

JEWISH LIFE

MAY 2023 | ISSUE 13



LAS OLAS BEAR FAMILY HEBREW SCHOOL END-OF-YEAR CEREMONY 2023

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FLEET WEEK DINNER

The dinner was attended by more than 150 people from our community, and more than twenty U.S. Navy men and women.

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE VOLUNTEER EVENING OF TRIBUTE

G-d sometimes wraps things in different packages, but it's because we each have our own beautiful mission

Shavuot Cheese Creations

What a magical year we had at the Las Olas Jewish Women's Circle!



THIS MAGAZINE IS INSPIRED BY THE TEACHINGS AND IDEAS OF THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE.



Dear Readers,

Summer is a time of expansiveness. The days are long and sun-filled, and people's minds tend to be more open and carefree as they break from the usual routine and take time to notice the beautiful world around them.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe saw this break in routine as a unique opportunity to dedicate time to learning and personal development. He often encouraged individuals, especially students, to participate in summer activities that would foster moral and spiritual growth. In the Rebbe's view, summer was also a prime time for spreading light and kindness in and beyond the community.

As we begin preparations for the 2023 High Holiday season, let's utilize this time to increase in positivity, Torah study and acts of kindness. May this summer be one of personal growth and deep connection!

Wishing you a happy and healthy summer,

Rabbi Chaim & Chayale Slavaticki

Directors, Las Olas Chabad Jewish Center



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By Rabbi Shmuel Marcus



A GUIDE TO LIVING WITH GRATITUDE

"I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King, for restoring my soul within me, with mercy; great is Your trust."

Modeh ani is said immediately upon waking in the morning (Code of Jewish Law).

If you woke up this morning, you have a soul.

The wonderful thing about your soul, or life force, is that it is a literal spark of the source of all life; G-d. So, it doesn't matter if you're a struggling entrepreneur, retired doctor, or still a little girl in pigtails; you have an actual part of the Creator within you.

Your soul, the real you, is pure Divinity, making you pure and holy. Your Divine spark also makes you incredibly loveable and unstoppable in your mission. Don't you want to shout it from the rooftops and do a little victory dance?

Welcome to Living with Gratitude

Modeh is Hebrew for "thanks," and it's the first word we use to begin

each day. Starting your day with a specific Hebrew word is not a coincidence. In Hebrew, modeh has the same root as hodayah "acknowledgment," meaning when you verbalize your appreciation, you're also announcing to the world that there is a G-d, and He gave you a Divine soul and task.

Imagine if you stacked all your daily conversations in a pile like a deck of cards, the bottom "card" would be the word Modeh, your gratitude card. In this way, your morning routine of saying the Modeh Ani, "I give thanks," operates as your spiritual foundation and core identity behind everything you do throughout the day.

Living with gratitude is much more than just feeling thankful at six or seven in the morning; it's the critical step in connecting the dots and recognizing your soul and your life's purpose.

Sadly, we don't see our beautiful souls in the mirror, so we identify

merely as our bodies. Unfortunately, many of us tend to get so busy with morning rush-hour traffic or late-night meetings that we need a reminder of who we are and why we do what we do. That's where living with gratitude comes in.

Say Thank You

We all have something to be thankful for, and adopting the habit of saying "Thank you G-d" in response to positive experiences extends the Modeh Ani gratitude and awareness to all aspects of daily life. Additionally, living with a heightened sense of gratefulness ultimately shifts our focus from specific gifts to a deeper appreciation of life, our soul, and our purpose.

Today, more than ever, we all need to hear this simple "Modeh Ani" truth: you have a perfectly pure soul, you're loveable, and you are unstoppable in your mission. So, try incorporating daily gratitude into your life and see how voicing this fundamental truth can change your world. ▲

LAS OLAS BEAR FAMILY HEBREW SCHOOL END-OF-YEAR CEREMONY 2023



The Las Olas Bear Family Hebrew School held its end-of-year ceremony three short weeks ago, and what a blast it was!



For this year's ceremony, the theme was "Who I Am," aptly titled to celebrate the beautiful learning the students accomplished this year by digging into their roots and discovering the incredible lineage they come from!

The day was extra special, getting to recognize and salute each student's individual accomplishments and the progress they had made throughout the year.

It was also an amazing opportunity for the students to perform and show off what they learned during the entire school year!

The incredible morning kicked off with the students & their families getting to enjoy the photo booth with its props, taking wonderful pictures and creating memories. It was followed by a scrumptious brunch while relaxing music was

playing in the background. While enjoying the delicious spread, each student had the opportunity to create a beautiful art project with their parents! Beautiful mirrors were set up with slogans such as, "Proud grandchild of Avraham & Sarah!" or "I love Hashem! He's always watching over me." Each student got to choose the slogan that spoke most to them, encompassing the lessons they learned this year & then added their personal preference in décor to make it their own to hang in their bedrooms.



Next up, Rabbi Chaim Slavaticki spoke about the importance of strong roots, speaking to this year's theme. This inspiring speech by the Rabbi was followed by an incredible student performance from each class. Their performance about the forefathers and foremothers of the Jewish people was followed by the grand finale, a student-led song called "Who I Am!" The audience jumped up with a standing ovation and some even with tears in their eyes as they took in the beautiful messages!

After the wonderful performance, one of the parents spoke & shared their wonderful experience as a first time Hebrew School parent. They expressed great gratitude toward the teachers and everyone involved for an incredible school year and memories that will remain embedded with their child forever. The mother of our Hebrew School, Mrs. Marcelle Bear, also gave a moving speech sharing with the students how proud she is of all of them.



A special tribute was then played in honor of Reb Chaim Catz, an impactful member of the Hebrew School Family. Reb Chaim together with his daughter set up the Leonard Catz Scholarship Fund, ensuring that every child, no matter their financial situation, receive the opportunity of a Jewish Education. In previous years, Reb Chaim would come to the The Bear Family Las Olas Hebrew School to bless the students with the Priestly Blessing after their performance. Sadly, Reb Chaim is no longer with us, but he was definitely there in spirit, blessing our students once again, this time from on high! His daughter, Safra, gave a touching speech, and we got to watch a tribute video with beautiful memories of Reb Chaim.

It was finally time to call up the stars of the morning! Our students were summoned for a wonderful award ceremony! As each student came up, they received a certificate based on the Hebrew reading level they achieved over the year, as well as a beautiful parting gift to remember Hebrew School, a travel hoodie pillow with the Hebrew School logo.

It was indeed a beautiful end-of-year ceremony for the students, their families, and all the teachers and staff at the Las Olas Bear Family Hebrew School! We are all so proud of our students and are already counting down another exciting year of Hebrew School ahead!



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I'm Only Human

The old story of **sinful Yankel** offers us a fresh and surprising perspective on our **human struggle** and **ultimate perfection**.

By Levy Lieberman



As humans, we are complex and unique.

We are all a combination of physical components (such as atoms, molecules, and genes) with visible characteristics influenced by our environment and upbringing. However, we are also more than just these elements.

As creations made in G-d's image, we can not only use scientific discoveries to understand and improve our world, but incredibly, we have the potential to transcend the limitations of our natural world.

Yankel of Vilna was known for his sins. This constant sinning caused sinful Yankel to be shunned by his local community. However, he still attended Vilna's Chasidic informal synagogue. Soon they, too, grew concerned about Yankel's presence and feared the backlash from the city's non-Chasidic leaders. As a result, they asked Yankel to leave and not return.

Heartbroken, Yankel wrote a letter to the Tzemach Tzedek (1789–1866), the Chasidic Rebbe in Lubavitch. In the tearful letter, sinful Yankel described his struggles with temptation and how he only found momentary peace at the Chasidic synagogue. Finally, he begged the Rebbe to ask his followers to allow him to return; otherwise, Yankel feared that he had no future as a Jew without the brief moments of connection he



experienced at the synagogue.

The Rebbe immediately instructed his followers to welcome Yankel back, stating that the few minutes of genuine Jewish feeling Yankel experienced there were more precious to G-d than all the devotion of even the most pious among them.

Yankel quickly became a role model for how regular people could defy their limitations and achieve moments of extraordinary perfection.

Sure, Yankel struggled to overcome his innate desires and tendencies towards selfishness and instant gratification. Yet, despite these challenges, he still found a few moments to connect with and worship G-d, moments in which he transcended this reality and meshed with the Divine.

In other words, although Yankel was a creature of the natural world, he also defied it, even if only sporadically. And to G-d, Yankel's worship was the most precious, no matter how brief or seemingly insignificant.

Similarly, the scroll of Esther does not mention G-d's name because G-d's deliverance was not supernatural but hidden behind natural events. In this way, Purim celebrates how G-d is present in our lives, even in ways that may not be apparent or spectacular.

So, even when we naturally struggle or falter, Purim encourages us to see ourselves as more than a collection of our actions and habits and to discover the Divinity hidden in our daily lives.

Eventually, this perspective allows you to view yourself through G-d's eyes, recognizing that, much like Yankel, your struggles and weaknesses ultimately make you the most perfect and precious of all. ▲

MY NAME IS GRATITUDE

The root of the term "JEWISH" is hidden within the ancient Hebrew language, and as we uncover its meaning, we realize why it is the perfect term to define us as a people.

Today, you would call me a Jew, but long ago, in Biblical times, this wasn't the common designation. Instead, throughout the Torah, our nation is referred to as the Children of Israel, or Hebrews. So, where did the term Jew come from? What is its significance?

Historically, the first book where we find the term Yehudi used throughout is the Book of Esther. In the second chapter we are introduced to our heroes: "A "Yehudi" (Jewish) man lived in Shushan, his name was Mordechai...he had raised his cousin, Esther..."

The term "Yehudi" or "Jew" carries a lot of historical and cultural significance:

It all started about 3,000 years ago, after the golden reign of King Solomon, when the kingdom split in two.. The northern kingdom, consisting of ten out of the twelve tribes, retained the name Israel. The southern kingdom, made up of only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, was named after the larger of the two tribes, Judah. That's when the inhabitants of Israel's southern kingdom became known as Judeans or Jews.

Tragically, in the eighth century BCE, the mighty Assyrian Empire invaded Israel, conquering the northern kingdom and exiling its inhabitants to unknown places. These people became known as the "ten lost tribes."

However, in the south, the Judeans (Jews) survived for another century before being defeated by Babylon and taken into captivity in Mesopotamia. Later, when the Persians defeated the Babylonians, the exiled Jews became subjects of Persia and its King Ahasverosh (Xerxes).

This is when the Purim story takes place, and that's how you have a "Jewish" man named Mordechai and the Yehudim, 'Jews' living in Shushan.

That's the historical and practical background to the term Jew. But, of course, there's a deeper story that goes way back to the original Judah and why he was named that.

According to the Torah, the name Judah comes from the Hebrew word "odeh" which means gratitude. When our matriarch Leah gave birth to her fourth child, she said, "Now I will thank the L-rd." And she named him Yehudah, or Judah, from the word "odeh" (to thank).

The term Jew is synonymous with gratitude...

The Hebrew root for "Jew" (odeh) is the same as "modeh," which is the first word in our daily prayers, it is said in bed as soon as we wake up. As Jews, we begin our day with the word "modeh" (thankful) before doing anything else. Before checking the news or social media, before even starting the day's activities, we take a moment to reflect on the one thing we

know for sure: we are alive! We woke up! And it is an amazing and lucky thing to have our souls restored. It's a moment to realize the importance of our souls and how much gratitude we have for being alive.

Whenever we express gratitude for our souls, it reminds us that we are not just physical beings going through the motions of survival. We possess something that transcends this world and is immune to negativity and hardship. It is the breath of G-d Himself and the essence of our being, the core of who we are.

Thus, the term Jew, or Jewish, gives us a gratitude identity and sets the tone for our entire life. Being a Yehudi, or a Jew means to be rooted in gratitude. This mindset is contagious, and by radiating gratitude, we inspire others to connect with their "Jewishness" and find gratitude in their own lives.

You can call me "grateful" because that is the meaning of my name.

Today, even after thousands of years, the term "Jew" is still associated with its original meaning, gratitude. The word Jew reminds us of the strength and enduring power of gratitude that has sustained us through even the most difficult times.▲





By Joseph Shaffer

UDE



Photo by Marko Dashev. You can view his collection online at MarkoDashev.com



FLEET WEEK SHABBAT DINNER



Each year, Southeast Florida residents welcome the U.S. Navy to Fort Lauderdale for Fleet Week. To celebrate the occasion, the Las Olas Chabad Jewish Center had the honor of inviting our Navy men and women for a special Shabbat Dinner. This year, four Navy ships arrived, to the delight of many! In addition we were pleased to welcome representatives of the Marines and Coast Guard.



The night was filled with great food, friendship, and inspiring messages. The dinner was attended by more than 150 people from our community, and more than twenty U.S. Navy men and women. It was a lovely evening that gave us the opportunity to show our gratitude to these brave men and women who are on the front lines every day, defending the flag and keeping our country safe.



The evening started with photo opportunities with the Navy men and women, before sitting down for a delicious Shabbat dinner, where the Navy personnel sat at different tables to mingle with community members and share their experiences. In the middle of the dinner, the Navy personnel were called up to share their inspiring stories about their service and words of appreciation for our country.

Rabbi Chaim Slavaticki then called each Navy personnel up front to receive a certificate and a small token of our appreciation – a special card containing all the important prayers to keep them safe in their journeys.

We were so pleased to have the opportunity to honor these brave men and women with a delicious dinner, joyful singing, and heartfelt speeches. It was a wonderful evening to connect and share experiences, and everyone in the community was left with a deeper understanding of what our U.S. Navy does and how much they give of themselves in service to our country.



We are so grateful to the Stahl Family for sponsoring this memorable and important event, and are truly blessed to have such inspiring military heroes serving our country! We thank the Navy personnel for their service, and look forward to hosting this special Shabbat for many more years to come.





FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE VOLUNTEERS EVENING OF TRIBUTE

Every year, the Friendship Circle brings our volunteers together for a night of celebration and gratitude. It's a special opportunity to recognize all the dedication and hard work each volunteer has invested into making our mission a possibility!

The night kicked off with a gorgeous photo backdrop filled with props and costumes so each volunteer could have a lasting memento of the magical evening. As everyone posed for their photos, the joy and appreciation in the room was palpable! Everyone in attendance was then able to relish in a delicious dairy buffet, while being serenaded by gorgeous melodies from the Shakey T Band.

The program then formally began with wonderful and inspiring opening remarks from Director Chayale Slavaticki, who reminded us that believe it or not, there have been many people with unique challenges who've had a profound effect on the course of history, inspiring us all with their remarkable achievements.



These remarkable historical figures showed us that G-d sometimes wraps things in different packages, but it's because we each have our own beautiful mission – a mission that no one else in this world can achieve for us! It was due to their “setbacks” that they were able to make such magnificent breakthroughs!

Mrs. Slavaticki's words resonated deeply in the room, as many hearts swelled with emotion. Her parting words, “The amazing Friendship Circle volunteers recognize the beauty and magnificent purpose that lies within each of our special friends! They understand that each individual has an immense potential, just waiting to be unleashed with a little bit of help. By providing this assistance, these volunteers truly make an invaluable difference in so many lives; their selfless actions serve as an inspiration to us all!”

She evoked the images of two iconic figures - Helen Keller and Beethoven - whose legacies continue to shape our world today.



These touching words were backed up by a heart-warming performance by the one and only Harmonicats Band, a musical group composed of our special friends in the Life Skills & Job Training Program. The Harmonicats got everyone up and moving, singing and dancing along to their wonderful lyrics. After a well-deserved standing ovation and lots of applause from the audience, the crowd got to tap into and enjoy some meaningful words from parents, participants, and volunteers about the wonderful impact The Friendship Circle had on their lives this year.

Melva's story is one of hope, determination, and courage. She moved her family from Bolivia to Florida in the hope of finding a program that could provide the best care and support for Alex, her son with special needs. After much research and planning, Melva and her husband David were able to find the Friendship Circle, a place where Alex could be embraced with open arms and where he could really thrive! The resilience and love of Melva and her family moved us all. For them to travel thousands of miles for a chance at a better life for their son was an inspiring reminder of how impactful the gift of friendship really is!



Gabe Shapiro, a participant in the Friendship Circle's programs, bravely stepped up in front of everyone, and we were delighted by how candidly he spoke about his experiences! Gabe spoke passionately about how much he cherished the new relationships that he made this year and how fun all the activities were! His all time favorites were working on art projects together, singing karaoke with newfound friends, and making delicious cupcakes! He added that it was an unforgettable year being part of the Friendship Circle, and that all the people involved would forever be in his heart.

Both Melva and Gabe expressed their utmost gratitude to all the Friendship Circle volunteers who have made such a positive impact on their lives, and we could all feel the genuine appreciation in their heartfelt words!

The night progressed to another activity, where each table was asked to define what friendship means to them. This conjured up words like support, acceptance, happiness, appreciation, love and more.

The answers were inspiring and filled our hearts with so much warmth! This is the true embodiment of the Friendship Circle! Each of our special friends get to experience all of the above every time they walk through the front doors!

To top off the night, we were graced with the honor of the presence of Mayor Dean Trantalis, who delivered a heartfelt speech full of gratitude to our volunteers. His words touched us all deeply, and we could feel the emotion in his voice as he expressed his appreciation for their commitment to the community and signed every award with pride.

As the night was coming to a close and everyone prepared to go back home, Amanda Levin shared her heartening volunteer reflection that moved us all. She recently joined the Friendship Circle as a volunteer after her uncle, who has special needs, became part of the program. In her passionate words, she shared how her entire family has been impacted by the Friendship Circle and how it has become a beacon of hope for them.



The night ended with a beautiful video presentation that showcased clips of memories throughout the year with some words of thanks from our special friends and a memorable award ceremony where each volunteer left their fingerprints on a special painting symbolizing the great affect they've made this year in the lives that they've changed. Each volunteer was also presented with a Certificate of Appreciation and a small token of appreciation; a travel hoodie pillow with the Friendship Circle logo to remember us by during a well- deserved vacation.

We are exceedingly proud of each of our volunteers for the amazing work they have accomplished this year, and we look forward to continuing these amazing memories! This special evening will definitely remain etched in our hearts.

There is nothing so whole as a broken heart



By Sara Esther Crispe

When I was a teenager, I used to have a book of quotes. It was orange, with lined white paper, and the cover was decorated with colorful puffy paint of peace signs and hearts.

I started writing in it at the age of 14, and by the time I was 17, it was completely full. I took this book with me everywhere I went and hid it in a secret spot so that my younger siblings wouldn't find it. I would copy over poems, bumper stickers, or billboard messages anything that moved or inspired me.

When I was looking through old things, I recently found this book. I was flipping through, reminiscing at the passages that tugged at my heart and soul, when I found one that completely astounded me. For the life of me, I can't figure out where I would have seen this quote or what I thought it meant at the time, but clearly, the seed was planted many years before this quote would become even more relevant in my life.

The statement was from Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, a Chasidic Rebbe, long before I had ever heard the word "Chasidic." I had written the quote on its own page, for I must have intrinsically felt its importance. It read: "There is nothing so whole as a broken

heart." When I saw these words, they shook me to my core. While I can't figure out what it meant to me then or how I understood it, I know what it means to me now.

Our wholeness, our completeness, is a process. And part of that process is allowing ourselves to feel and be vulnerable enough to be broken. If we have never been broken, we can never be whole. I love that. I need that.

Willingness to acknowledge our mistakes, the pain we caused, and our missed opportunities can be challenging. It is so much easier to just close that door and tell ourselves we are just focusing on moving forward. But if we want our future to be different than our past, we better take a long and hard look at it, learn from those mistakes and commit to not making them again. Looking back is the best way to ensure that the past remains there and does not follow us into our present.

Living with a broken heart is hard because we wouldn't be growing or developing if it wasn't. And it hurts, but that is the point. It is not that we want the pain or ask for it, but it makes us who we are, and if utilized correctly, makes us better because of it.



I can't even begin to remember what heartache I must have experienced at fifteen when I wrote down that quote. It must have been pretty painful, though, if the words of a broken heart moved me and connected to me. And I bet if you asked me then, I would have believed that the pain was something I never would forget, and probably something I never would get over. But I did. And at the same time, it changed me. That 15-year-old is part of who I am today. And what that 15-year-old saw and related to still moves me and even defines me to a point.

Those words still inspire me today, reminding me that whatever pain I currently experience will one day be lessened. Still, the lesson from that pain will remain with me forever. For those words are so true: **"There is nothing as whole as a broken heart."** ▲

About: Sara Esther Crispe, a writer, inspirational speaker and mother of four, is the co-director of *Interinclusion*, a nonprofit multi-layered educational initiative celebrating the convergence between contemporary arts and sciences and timeless Jewish wisdom. Prior to that she was the editor of *The Jewish Woman.org*.

JEWISH LIFE HAPPENINGS



Celebrating & dancing with the new CommUNITY Sefer Torah as it enters the Las Olas Chabad Jewish Center for the first time!



Limbo with our awesome Friendship Circle friends!



Nothin' like shmoozing with friends at the Las Olas Jewish Women's Circle



Professional art class at Young Adult Circle with the amazing Marlene!



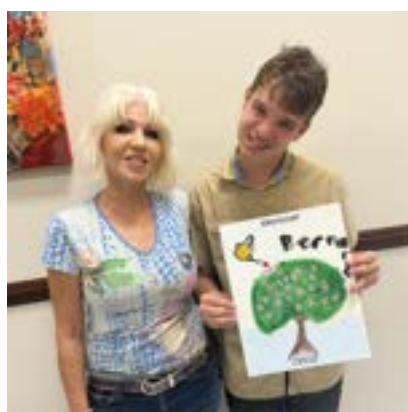
Our incredible students at The Bear Family Las Olas Hebrew School Rock!



Students at the Friendship Life Skills & Job Training Program presenting Chief Lynn & Assistant Chief Alvarez with a special thank you gift



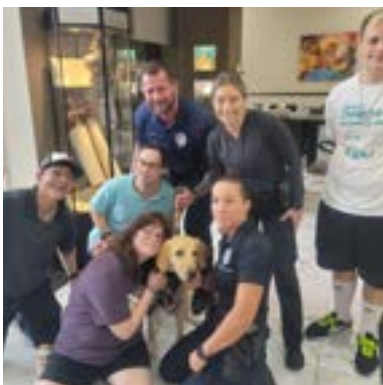
Israel Heart2Heart warriors getting cooking demo from Celebrity Chef



Gorgeous artwork by wonderful Friendship Circle participant!



Poke bowl time at the Friendship Circle Culinary Club.



Our special friends enjoyed an incredible morning of coffee with cops!



Powerful performance by The Bear Family Las Olas Hebrew School students!



Fun Singles 45+ event Mix & Mingle!

JEWISH LIFE HAPPENINGS



Learning to make delicious sushi cakes, a Shabbat delicacy, at the Las Olas Jewish Women's Circle.



Creating yummy tri-color bruschetta at the Friendship Circle Culinary Club.



Hanging out with wonderful friends at Las Olas Chabad Jewish Center.



The Friendship Life Skills students take a visit to Trader Joe's and kick into full learning gear!



Proud graduates at the Bear Family Las Olas Hebrew School graduation party.



A wonderful Lag B'omer BBQ get together!



Rocking it out with the Harmonicats at The Friendship Circle Volunteer Tribute Dinner.



The Petting Zoo was a big hit with all our Friendship Circle friends!



Israel Heart2Heart in action, strengthening the body and the mind to overcome PTS.



Our wonderful U.S Navy men & women posing with the community at the Annual Fleet Week Shabbat Dinner



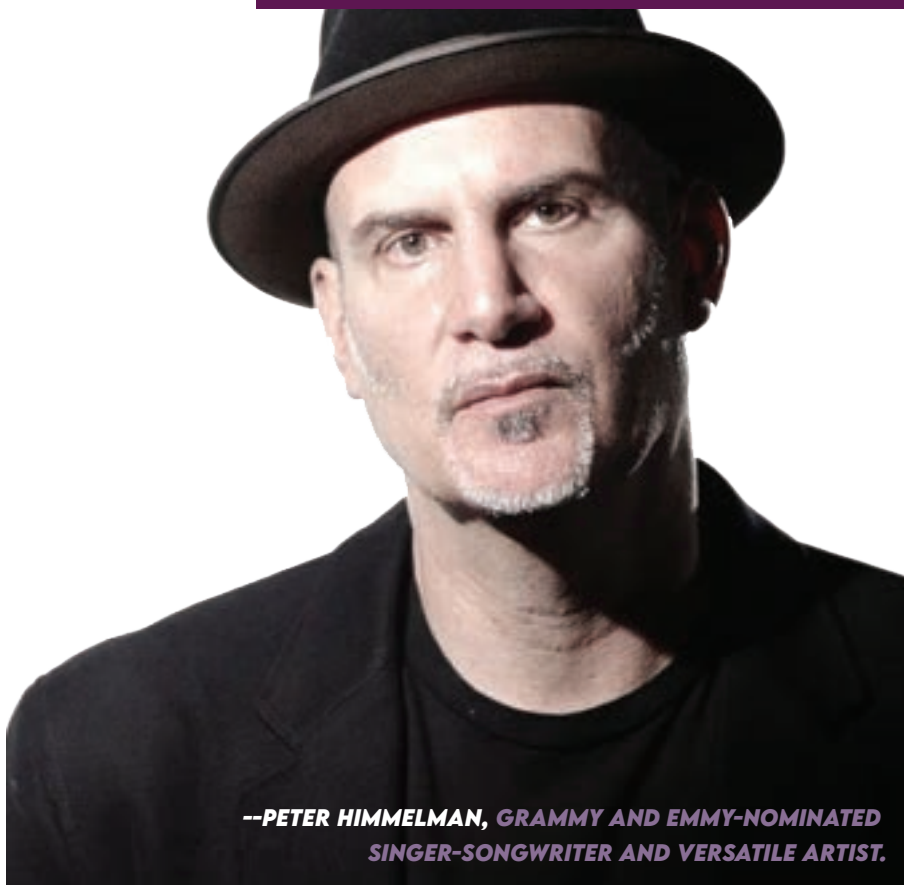
The Friendship Life Skills students visiting a food bank to help make packages for distribution.



Fun poses with friends at the End of Year Friendship Circle Family BBQ

**IF YOU
THINK THE
TORAH
IS JUST
A LONG
LIST OF
DO'S AND
DON'TS,**

**READ
THIS.**



**--PETER HIMMELMAN, GRAMMY AND EMMY-NOMINATED
SINGER-SONGWRITER AND VERSATILE ARTIST.**

The Torah is not simply a book of laws or a collection of stories. Instead, it is a blueprint for life that provides a comprehensive understanding of who we are, why we are here, and how we can live our lives in the most meaningful and purposeful way possible. Through studying and applying Torah wisdom, we can unlock our full potential as human beings and positively impact the world around us.

**“IN OUR MERCURIAL
WORLD, WHERE “TRUTH”
IS CHANGING MINUTE BY
MINUTE, IT’S IMPORTANT
TO SPEND A MOMENT
EACH DAY ABSORBING
SOMETHING TIMELESS,
SOMETHING ETERNAL.”**



By Rabbi Shmuel Marcus

➔ What is the Torah?

The Torah (literally means "instruction"), provides us with guidance and you could say it's G-d's "user's manual" for the world, and yes, the Torah has many commandments, but when you look deeper, it's primarily a holy, multi-layered book that can change your world. Think of it as looking beyond the black and white chocolate figurines on a wedding cake to discover the profound power and beauty of marriage, love, and commitment.

So, if it's not all about what I can and can't do, what exactly is the Torah? What are those many layers and dimensions that make the Torah our national treasure and cause us to want to celebrate Shavuot? The following is a brief guide to understanding what the Torah truly is.

➔ It's Yours!

The first thing you should know is the Torah is rightfully yours, as it states in Deuteronomy 33:4, "The Torah is the inheritance of every Jew."

Unlike a purchase or a gift, inheritance implies that it belongs to you because of who you are, not because of an external force. In fact, according to the Zohar, your connection to the Torah is intrinsic to your being, as it proclaims that G-d, your soul, and the Torah are indeed one. Therefore, as you delve into the power and significance of the Torah, it is essential to remember that it is your story and that you share a deep connection with the Torah. Therefore, this Shavuot, as we celebrate the giving of the Torah, go ahead and claim what is rightfully yours.

THE TORAH IS OUR INHERITANCE

➔ Bridge to Heaven

You can pick up many books at the library, but only one book, the Torah, picks you up and elevates your life.

For generations, people struggled to bridge the gap between creation and the Creator, as the distance seemed insurmountable. Finally, on Shavuot, through the Torah, G-d bridged the gap between Heaven and Earth.

The Torah is more like a bridge than a mere source of information; it connects Heaven and Earth and your body and soul. In this way, Shavuot is the holiday that makes all other Jewish celebrations possible. It commemorates the arrival of the Torah and the breaking down of the natural barriers between the earthly and the divine, enabling us to transform our world into a more sacred and heavenly place.



➔ Feel like a fish out of water?

Can you imagine explaining the Torah to people who don't get it? You might feel like a fish out of water, and here's why. Years ago, when the Roman government ruled the Jews and forbade Torah study, the great Rabbi Akiva defied this decree and explained with a parable about a fox who tried to persuade fish to avoid the fisherman's nets and leave the water and live on land with him. The fish refused, saying they could perhaps survive in the water but would surely die on dry land.

Similarly, Rabbi Akiva argued that studying Torah, our life and longevity, was necessary even in a time of danger and prohibition. Today, learning Torah is legal everywhere, meaning there's plenty of oxygen for your soul. So, breathe freely and deeply.

➔ A Slice of Heaven

Worldly possessions and pleasures cannot quench the thirst of our otherworldly souls, so we subconsciously yearn for the authenticity of the Torah. The pages in a Torah book are like slices of Heaven you can hold in your hand.

While G-d's wisdom is present throughout creation, the Torah is different in that it embodies G-d's wisdom and remains inseparable from it, continuing to exist as the "Creator" even after entering creation. This pure holiness makes the Torah impervious to impurity, as Jeremiah 23:29 says, "Behold, my words are fire." Even after the Torah descends to earth and is handed to you, it remains a pure flame of Heavenly divinity that can warm and invigorate your thirsty soul like nothing else.

➔ Ultimate Tool

If you plan on changing the world, you will need this tool: The Torah.

The Torah is like an outsider who can serve as a business consultant or therapist. The Torah's transcendent nature is the key to transforming the physical world into a heavenly dwelling place. Sure, the Torah contains superior wisdom, but its genuine power lies in its ability to sanctify the world around us.

For example, the Torah enables us to transform parchment and ink into a holy scroll or turn wool scraps into a holy tallit with tzitzit. That's why Shavuot is considered the day we were given the tools to make this world a holy place.



➔ Your Safe Space

When the world around you has gone crazy, like Noah, you can enter the ark, or Torah, and find refuge.

Interestingly, the Baal Shem Tov points out that the Hebrew term for "ark" is the same as for "word," as in the word of G-d. Therefore, just as Noah found safety by entering the ark, we, too, can find shelter from everyday chaos by immersing ourselves in the words of the Torah.

THE TORAH IS A MUST TO CHANGE THE WORLD!

Rabbi Shmuel Marcus is the editor of Chabad Magazine



SHAVUOT CHEESE CREATIONS BY THE LAS OLAS JEWISH WOMEN'S CIRCLE

For our last Jewish Women's Circle event of the year, we spent a lovely evening in honor of the holiday of Shavuot! We focused our activities on all things dairy, kicking off the event by assembling fun and delectable charcuterie boards. The presenter of the evening, Mrs. Debbie Shultz, taught us how to create our very own beautiful holiday centerpieces for our Shavuot tables that we all got to take home afterward!

During the event, we also learned about the special significance of eating cheese on this holiday. Rebbetzin Chayale shared some inspiring words as to the meanings of dairy vs. meat and how we can practically apply these lessons to our everyday lives.



It truly was a fantastic evening getting to schmooze with everyone.

We were able to catch up with the strong and wonderful women of the Jewish Women's Circle and had a blast singing and dancing together! We were surrounded by an amazing atmosphere all evening and enjoyed a wonderful buffet of delicious dairy food to top it all off.

What a magical year we had at the Las Olas Jewish Women's Circle! We can't believe how quickly it flew by and are already working up the next incredible batch for the upcoming year. If you haven't tried one of these events yet, it's definitely worth your while! The countdown is on to seeing you for more unforgettable and memorable evenings ahead! We hope you'll join us next year as we explore more about our Jewish holidays and culture together.

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My Journey to Sinai

By Sara Esther Crispe

At 20 years old, I had no intention of ever leading a religious life. I actually had no intentions whatsoever. I just figured that I would live day-by-day and make decisions as they came. I liked the idea of being open-minded and receptive to any possibility, and feared constriction on any level. Then again, I was in college, so what better time for such an attitude?

Yet G-d had other plans for me (doesn't He always?), and my content little life suddenly became quite difficult and confusing. I was spending my junior year studying abroad in Israel, far away from friends and family. And I was in the midst of a falling-out with my immediate family to the extent that we were not speaking, leaving me financially independent.

As a full-time student working 40 hours a week to support myself, I wasn't exactly spiritually searching. I was simply surviving. Yet, everywhere I went, I kept meeting these enlightened, intellectually and emotionally fulfilled people. And they were all connected to this Torah thing and seemed to have an intimate and personal relationship with the big and only G-d.

Up to that time, I'd figured that He was hardly aware I existed. I never made much of an effort to get to know Him, and when we did communicate, our relationship was always very one-sided. When I needed something, badly, I called to Him, and promised to change certain things that were wrong with my life. In return, I expected to be saved from my predicament.

But then, once those moments of need had passed, I would more or less forget about Him and I assumed that He forgot about me, too. Yet now I wanted to

understand the meaning and purpose in my life, and figured there was no better place to start than with the One who put me here. The problem was that my life was really busy, and I didn't know how I'd squeeze Him in. Between my work hours and school, there didn't seem to be a moment to spare.

And yet, in the most freakish kind of way, every step I made towards connecting with my Judaism, was met with this supernatural response. I made a request and BOOM, there was the answer. I was working too much? Hated my job? No problem. The next day a friend took me to lunch, the place needed a waitress, and before I knew it, I was working half the hours for double the pay of my previous job. Only one catch—I couldn't work on Shabbat like I had been at my other job. They were closed on Shabbat.

When the classes on Judaism I wanted to attend conflicted with my university schedule, the schedule changed. So now I was making good money, had my weekends free, could attend Shabbat meals with local families and went to the local yeshiva in the morning for some learning. Not bad.

At this point the academic year was about to end, and I had some serious choices to make. I knew I was at a crossroads in my life; I just wasn't sure which road I was going to take.

I had definitely fallen in love with Judaism. I had never felt more alive or more in-tune with my life and the world around me. Yet I was far from ready to make the transition from a life of no rules or boundaries to one of structure. The festival of Shavuot—commemorating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai—was approaching and I figured I would use the opportunity for serious reflection and introspection.

But then again, my plans and my reality were not exactly the same. A few days before Shavuot one of my best friends arrived in Israel to surprise me. She was only around for the week and was adamant that I was going to travel with her to Egypt. And while initially I truly didn't want to go, before I knew it, I was in Dahab, Egypt soaking in the sun on the white-sanded beach. Shavuot quickly became a distant memory. That is, until I was suddenly jarred awake by the woman next to me.

"So, where are you from?" she asked, nicely enough. Though I was not really in the mood for conversation, I explained I was studying in Jerusalem for the year. Her eyes lit up and she started asking me about Judaism. I shared my limited knowledge and instantly found myself passionately and intensely describing how incredible I found Judaism to be emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. We spoke for over five hours until we realized that we were sitting in the dark. She had to leave, but before doing so, innocently asked whether or not there was some Jewish holiday that night. My heart stopped. It was the eve of Shavuot. I had completely forgotten, and I was in Egypt.

For the first time in my life, I cared. I felt that I was losing out. It was as if I had been invited to a very special meeting with G-d, and I simply decided to do something else. As far as I could see, the damage was irreparable.

I was quite depressed and felt trapped in this "resort." I dragged myself to dinner with my friend and a group of others. To my great surprise, I ran into Mike, who attended Hebrew University with me. Although he wasn't what one would describe as religiously observant, he was quite spiritual. He joined us for dinner, and then said he had to leave.



About: Sara Esther Crispe, a writer, inspirational speaker and mother of four, is the co-director of Interinclusion, a nonprofit multi-layered educational initiative celebrating the convergence between contemporary arts and sciences and timeless Jewish wisdom. Prior to that she was the editor of *TheJewishWoman.org*.

I couldn't imagine what he had to do in Dahab, so I asked.

He told me he had specifically come to Dahab for Shavuot, as it is very close to the site believed by many to be Mount Sinai. He wanted to spend the night learning Torah and asked if I cared to join him. I couldn't even respond, but the tears rolling down my cheeks sufficed for my "yes." We bid our friends goodbye and were off.

We found a small hut and lit a candle. Mike had brought with him an English/Hebrew Bible, and we decided we would take turns reading. We had no idea what we were doing but felt we should say some kind of blessing. We decided to wash our hands as we had seen people do when eating bread, and pronounced a blessing of our own, "Baruch Atah Hashem... al HaTorah."

We spent the entire night learning and discussing Torah. We read through the Ten Commandments and each one spoke to me in a different, profound way. I resolved during that time that I would stay in Israel for the summer to enroll in a full-time learning program about Judaism. I resolved that I would speak with my parents and repair our damaged relationship. And I resolved that I would no longer view Judaism and its observance as an outsider, but would do my best to keep G-d's Torah and His commandments.

It was Shavuot, and I had merited to receive the Torah. I walked out toward the ocean and said the Shema with all the power of my heart, soul, and mind. I knew G-d was listening, always had been, and always would be.





LAG B'OMER BBQ

It was a beautiful Tuesday evening, the skies were clear & the weather beautiful!



It was Lag B'Omer, a festive day on the Jewish calendar which is usually celebrated with outings, bonfires, and parades to commemorate the anniversary of the passing of **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai**, and the Las Olas Chabad Jewish Center was not going to pass up on this special opportunity! The entire community, kids and adults alike, joined in for a fun evening to celebrate the special day together in style!

The evening kicked off with a delicious BBQ catered by the Friendship Grill, with all kinds of mouthwatering grilled meats, delicious hotdogs, burgers, and a wonderful array of salads! While enjoying the sumptuous food, the Miami Klezmer Band treated all in the vicinity to a one-of-a-kind performance, conjuring up special memories while playing the traditional Jewish songs we all grew up with.

You were able to find everyone in attendance tapping and singing along to the music, some even dancing in groups, and others enjoying the mingling time. It was a lovely evening of celebration for our entire community and a wonderful way to commemorate this special day.



As the sun set and it began getting dark, those in attendance enjoyed an unforgettable kumzitz. Sitting in a circle singing and just enjoying the many old and new faces, this night was a definitely a treasure that will remain embedded with many.



HERE'S MY
TOP

5



**TORAH
SITES**

**THE TORAH
WENT FROM
STONE TABLETS
TO PARCHMENT
SCROLLS, BACK
TO TABLETS
AND GADGETS
AGAIN.**



YOUTUBE AND **SPOTIFY**
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CONVENIENCE OF
STREAMING TORAH
CONTENT DIRECTLY TO
YOUR IPAD OR TABLET
WHEREVER YOU GO. IN
TODAY'S AGE, SEEKING
DIVINE INSPIRATION
NO LONGER REQUIRES
SCALING A MOUNTAIN;
HAVING WIFI WILL SUFFICE.



CHABAD.ORG

Moses himself would be impressed with the amount of Torah content on Chabad.org. The site is my go-to for anything Jewish. I found myself searching Chabad.org for things like the history of the Golden Calf, and how to make a kosher brisket my mom would eat, and of course, where to find a Passover seder in Norway for Aunt Dorothy. Nevermind, with over 50 million annual users, you've probably already been to Chabad.org and know exactly what I'm talking about.



TORAHCAFE.COM

I listen to podcasts at double speed, but whenever I want to enjoy an excellent Torah-based lecture on topics like how to avoid anger or find joy, I visit TorahCafe.com. The site has a wealth of Torah-related courses from top names in Jewish education. Many of the talks were filmed live at the annual JLI Retreats that feature speakers and Jewish personalities from across the globe. So, skip the lines and get a front-row seat to your favorite topic at TorahCafe.com.



RABBIKAPLAN.TV

I recently discovered Rabbi Kaplan and his many thought-provoking, informative, insightful, and inspiring video classes. If you're like me and want to know why we do what we do, then you will love Rabbi Kaplan's carefully researched and meticulously sourced, authentic learning. You will enjoy how these classes are presented in his clear, crisp, and articulate signature style. You can now journey beyond the facade and delve into authentic Torah teachings, by visiting rabbikaplan.tv.



SOULWORDS.ORG

I read Rabbi Shais Taub's bestselling book, G-d of Our Understanding: Jewish Spirituality and Recovery from Addiction, before I met or heard him speak. Luckily, his clear, down-to-earth style is not limited to his popular books or magazine articles, it also has made him a popular speaker to captivated audiences worldwide. On Soulwords.org you'll find his many lectures and classes, plus his famous parenting classes. In addition, I recommend his practical, sometimes funny, weekly Torah class on Soulwords.org.



THEYESHIVA.NET

I missed out on the immersive yeshiva experience as a child and only discovered my passion for Jewish knowledge after I was married with two kids. But, with theyeshiva.net, I get a glimpse and taste of the depth of Torah study. Rabbi Jacobson is a great teacher who masterfully weaves many interesting Jewish ideas and anecdotes throughout his presentations. So, go to theyeshiva.net for an at-home yeshiva-like experience.



ISRAEL HEART2HEART'S AMAZING RETREAT IN THE MOUNTAINS OF JERUSALEM

Right after Passover, Israel Heart2Heart held a wonderful retreat in Hotel Salina, located in the beautiful mountains of Jerusalem. It was twenty hours of connecting with others, self-care, and meditation.

IDF veteran participants had the chance to explore the breathtaking views of Jerusalem's mountains, connect with like-minded people, practice yoga and mindfulness exercises that supported their physical and mental well-being, and even experience an evening of singing and storytelling around a lovely bonfire!

The retreat was facilitated by a team of five yoga teachers led by one of the biggest yoga therapy teachers in Israel, the legendary Tzipi Negev! Not only is Tzipi a legendary yoga guru, but she also sits on the board of Israel Heart2Heart as our advisor for the trauma-conscious yoga program. Indeed, it was such an honor to have her with us for this retreat!



Thirty of our IDF veterans participated in the retreat that focused on the connection of the mind, body, and soul through yoga therapy and meditation!

From the get-go, the energy of the group was palpable, and we quickly felt a strong sense of camaraderie among our participants, many of whom had already known each other from previous Israel Heart2Heart activities.

The retreat was filled with joy and connection as we moved through various yoga postures, breathing practices, mindfulness meditations, and relaxation techniques. The focus of the retreat was to return to our essence and deal with trauma through breathing and meditation techniques.

Each participant learned the different yoga poses, why it is important to sit and breathe in a certain way, and how to use strength points to strengthen ourselves and our posture. One of our participants shared that learning from Tzipi Negev was such an amazing experience, allowing him to finally understand how yoga can help with managing the symptoms and triggers of his PTS!



In the evening, participants were able to relax and bond with each other around a bonfire where three of our participants played their guitars with everyone joyfully singing along!

The following day, we again participated in soft yoga and meditation sessions focused on the "Power of the Morning." Participants also got to listen to a thought-provoking lecture about the connection between nutrition and mental health, and the importance of including healthy foods in our daily diet.



Throughout these two days, participants felt closer to each other than ever before! They shared stories about their journey through life, providing support and understanding for one another in a safe and comforting environment. "This was definitely my highlight," shared one of the soldiers, "Recognizing that I have this special family to turn to, to help me through my journey of PTS."

By the end of the retreat, all the participants felt re-energized and connected with each other in a special way that can only be found when spending time in nature! But most importantly, we were able to gain the tools to help manage PTS, all through the mind-body-soul connection that can be practiced by doing trauma-conscious yoga and meditation on a regular basis!

Everyone returned home refreshed and inspired, able to reconnect, and empowered to make positive changes in their lives.

After the retreat, one of the participants shared a powerful account of his experience – that for the first time, he felt relieved of the haunting sounds that he hears every single day!

After the twenty hours, he was able to drive back home with a smile on his face. The retreat created a very serene feeling, and practicing the Power of the Morning yoga sessions finally gave him the effective tool to enable him to cope with his daily struggles of living with PTS. This was a beautiful testament to the powerful impact that Israel Heart2Heart's activities have on each IDF combat veteran living with PTS!



The retreat was held in preparation for the Yom HaZikaron, or the Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers of the Wars of Israel and Victims of Actions of Terrorism. Our IDF veterans often have a difficult time coping with this day because they remember their fallen brothers-in-arms, which worsens the symptoms of PTS so it couldn't have come at a more perfect time. Each participant was given a warm, soft-shell jacket embellished with the logo of Israel Heart2Heart, as a reminder of the special time together & with the message that we are here for you and will help you get through this!

Israel Heart2Heart is committed to creating positive impacts on the lives of Israeli combat veterans living with Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS), giving them an opportunity for rehabilitation and personal development. These incredible efforts are helping our wounded heroes heal emotionally so they can live meaningful lives again.

MEET THE

BOURBON RABBI



If you're new to bourbon, here's a quick overview: Firstly, bourbon uses a mash bill (a mixture of grains like rye, wheat, or barley) containing at least 51% corn. Secondly, the aging process can only be done in new charred oak containers, bottled at no less than 80 proof. And while bourbon can be made anywhere in the United States, it is strongly associated with the state of Kentucky, The Official Home of Bourbon.

Jewish immigrants owned and operated many US distilleries in the early days. For example, Harry Blum was the owner of Jim Beam from 1945 to 1968. But it wasn't until recently that Kentucky's Bourbon Rabbi released his first bottle.

Growing up, Rabbi Chaim Litvin was one of the only orthodox kids living in Kentucky. In the eighties, his parents were sent by the Rebbe from Brooklyn to open a Chabad

center in Kentucky and serve the Jews living in the state.

Like many Chabad families living in remote areas, young Chaim left home as a preteen and traveled out of state for his Jewish education. Fortunately for us, when he

and soon moved to Kentucky to run the growing Chabad programs in Louisville. Chaim soon accepted the role of kosher supervisor to certify the local Kentucky distilleries. As a result of Litvin's involvement in the bourbon process

but yes, the party has already started. While young in years, American Whiskey Magazine's blind-tasting team gave Bourbon Rabbi's 115-proof bourbon an excellent 8.8 and 8.9. "115 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word *chazak* or strength. To me, that's a message to say L'chaim responsibly with an attitude and empowerment of strength." Says Rabbi Litvin.

When speaking with the Bourbon Rabbi, he reminds me that he is primarily an educator and sees his ever-growing line of premier bourbons as a way of connecting with people. One sip at a time.

I tasted it for myself, and I can say that the Bourbon Rabbi seems to have an old soul with rich flavors and complexities that you might expect from something decades older, just like young, yet wise, Rabbi Chaim Litvin, whom everyone calls the Bourbon Rabbi.

Read more and browse the Bourbon and Merch store at BourbonRabbi.com



eventually returned home, he was an expert in kosher law, and, no surprise here, Chaim focused his studies on precisely how the laws of Kosher pertain to crafting a kosher whiskey. So you see where this is going.

After meeting Fraidy Raskin in Brooklyn, the two married

and industry, Rabbi Chaim discovered his passion project.

In 2021, the couple celebrated the release of the world's first Rabbi-made Kentucky Bourbon, rightly named BourbonRabbi. Is it any good? The bourbon may be too young for a bar mitzvah,

ב"ה

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