all this work (sorry, I know it seems like a lot), you will then be very clear on whom you can trust and whom you can't. I'm sorry you have to learn this lesson so young but as you make your way through life, you'll find there are many people whom you can generally trust and rely on and there are also people whom you can't. The only thing you can do to protect yourself is to identify who is deserving of your trust, and who isn't. That's a lesson that will serve you well throughout your life and stop you from making mistakes.

There are around eight billion people in the world. Take my word for it, some of them are very reliable. The better you get at identifying those who are, and the better you are at being trustworthy yourself, the more your life will be filled with promise, in every sense of the word.

You can take my word for that.

Rosally

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Rosally Saltsman has a teaching degree and offers creative consulting sessions. She has also written many books, her latest of which is entitled 100 Life Lessons I've Learned So You Don't Have To.

QUESTION & ANSWER TIME

with kids almost like you

Esty Shore

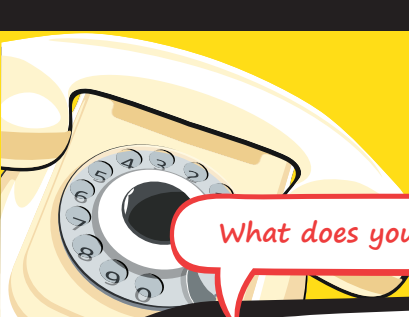
This month, in honor of Elul and the new school year, we meet Amy Birman, a social worker at the Teaneck branch of MYEF. She discusses activities that she's involved in, the impact that social work has had on her life, and a particularly meaningful story that she's been involved in.

Read on for a fascinating interview.



Hi Amy, thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule for this conversation. How long have you been working as a social worker?

I've been in the field for about twenty-three years. I started out in OHEL Children's Home and Family services, and then moved on to working in schools and high schools. I've been working for MYEF's Teaneck branch for about four years now. Rabbi Simon, the Chabad Rabbi of Teaneck, is my neighbor and when he decided to bring MYEF to Teaneck, to help children from single parent homes, he offered me the position of social worker for the organization. I was both honored and excited to take on the job.



What does your position entail?

Mainly, I'm in touch with the parents and children of MYEF to help smooth uncharted waters. If I see a child struggling, or if a child comes to me with a problem, I try to help that child find a solution. Oftentimes, this involves speaking to parents, but other times it means being in touch with schools. In other words, I help the children of MYEF Teaneck navigate troublesome territory by showing them that most problems have solutions, even if it takes work to find those solutions. I also train social work interns of the other MYEF branches in Crown Heights, Boro Park, Flatbush, Five Towns, Monsey, and Teaneck. And, throughout the year, I'm on hand to answer any questions and concerns that might crop up at club night – that fun evening once a week that MYEF participants attend. The night operates through big brothers and sisters whom I guide.

Wow! Sounds like very busy work! For the benefit of readers who are unfamiliar with MYEF and the way that it works, please tell us what club night is.

Certainly! Club night takes place one evening a week when children of single parent families come together and have fun. There's girls' club night and boys' club night and in Teaneck these nights are on the same evening of the week at two different locations. Club nights always follow a certain basic program: A dinner, followed by kids meeting with their big brother or big sister to do homework and chat. After that there's always an activity like challah baking, fun quizzes, dancing, etc. At the boys' branch there's a pool, so once a month the activity is swimming.

Fun! What age is club night for?

It's mainly for elementary age kids, but in Teaneck we're lenient, so if a highschooler wants to stay on for club nights they're welcome to. Really, though, the idea is that by the time a kid "graduates" from club nights as a participant, he or she is then ready to become a big brother or sister.

So, you guide the big brother and sisters?

Yes. At the beginning of each year I give an orientation, explaining what their job entails, what issues might come up, dos and don'ts etc. Then, during the year, I'm available if any questions and concerns arise. Many times, the big brothers and sisters will come to me with sensitive information that their little brother or sister told them, and I will then guide them on how to respond. One important thing to keep in mind is that no matter how unbearable things may seem, or how challenging, help is always available. Sometimes though, reaching out for that help may necessitate stepping out of your comfort zone.





LET'S TALK

Esty Shore

An important message! As a social worker, what would you say is the most difficult aspect of parents' divorce for children to navigate?

The differing rules aspect. It's hard when in one parent's home bedtimes, tooth-brushing, waking up etc. is all strictly enforced while in the other home rules are looser. In such cases I often speak to the parent whom the kids spend most of their time with, to try and get a dialogue with the kid going on the subject of the different rules. Acknowledging differences between the two homes, and discussing them, is the first step to smoothing over differences but it isn't always easy.

It definitely doesn't sound easy. Have you been privy to any success stories?

Absolutely! I see children lift their heads higher and gain confidence through MYEF club meetings and involvement all the time. One specific story comes to mind of a kid whose parents were on two completely different pages when it came to religion. One parent was very "frum" while the other had no interest anymore and the kid was floundering. The kid started to come to MYEF because the "frumer" parent begged and pleaded— but it wasn't clear where the kid would go after finishing elementary. The less religious parent was unprepared to pay for a yeshivah education so the kid was in a non-religious elementary school.

One club meeting. Another. The kid was put in touch with a wonderful big brother/sister and started to come happily every week. The child and mentor became closer and closer, and I saw how the child's eyes started to sparkle. It came time for the child to choose a high school and the child chose a typical, frum option. Whenever I see this child – who's now a teen – I'm thrilled to know that we played a part in the child's emotional and religious turnaround.

That's a beautiful story! How has your work for MYEF impacted you, personally?

It's interesting, because unlike some of the places that I worked in in the past, where it was obvious that a child was sick or unwell, MYEF children aren't children whom one would automatically assume is struggling. Baruch Hashem MYEF children look very put together and a person can be excused for thinking that they're "fine". Fine meaning they don't need that extra dose of care. But that's an illusion and after I got to know these children better I came to see that there are so many struggles beneath the surface, and that despite them, the children are doing the very best that they can. Getting close to such fantastic kids has really taught me to be extra sensitive to everyone I meet because a person can never really know what someone else is going through.

That's a beautiful message! Thank you for giving us a glimpse behind the scenes. Readers can get in touch with Amy via the magazine.





DAY *Boy* DAY

Sara Miriam Gross

F'rev Shabbos

"I can't hop all day," twelve-year-old Yosef muttered as he sat down next to the couch and stuck his hand underneath it.

"Yuck!!" he shouted as he pulled out a puzzle piece stuck to a strawberry popsicle wrapper. "Who put that there, and where's my other Shabbos shoe?"

Eleven-year-old Kayla shrugged. "At least you have clean clothing. I just found my green dress in the hamper."

"Kayla, sweetie, you can wear your purple dress — or the blue one. You have other things to wear," Mommy pointed out as she continued transferring towels to the dryer.

"But the green one's my favorite," Kayla protested with a grimace.

"Which is why it's often in the wash," Mommy said. "You wear it all the time. Anyway, Bubby Weiss will be here in twenty minutes to pick you up. There's no time to wash it now, plus I need your help

packing bags for Mendy and Ari... Mendy, are you dressed yet?" Mommy called in the direction of his bedroom.

"Yeah. I got dressed all by myself!" Four-year-old Mendy announced, as he emerged from his room with arms spread open wide to present his backward-shirt self to the rest of the family. Mommy smiled and quietly moved closer to help him out.

"Yosef, please unpack the groceries," Mommy told her oldest as she finished rebuttoning Mendy. "I need the table clear so I can serve lunch fast."

Oh come on, Yosef thought as he tugged on his sneakers. How fast can I work? Why are we always in a rush before we go to Tatty?

It was approaching one year since his parents had split up. That had been a tough way to start the last school year. But a whole year had passed since then. I wish Mommy and Tatty were still together, but I also don't. It's good that they don't fight anymore... Yosef reached into the shopping bags



and let his thoughts jumble and tumble as he arranged the canned beans, rice, and tuna in the pantry.

"Done!" Yosef reported loudly five minutes later.

"Good. Thanks." Mommy quickly turned to grab the pot off the stove.

"I want kugel!" seven-year-old Ari insisted as his mother began pouring sauce from the glass jar onto their bowls of pasta. "Kugel is Erev Shabbos food."

"Kugel is a *patchkeh*. It takes a long time to make," Mommy said.

What a simple explanation, Yosef thought. The bigger explanation was more than their fifteen-minute lunch could handle and had a lot to do with Mommy's new job. There were bigger things in life than eating less kugel and more pasta, obviously, but some days the small things added up.

"I'll help you make it," offered Ari.

Mommy stopped and took a long look at the sweet second grader and sighed. "Maybe some week. On a Thursday night, not on erev Shabbos. Your Bubby is coming soon. Hurry and finish eating."

Honk!!!

Yosef ran to the living room window. "Bubby's here!!" he shouted.

Four half-eaten bowls of pasta shook as the children jumped from their chairs, scrambled to grab their bags, and gave their mother goodbye hugs.

"Ah guten erev Shabbos!" Bubby Weiss said warmly from the rolled-down window, as she took stock of the children's tomato-sauce smeared faces and messy hair.

"Good Shabbos, Bubby!" everyone except for Yosef managed to say.

Huffing as he shlepped his bag and Mendy's bags,

Yosef popped the trunk and put everyone's stuff in. Then he opened the car door and plunked himself down. After that Kayla came in from the other side, and Mendy and Ari climbed over Yosef to reach the middle spots. Seeing the brown footprints on his Shabbos pants made Yosef's whole face heat up.

"Look! Look what you did to me," he yelled. "Not enough that I had to come in sneakers. Even the Shabbos pants I did find have to get dirty from you? Today was terrible."

Bubby turned toward Yosef and sighed. My poor *eineklach*, she thought. They all look so shlumpy and stressed.

Bubby had been hoping to pick up kids who were smiling and clean. Apparently though, their mother wasn't managing. I'm not Tzipora's shivgger anymore, she thought, but I'm still the bubby. I'll have to do something to get things under control...

Monday evening

"I do my best," Yosef heard his mother explain slowly into the phone. "They have a nice home. They have food. They have clean clothing. And most of all they have love."

His siblings were already asleep, and Yosef should have been sleeping too, but he had heard his mother having an unusual conversation and he'd gone to listen in to get a glass of water from the kitchen.

"Well, he is the oldest, so I do expect more of him," Mommy continued... "Too much stress? Look, most families have some chaos on erev Shabbos. I don't think there was anything crazy. It was just hectic.... Of course it would help if I had some help around here. If you want, you can tell your son that his children's mother needs household help.... Anyway, thanks for having them for Shabbos... Good night."

Y o s e f





watched his mother go to a corner of the living room and cover her eyes with her hands. Oy, it's all my fault, Yosef concluded. I shouldn't have complained.

Yosef felt like his pajamas were made of stone. He couldn't move. He stood behind the half-closed door watching his mother as her back rose up and down slightly with muffled tears. Finally Mommy stood up and went to her room.

The next day

Tuesday was the best day of Yosef's week; the day he went to hang out with his big brother. True, Yosef was the real big brother in his family, but Gavriel was like his big brother and a counselor and a smart friend all in one. They'd been set up through a mentorship program at Yosef's school a year ago and it was working out. Gavriel knew what growing up without a father at home was like. His parents had divorced when he was four but now he was married and had two little kids of his own. Yosef sometimes learned with him, sometimes played games with him, and other times they just chilled and shmoozed.

"So your mom called me," Gavriel told Yosef as he picked a stray onion off his olive pizza. "She wanted us to talk a little about—"

"About my Bubby and my father, right?" Yosef's blue eyes widened as he hoped to be wrong.

"Yeah," Gavriel said with a nod.

"Oh," Yosef said softly as he studied the words "World's Greatest Italian Pizza" on the side of the oil-stained box.

"You know, your father and your Bubby think that things aren't okay at your mom's house. And that's not your fault. These kinds of things happen after a divorce. No matter how good you and your siblings are, there will still be things that your mother thinks are not good about your father and that your father thinks aren't good about your mom. That's probably why they got divorced... For sure it's

okay, and even healthy, to talk about the things that are bothering you," Gavriel continued. "The only question is who to tell when. It seems like talking things out with me might be a better way to get hard things off your heart."

Yosef began to chew the skin on his lips.

"And if you're not around or whatever and you can't talk?" Yosef asked as he considered the new idea.

"Hmm... Well, what do you think you could do?"

"Maybe talk into my MP3 and let you listen to everything later?" Yosef suggested.

"That's a good idea." Gavriel responded with a thumbs up.

"Or write it down in a notebook and show you."

"Also shayach." Gavriel nodded.

"Okay," Yosef said as he reached for another slice. "And the next time I go for Shabbos with my father, I'm going to take along some of my mother's chocolate cake."

Gavriel's forehead wrinkled in confusion.

"So my Bubby and father see some of the nice things that Mommy does for me," Yosef explained.

Gavriel smiled.

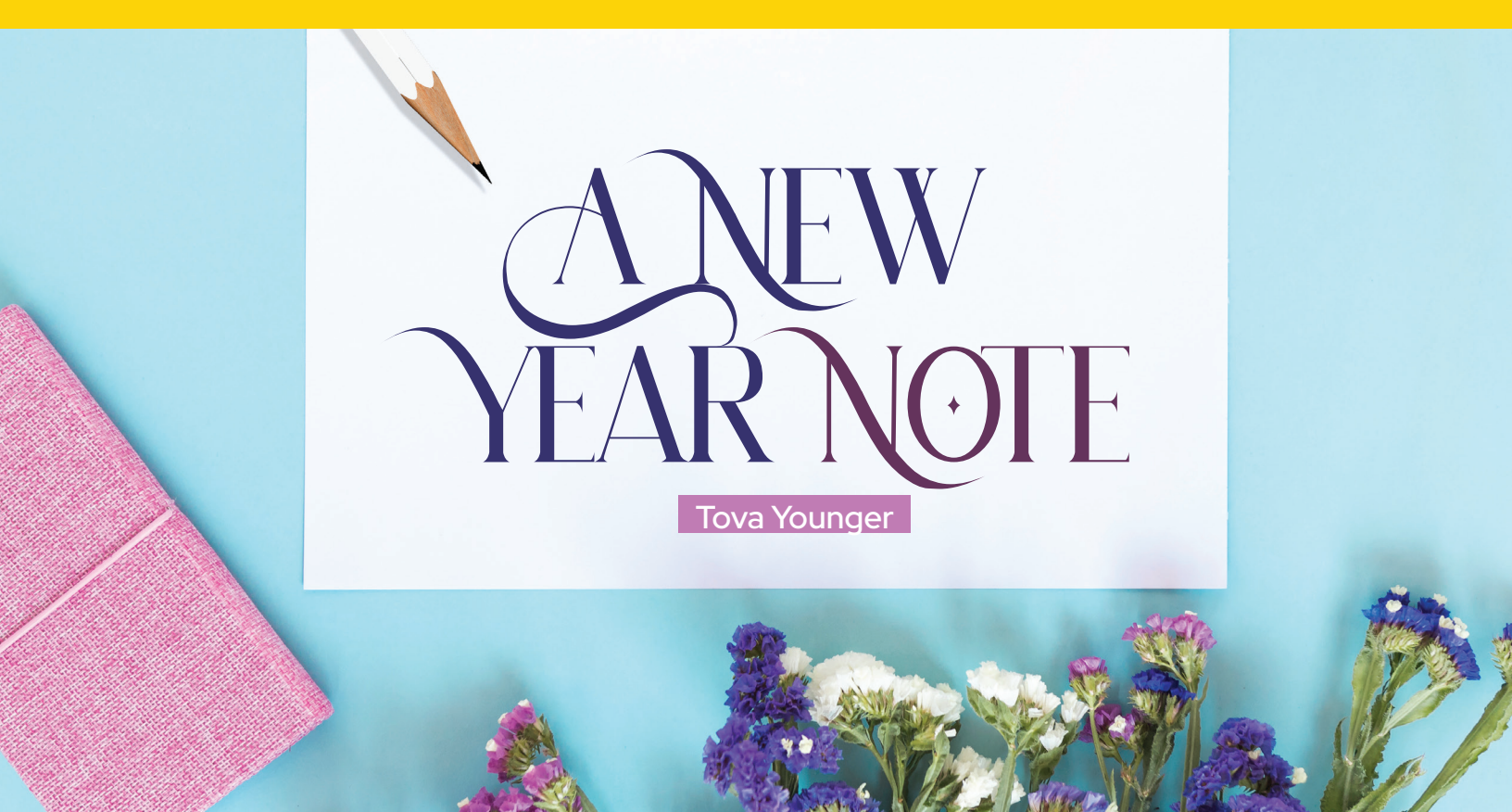
Yosef did too.

Life was complicated but Yosef was figuring out how to handle things. Day by day.



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Sara Miriam Gross is the author of Lemonade Girls Forever!, Catch that Crook!, and the upcoming Invisible Tribe — a story collection for children coping with the death of a parent. Sara Miriam was orphaned at age seven. When her mother eventually remarried a divorced father, she and her brother learned some things about divorce, and a lot of things about life in a blended family.



A NEW YEAR NOTE

Tova Younger

Remember Rosh Hashana greeting cards? It could be you have never even seen one. In the olden days – read: before people spent hours on the phone – people once communicated with letters! And with postcards too. Girls "back in the olden days" had stationery collections and worked on their handwriting, so that other people would be able to read what they'd written. What a different life!

Years ago, everyone knew that for Rosh Hashana you'd send everyone you knew a L'Shanah Tovah greeting card, wishing them all kinds of brachos. This forced people to think about their friends and relatives and to come up with a nice greeting. Many people "back in those days" had shoeboxes full of notes, letters, and cards. We have a collection like that in my house, and it's a special experience to read those letters and cards and to reminisce about old times.

Today, most people probably only have utility bills – no fun there! So, please join me as I share a few ways to bring an old idea back into style.

For kids who don't often see certain loved ones, writing a note or card can be an eye-opening experience. Not everyone will respond, but chances are that people will be happy and touched to receive your note--even if they don't tell you that outright!

Below are some ideas but remember while designing and writing that 'the best can be the enemy of the good.' Any pleasant note is appreciated, even if it's not perfect. Even just a smiley and / or a heart is a wonderful note to give. Notes communicate: "I care about you." And that is a very welcome message!

There's another old-fashioned quote that goes: "Good better best, never let it rest, 'til the good is better and the better is best!"

This means that while perfection isn't something to demand of yourself, hard work and perseverance are sure to create a note that will be greatly appreciated by your recipients.

Now, onward to ideas that will make it fun to write notes that other people will love receiving. Do your best – b'simcha!



NOTE AND LETTER WRITING TIPS



1 Get started

Keep a list of people whom you plan to send to so you don't forget someone by accident. Some people love to write lists and that's how they start any project. If you're not one of those people, realize that creating this list is a one-time task. Keep your list in a secure place, updating it regularly or irregularly as needed, and you will be all set every year... and even for your chasunah!!

Note: Consider writing notes to your father, mother, paternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, maternal grandfather, maternal grandmother, uncles, aunts, cousins, teachers, principals, counselors, mentors, and friends. Anyone whom you've ever felt a special connection with belongs on your list.

2 The paper



Pick the right type of paper for this project. No emails or texts, please, that's a b'dieved for this project. One of your older relatives or neighbors may have stationery from years ago that they'd be delighted to have you put to good use, otherwise you can buy. You can also use plain paper and design it any way that you'd like.

Note: STRONGER Issue 11 / Elul 5783 had an article about ways to decorate notebooks. Use those back-to-school notebook decorating ideas now. You can glue yarn in letter shapes, cut out letters/words from advertisements, punch holes into colored papers, apply glitter or stickers, and color with decorative markers – all to create the nicest card possible...

3 The Actual Writing



Write a rough draft for the actual letter on a piece of scrap paper. It's normal to find yourself getting stuck on the actual writing. You may have realized I'm a writer, but still, when I want to write a note it's not always so easy. I often look at what other people have written and copy a few words here and there before adding my own words to create the note. To get your brain into the right mode, read over some notes you received or saw in a magazine. If you don't have any, start collecting. You might even be able to get some from friends. You might also want to try your hand at poetry. One nice idea is to write an acrostic, a poem where the first letter of each line spells out a certain word like... Rosh Hashana!

Note: Read before writing. Seriously! Read poems, rhymes, or nice dialogue. Then words will come to your mind when it's time to write your note.

4 The Envelope



Did you know you can make an envelope? Recently I took a page from an advertising magazine, trimmed it a bit, and folded it up envelope-style, using a real envelope as a guide. I chose a page that had cute pictures and some empty space to write the recipients names, and my grandchildren loved it.

Note: You can use any pretty page that you want as an envelope, even if it has no empty space on it. Simply apply a white sticker to write the address. You can obviously use regular envelopes as well.

(Continued on page 21)



A Summer Gone Wrong

OR NOT?

Goldy Leader

"Welcome, Welcome! Welcome to Camp Ahuva!", head counselors Mina and Sarah yelled as the Lakewood coach bus pulled in.

"Hey, Shira!!! Long time no seeeee!!!" Esther, my BCFF (Best Camp Friend Forever) yelled, pulling me into the world's biggest hug.

"Hey, Ez! I didn't see you in a long time, too!"

"Yeah! I know, it's crazy! My father just dropped me off..." Esther finished her sentence lamely with her cheeks flaming.

Oh , come on! Will I be the divorced girl in camp too? At least my campers don't know!

"Oh! That's nice!", I replied enthusiastically aware that I was overcompensating for my blushing camp friend.

Would it be like that the whole summer?

"Hey, Shira! Me and Laylay are going to the woods for a bit. You game?"

My "favorite" camper, overconfident Temmy, was standing and holding teary-eyed Laylay's hand.

I was at the end of the rope with my relationship with Esther. Since she'd gotten wind of my parents divorce, she'd begun treating me like a human plague! It was already the end of the third week of camp, nearly the end of camp! My head was so overwhelmed with Esther, that I nearly missed the tears cascading freely down Laylay's cheek.

"Wait a sec . Laylay, come here."

Shrugging her shoulders, happy to be off DMC duty, Temmy turned on her heel to join her friends in "The popular Clique" as they headed down the cracked path to night activity.

"Hey, yo`s! Wait up!" She yelled, as she ran into the bundle of hot pink sweatshirt with hoods pulled tightly around faces.

Okay. I had work to do.

"Laylay, is something wrong?"

Laylay was a pretty good camper. Maybe she was a drop on the quiet side, but I couldn't imagine what would cause her to bawl her head off the way she was doing now.

To my shock, Laylay only started crying more after I asked my question. Her shoulders heaved as if she had the weight of the world's problems on them.

"Laylay, what`s wrong?!" I asked, befuddled.

More prodding. A tight hug. Me saying that everything would be all right...

Finally, the story came tumbling out.

Laylay started by saying I wouldn't understand, but when I told her that maybe I would, and that it's not good to keep things locked inside, she finally the source of her angst with me.

"Shira, mm-my parents just got divorced." She started bawling again. A torrent of tears fell from her eyes.

I gently placed my hand on her quivering shoulders. What to say?

"Oh, Laylay," I murmured softly. "Oh, Laylay."



The air fell silent between us.

"You see, you don't understand! I knew it! And, how could you?"

"But Laylay. Yes, I do! I do understand! Oh, how I do!"

"You do? But how could you? Your parents aren't divorced... Or wait, are they?"

Our eyes locked for a brief few seconds. Then, I nodded.

"Yes, Laylay. They are."

Laylay's mouth hung open, clearly shocked.

"B-but, how... why..."

"Are you shocked? Were you expecting me to wear horns?"

"No. N-no. Not horns, but..."

"But what? Is it that I look normal? Is that it?"

"Yes. How do you know?"

"Oh, Laylay. Cu`z, those were my thoughts exactly when I found out my parents were getting divorced. I remember wondering how someone in the same boat as me could look normal? I mean kids whose parents are divorced are supposed to look dysfunctional, right?"

Laylay gave an embarrassed nod.

"But Laylay, think about yourself. Are you going to turn all dysfunctional now? Is that the picture in your head?"

"No. But, I don't know what to picture! Everyone's for sure going to call us a dysfunctional family!"

"But Laylay, that's not true! Firstly, your family is not so interesting to become the talk of town! Other families have their own things going on. And secondly, no matter what others say, if you hold your head high - and I know it's hard, trust me, especially when you'd rather be under covers - but, if you hold your head high and show others that no matter what you are great, then others will have no choice but to treat you

the same! Got that?"

Slowly, miraculously, Laylay looked up and nodded.

* * *

"Bye, Shira!!! OMG am I gonna miss you!!! But hey, we`ll KIT, right?", Esther yelled breathlessly to my slowly departing back.

"Yah! Sure! Anytime, yo kiddo! Goodbye to you too!!", I shrilled over three very impatient looking campers, all headed to the Queens bus.

"Bye!!!", Esther yelled one last time, waving hysterically, now with both hands.

"Bye," I mumbled, laughing to my fellow ninezies counselor, Rebecca Leah.

"You gotta love them!" I finished off, sharing a hearty laugh with Rebecca Leah.

"Yup!" she agreed. Then she finished knowingly. "Friends. You gotta love them to get to hate them."

"Oh, Becca!" I replied, smirking.

"Anyhow, see ya around town! I`m grabbing a window seat for a snooze. Enjoy!"

"Bye! See you!"

Oh, what a fabulous summer! And to think how rickety the relationship between me and Esther had been in the beginning, and how it all straightened out! Once I took the lesson I'd tried conveying to Laylay to my own heart, it became easy to walk around with my head held high and things really changed! I could talk about my father nonchalantly without blushing and Esther treated me nonchalantly as well! No more awkward attempts at conversations! And not only with her but with all my other fellow staffers!

So much thinking. It's making me tired!

Can`t wait for next summer...

Zzzz...

THE END!

Submissions to "Our Share" column are very welcome by readers! To submit a story, poem, or other writing for publication please email: editor@strongermagazine.com.



CHAPTER 3

Menucha
Chana Levin

Recap: Yaakov Kestenbaum walks to his father's house with his friend Ruvy Dishinsky. When he arrives there's a message on the answering machine informing him that there's a meeting at his mother's house.

When Shira Leah was sitting at the kitchen table when she heard her mother come home from work.

"Hi, sweetie! How was your day?" asked Mrs. Kestenbaum, sinking into the closest kitchen chair.

"Long, boring and tiring." Shira Leah sighed. "We had such a crazy math test; it would be a total miracle if I passed it. How was your day, Mom?"

"I thought I was adjusting to working longer hours at the medical center but it's still not easy. At one-thirty, I look at the clock and think 'Great, time to go home now,' but then remember I still have to work for another three hours! And today we had a new girl start, so I had to explain everything to her. She's a cute, starry-eyed newlywed who loves to chat about her life with her brand-new husband."

"Last year I had a shana rishona person like her

for a teacher," Shira Leah said sympathetically.

"Well, wedded bliss doesn't last too long. They'll all have to wake up to reality one day," her mother said in a bitter tone.

The conversation wasn't to Shira Leah's liking. "Would you like a snack, Mom?" she offered. "How about some French fries I made? They're pretty good, and I could heat them up in the microwave if you want."

Mrs. Kestenbaum shook her head. "I appreciate your offer but no thanks. French fries are loaded with calories and I'm trying to watch my weight. I'm hoping to wear that lovely dress I bought for Estie's wedding in a month. It just about fits me now but I still have a small way to go!"

"I'm sure you'll be okay, Mom," Shira Leah said reassuringly. "You have tons of willpower when it comes to food. Not like me," she admitted. "I couldn't resist finishing that chocolate fudge ice cream we had left from Shabbos."

"Shira Leah, we've talked about food many times before, about what's healthy and what isn't. That ice cream was a special Shabbos treat since everyone was home and I'm disappointed you finished it up."



"Not everyone was home, Mom," Shira Leah pointed out. "Leeba wasn't."

Mrs. Kestenbaum sighed at the painful reminder of her sixteen-year-old daughter who had recently left home to live with a friend.

"Let's not change the topic so fast, okay? I'm very concerned about your eating habits lately, sweetie. I know we've all had a huge upheaval in our lives..."

"That's the total understatement of the year, Mom," muttered Shira Leah.

"All the more reason to stay in good shape and eat healthy foods."

With a shrug, Shira Leah stared out of the kitchen window. "Looks like it's getting cold and windy out there," she commented, in another attempt to change the topic.

"You didn't eat any breakfast this morning," her mother persisted.

"I did too! I had a glass of orange juice. Well, most of one anyway, and I took a granola bar to eat on the way," Shira Leah protested.

"I read an interesting article in a magazine about teenagers' eating habits. Did you know that about a quarter of all teenagers don't eat breakfast?"

"But I'm always in a rush in the morning and don't have enough time to eat," Shira Leah insisted.

"If you got up just ten minutes earlier you'd have time to eat."

"But, Mom, most mornings all I see you have for breakfast is a cup of coffee."

"That's true," her mother admitted. "Coffee is not breakfast. Still, adult brains are better than teenage brains at adapting to not eating properly. I can survive on caffeine but at your age you cannot. You know, let's both make an effort to get up earlier and eat a healthy breakfast."

"But it's hard to get up so early!" complained Shira Leah.

Mrs. Kestenbaum walked over to the kitchen sink and began washing her hands[2■] as a

preparation for getting dinner underway. "I understand. Way back in the olden days, I was once a teenager like you. There's always tons of homework and studying to do so you stay up late. But then you're too tired and rushed in the morning to eat breakfast. According to that article, constantly skipping breakfast can result in weight gain from snacking, plus it's harder to concentrate in school, and can even increase your risk of illness, chas v'shalom."

"Mom, I'm so not in the mood of another food lecture right now."

“

**WE'VE ALL HAD A
HUGE UPHEAVAL IN
OUR LIVES...**

”

Brrring!

Shira Leah eagerly jumped to answer the phone, relieved to be able to end the frustrating conversation.

But when she picked up the phone the call disconnected, and she only heard the dial tone.

"What happened?" asked her mother. "Did they hang up?"

"I don't know. This happened already twice since I got home. The first time I thought I didn't grab the phone in time, but the second time it disconnected like now."

"Oh no, not another problem to deal with." Mrs. Kestenbaum sighed. "Last week we had that power out and before that the awful flood in the upstairs bathroom...there's always



something going wrong around here."

"That's for sure. But let's call the phone company from your cell phone and tell them to send over a repairman," Shira Leah suggested.

"Good idea. I'll have to find my cell phone." Mrs. Kestenbaum turned. "Come to think of it, it hasn't rung all day."

"Are you sure it's on, Mom?"

"Probably. But I'm not as techno savvy as you are, sweetie."

Shira Leah began to look around together with her mother.

"It's not in my bag, which is the usual place I keep it," Mrs. Kestenbaum said. "I'll try to call it from the house phone."

"But, Mom, the house phone isn't working, remember?" Shira Leah pointed out.

Mrs. Kestenbaum gave a shaky little laugh.

"Of course – that's why we're trying to call the phone company!"

The two continued to search, and several long moments later Mrs Kestenbaum finally located her cell phone in the pocket of her jacket.

Looking at it, she noticed it had been in silent mode and that there were four missed calls. "That's very strange. Most days no-one calls me while I'm at work." Puzzled, she pressed the button to hear the first message.

"Hello, Mrs. Kestenbaum. This is Suri Weiner from Shelbrook Hebrew Academy. I know you're at work now, but could you please call the school at your earliest opportunity? Thank you."

She continued to listen to the rest of the messages.

"Hello, Mrs. Kestenbaum, this is Suri Weiner again. I called you earlier, but we still haven't heard from you. Please call us back as soon as you get this message."

"Mrs. Kestenbaum, we are still waiting to hear from you." This time Suri Weiner's

tone sounded insistent. "Your son Heshy was dropped off at school in the morning by his father, but when school ended this afternoon he didn't get on his bus as usual. Did he have an appointment after school we weren't notified about? We don't want to alarm you



**WE DON'T WANT
TO ALARM YOU
UNNECESSARILY, BUT
PLEASE CALL THE
SCHOOL AS SOON AS
POSSIBLE.**



unnecessarily, but please call the school as soon as possible!"

After that came the final, urgent message:

"Malka, it's Dov. Heshy's school called and said they've been trying to reach you all afternoon. Do you know where Heshy is? It seems he's disappeared."

Mrs. Kestenbaum's face turned white with shock and she gasped.

Shira Leah's hands began trembling.

To be continued...

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Menucha Chana Levin, a former English teacher, has written many short stories and several novels for children and teenagers. Her latest novel, Hidden Heritage, published by Hamodia Treasures, is available in Jewish bookstores and on Amazon.





(Continued from page 15)



5 Get Ready to Send

The earlier you mail your notes, the better. Notes are so fun to get, and if they come early, they can inspire your recipient to send their own greetings out as well! When you have finished putting your letter together, visit the post office to mail it. The post office also often has cute stamps available, just ask!

Note: Before sending your note, make a copy and keep it with your collection of notes that other people have written; it'll be much easier to write future notes that way.

You're now on your way to letter writing. Before you start though, there's one last expression that I want to share for this project. 'Kol hatchalos kashos – all beginnings are difficult.' Start writing and you may be pleasantly surprised to see it become easier and easier. If it doesn't, you can pace yourself. Write two or three notes and then take a break. Skip a day of writing and start all fresh again. Listen to some nice music while you write. Picture the big smiles your greetings will generate and work your way through the decorating and writing.

Kesiva Vechasima Tovah – May we all be inscribed for a good and sweet year!



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