

# הקשר



The Chief Rabbi shares his personal story Page 18

DEAR FRIEND,

For decades now, Jewish educators, social scientists, pundits and parents have been talking about the “December Dilemma.” In December 2012, the term will be further enshrined in our collective consciousness with the projected release of a movie titled December Dilemma.

From the very first time I heard it, the term irked me. Why is this a December Dilemma? How Jewish children (or more correctly, their parents, or both) should meet the challenge of living in a predominantly non Jewish world is not a dilemma but an obligation termed Jewish education, and it should not be confined to one month but should pervade every single day of the year.



Chanukah Harry, Chanukah Bushes and even Smiley Shalom (a Jewish version of Frosty Snowman) cannot hope to compete with the real McCoy nor should they have to. The response to the so called dilemma is not “we’re Jewish, we have Chanukah”. It is a life filled with Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Chanukah, Tu B’svat, Purim, Pesach, Shavuot, Shabbat each week. The way to obviate the dilemma is to live a life brimming with vibrant, relevant celebration of our identity, our rituals, our history and our shared destiny. There are no shortcuts. And there cannot be compromise.

There is a very important, albeit little known, fact about the Chanukah miracle surrounding the one cruse of oil that miraculously burned for eight days. It is widely thought that the Jews upon returning to the Temple found only one small cruse of oil. In fact, they found hundreds. The bottles were intact, but the seal of the High Priest that denoted the oil’s purity had been systematically broken by the Greek-Syrian forces on each and every bottle. Under normal circumstances only oil pressed from olives grown in a specific grove, by Jews in a state of ritual purity, could be used for lighting the Menorah each day in the Temple. The seal of the High priest on each bottle attested to the purity of its contents. The Talmud records (Pesachim 80a) however, that in a time when pure oil is unavailable, even impure olive oil may be substituted to light the Menorah.

Still, upon returning to the Temple, the Jews refused to compromise. They recognized the challenge before them; the Hellenists had left them oil but had taken its purity and distinctiveness. It was a message to the Jews: ‘restore your Temple, but do it on our terms; you can be cultural Jews but denude your lives of the transcendent aspect, the purity’. The Jewish leadership opted not to use the defiled oil. Indeed it was a heavily symbolic decision: the entire struggle surrounding Chanukah was not about bodily harm to the Jews but about robbing them of their soul and spirit. No, they would not use impure oil to light the Menorah.

The deeply passionate and tenacious stance of the Jews against their enemies was rewarded with a reciprocal, loving overture from above. A lone cruse of oil with the unbroken seal of the High priest was found. Then another miracle occurred: this small amount of oil burned for eight whole days until new oil produced in purity could be brought to Jerusalem. This is the miracle we celebrate each year; this is the miracle we can recreate each day.

If we truly worry about the seasonal dilemma there is a solution: to fill our lives and the lives of those around us with Jewish education and observance that is unadulterated, pure and unsullied. That will leave little place for confusion or jealousy in December or in any other month.

Finally, unlike any of our other rituals, the Chanukah Menorah is meant to be lit in a way that is visible by those on the outside. Chanukah is not a time for an inferiority complex or apologetics; it is the quintessential holiday of Jewish pride.

Please accept my best wishes for a joy filled, meaningful Chanukah and a healthy winter,

*N’hiye B’kesher, let’s stay connected and be in touch!*

*Rabbi Aaron Slonim*

Rabbi Aaron Slonim



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# When We Dare Not Compromise

By Yanki Tauber



**T**he miracle of Chanukah was completely unnecessary.

Every Jewish schoolchild knows the story: the Greeks had defiled the Holy Temple's store of olive oil. So when the Maccabees liberated the Temple, they could not find ritually pure oil with which to kindle the menorah. Then, a single cruse of uncontaminated oil was found, enough to keep the menorah lit for a single day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days, until new oil could be prepared.

Strictly speaking, none of this was necessary. The law which forbids the use of ritually impure oil in the Temple would not have applied under the circumstances which then prevailed. According to Torah law, The prohibition of impurity, if affecting the entire community, is waived—if the entire community, or all the *kohanim* (priests), or all the Temple's vessels, are ritually impure, it is permissible to enter the Temple and conduct the Temple services under conditions of impurity.

Nevertheless, G-d wished to show His

love for His people: He suspended the laws of nature in order to enable them to rededicate the Temple without any compromise on its standards of purity—even if it be a perfectly legal and permissible compromise.

## Going Overboard

Every Chanukah, we reciprocate in kind. How many lights must be kindled on the Chanukah menorah? Most would reply: one on the first night, two on the second, and so on. The law, however, is otherwise. According to the Talmud,

The mitzvah of Chanukah is [fulfilled with] a single light for each household. Those who do more than is obligatory, kindle a single light for each individual. Those who do more than those who do more than is obligatory... kindle one light on the first day and add an additional light on each succeeding day.

There are those who buy the least costly tefillin on the market, who give the absolute minimum that the laws of charity mandate, who employ every ha-

lachic exemption and loophole they can lay their hands on. But when was the last time you saw a single light in the window of a Jewish home on the sixth night of Chanukah? On Chanukah, we all do more than those who do more than is obligatory—after all, G-d did the same for us.

## Fanatical Educator

The name Chanukah comes from the word *chinuch*, which means “inauguration.” Chanukah celebrates the renewal of the service in the Holy Temple after it was liberated from the Greek defiler, purified, and rededicated as the seat of the divine presence in our world.

Chanukah serves as a model for all inaugurations, including the most significant inauguration of all—education, a child's inauguration into life (indeed, *chinuch* is also the Hebrew word for “education”). The uncompromising insistence on purity and perfection which Chanukah represents holds an important lesson regarding the essence of the educator's task.

Compromise is anathema to education. To a mature tree, a gash here or a torn limb there is of little or no consequence. But the smallest scratch in the seed, the slightest nick in the sapling, results in an irrevocable deformity, a flaw which the years to come will deepen rather than erase.

Virtually every life is faced with demands for compromises—some tolerable, others not. The educator who wishes to impart a set of values and priorities that will weather them all, must deliver, in word and example, a message of impeccable purity, free of even the slightest and most acceptable compromise. ❧





Avi Jorisch '97

## GRAD FIGHTS TERROR BY TAKING IT TO THE BANK

By Alan Zeitlin '00

As much of the world holds its breath, hoping that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon, one Binghamton graduate has been leading a method of attack that requires no bombs, bullets or missiles. Avi Jorisch, who says he does not advocate for or against a war with Iran, has devoted his life to stopping illicit financial dealings that could put the U.S., Israel and much of the world in danger.

"If there's no money, there's no 'boom,'" Jorisch said.

Jorisch is the founder of the Red Cell Intelligence Group, a training and consulting firm that focuses on illegal financial

measures to aide terrorism. He also serves as an adjunct scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Previously, Jorisch worked as a policy advisor at the Treasury Department's office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, and as a liaison to the Department of Home-

land Security. His articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and a recent article in *Forbes* highlighted a New York judge's order for Citibank to freeze \$2 billion in debt securities belonging to Iran.

Besides working on illicit finance, Jorisch has also done work on terrorist-sponsored media outlets, including the Hezbollah backed Al-Manar satellite television station. He remembers the day in 2002 when he watched Al-Manar and saw a mini-series that depicted the blood libel-the historic propaganda piece in which Jews were accused of killing Christian children to use their blood to bake matzah.

"I still have Goosebumps thinking about it," he said. "Millions of people watched the program, including children. You can't underestimate the psychological impact."

Jorisch wrote a book about Al-Manar and later led an international awareness raising campaign. He highlighted the station's content with government officials, the satellite providers that broadcast the station and their corporate sponsors including Coke, Pepsi, Western Union and Proctor and Gamble. In the end, most of the providers stopped broadcasting Al-Manar and the corporate sponsors stopped airing ads. In addition, both the U.S. and the European Union blacklisted the station from operating on their soil.

Jorisch, who has also served as an Arab media and terrorism consultant for The Department of Defense, interviewed members of Hezbollah for the book and has come to a simple conclusion.

"They say what they mean and they mean what they say," Jorisch said.

He is the author of four books, including "Iran's Dirty Banking: How the Islamic Republic Skirts International Financial Sanctions"; "On the Trail of Terror Finance: What Law Enforcement and Intelligence Officials Need to Know"; "Tainted Money: Are We Losing the War on Money Laundering and Terrorism Finance?"; and *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hezbollah's Al-Manar Television*.

He studied at the American University in Cairo and received a master's degree in Islamic studies from Hebrew University. At Binghamton, where he earned a bachelor's in history, he enjoyed his time at Chabad and said he owes thanks to the Slonims.

"I consider them to be two of the most influential people I've met," he said. "They played a significant role in who I became."

And Jorisch has become someone who's traveled to Syria, Lebanon and even sung *nigunim* in a sukkah in Egypt. In dealing with nefarious characters, is this nice Jewish boy ever afraid?

"I just think it's important to highlight what's going on," he said.

So as the world holds its breath, Jorisch is trying to hold financial institutions and international policymakers accountable.

Alan Zeitlin '00 teaches English and Journalism at a Brooklyn public high school. As a freelance writer for the past 10 years, his articles have appeared in *The Jewish Week*, *The Journal News* and other publications.



# MAZEL TOVS

- '89 **Marc and Amy Kalter** announce the birth of their daughter, Ziva Sara, on October 5, 2011. She was welcomed home by big sisters, Brielle Deborah and Adina Lara.
- '90 **Ari and Deborah (Steinhauser) Burstein** announce the birth of their son, Benjamin Judah, on Oct. 5, 2011. He was welcomed home by big brothers, Ari, Noam and Jacob.
- '92 **Deborah (Steinhauser) and Ari Burstein** announce the birth of their son, Benjamin Judah. See '90 for full details.
- '93 **Leah Chaya (Dicker) and Shabsi Belin** celebrated the Bat Mitzvah of their daughter, Bayla Yehudis, on September, 25, 2011.
- '94 **Menucha (Millman) and Marty Rothenberg** celebrated the Bar Mitzvah of their son, Aryeh Leib, on July 2, 2011.
- '95 **Josh and Paula (Stein) Weissman** announce the birth of their daughter, Maya on November 12, 2011. She was welcomed home by older siblings, Aron, Adi and Eliana.
- '96 **Paula (Stein) and Josh Weissman** announce the birth of their daughter, Maya. See '95 for full details.
- '99 **Michael and Irina Kimyagarov** announce the birth of their son, David Aaron, on November 4, 2011. He was welcomed home by big sisters Batya, Tamar and Mazaltov.
- '00 **Yitzhak Bachman and Aura Danesh** announce the birth of their daughter, Sarah, on Nov 17, 2011. She was welcomed home by big brother Menashe Eitan and big sister Shiri.
- '06 **Aric and Dana Joudai** announce the birth of their son, Orie on October 24th 2011, 26 Tishrei 5772.  
**Kim Richardson** announces her engagement to Jonathan Abratt of Johannesburg, South Africa; a June 2012 wedding is planned. Kim is the Director of Marketing and Sales for SpotOption Ltd, in Ramat Gan, Israel. Jonathan is a Director in a Mobile Payments company. They will make their home in Tel Aviv, Israel.
- '08 **Samantha Jess Soloway** was married to Benjamin Max Einsidler on October 23, 2011. Sam works at a biotech company; Ben is a high school Spanish teacher. They are living in Cambridge, MA.  
**Avi Aarons** announces his engagement to Danielle Klein. Avi is currently a supervisor at Icon Parking; Danielle is completing her Masters in Interior Architecture and Design at Drexel University.

## CONDOLANCES

Chabad mourns the untimely deaths of

**Mr. Leonard Gopstein**,  
 father of Barbara '88 and father in law of David Levine '88,  
 on Oct. 20, 2011.

**Mrs. Naomi Mittman**,  
 Mother of Benjamin Mittman '90 on November 11, 2011.

**Mr. William Stephen Zager**,  
 father of Jordan Zager '10.

*May the family be comforted among the  
 mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.*

## Alumni, parents, friends:

A dedication in Hakesher is a perfect way to mark a birth, bar mitzvah, engagement, wedding, Yahrtzeit or any other special event, while assisting us in bringing you this magazine.

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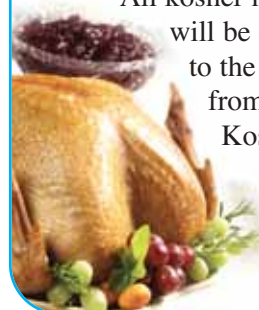


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# Whoever heard of “Protestant B”?

Dog tags. When you get right down to it, the military’s dog tag classification forced me to reclaim my Judaism.



In the fall of 1990, things were heating up in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. I had been an Army captain and a helicopter maintenance test pilot for a decade, and received notice that I would be transferred to the First Cavalry Division, which was on alert for the Persian Gulf War. Consequently, I also got wind of the Department of Defense “dog tag dilemma” vis-à-vis Jewish personnel. Then as now, Jews were forbidden by Saudi law to enter the country. But our Secretary of Defense flat-out told the king of Saudi Arabia, “We have Jews in our military. They’ve trained with their units and they’re going. Blink and look the other way.”

With Kuwait occupied and the Iraqis at his border, King Fahd did the practical thing. We shipped out, but there was still the issue of classification. Normally the dog tags of Jewish servicemen are imprinted with the word “Jewish.” But Defense, fearing that this would put Jewish soldiers at further risk should they be captured on Iraqi soil, substituted the classification “Protestant B” on the tags. I didn’t like the whole idea of classifying Jews as Protestant-anything, and so I decided to leave my dog tag alone. I figured if I were captured, it was in G-d’s hands. Changing my tags was tantamount to denying my religion, and I couldn’t swallow that.

In September 1990 I went off to defend a country that I was prohibited from entering. The “Jewish” on my dog tag remained as clear and unmistakable as the American star on the hood of every Army truck.

A few days after my arrival, the Baptist chaplain approached me. “I just got a secret message through channels,” he said. “There’s going to be a Jewish gathering. A

holiday? Simkatoro or something like that. You want to go? It’s at 1800 hours at Dhahran Airbase.”

Simkatoro turned out to be Simchat Torah, a holiday that hadn’t registered on my religious radar in eons. Services were held in absolute secrecy in a windowless room in a cinder block building. The chaplain led a swift and simple service. We couldn’t risk singing or dancing, but Rabbi Ben Romer had managed to smuggle in a bottle of Manischewitz. Normally I can’t stand the stuff, but that night, the wine tasted of Shabbat and family and Seders of long ago. My soul was warmed by the forbidden alcohol and by the memories swirling around me and my fellow soldiers. We were strangers to one another in a land stranger than any of us had ever experienced, but for that brief hour, we were home.

Only Americans would have had thechutzpah to celebrate Simchat Torah under the noses of the Saudis. Irony and pride twisted together inside me like barbed wire. Celebrating my Judaism that evening made me even prouder to be an American, thankful once more for the freedoms we have. I had only been in Saudi Arabia a week, but I already had a keen understanding of how restrictive its society was.

Soon after, things began coming to a head. The next time I was able to do anything remotely Jewish was Chanukah. Maybe it was coincidence, or maybe it was G-d’s hand that placed a Jewish colonel in charge of our unit. Colonel Lawrence Schneider relayed messages of Jewish gatherings to us immediately. Had a non-Jew been in that position, the information would likely have taken a back seat to a more pressing issue. Like war. But it didn’t.



When notice of the Chanukah party was decoded, we knew about it at once. The first thing we saw when we entered the tent was food, tons of it. Care packages from the States—cookies, latkes, sour cream and applesauce, and cans and cans of gefilte fish. The wind was blowing dry across the tent, but inside there was an incredible feeling of celebration. As Rabbi Romer talked about the theme of Chanukah and the ragtag bunch of Maccabee soldiers fighting Jewry's oppressors thousands of years ago, it wasn't hard to make the connection to what lay ahead of us. There, in the middle of the desert, inside an olive green tent, we felt like we were the Maccabees. If we had to go down, we were going to go down fighting, as they did.

We blessed the candles, acknowledging the King of the Universe who commanded us to kindle the Chanukah lights. We said the second prayer, praising G-d for the miracles He performed, in those days and now. And we sang the third blessing, the Shehecheyanu, thanking G-d for keeping us in life and for enabling us to reach this season.

We knew war was imminent. All week we had received reports of mass destruction, projections of the chemical weapons that were likely to be unleashed. Intelligence estimates put the first rounds of casualties at 12,500 soldiers. I heard those numbers and thought, "That's my whole division!" I sat back in my chair, my gefilte fish cans at my feet. We were in the desert, about to go to war, singing songs of praise to G-d who had saved our ancestors in battle once before.

The feeling of unity was as pervasive as our apprehension, as real as the sand that found its way into everything from our socks to our toothbrushes. I felt more Jewish there on that lonely Saudi plain, our tanks and guns at the ready, than I had ever felt back home in synagogue.

That Chanukah in the desert solidified for me the urge

to reconnect with my Judaism. I felt religion welling up inside me. Any soldier will tell you that there are no atheists in foxholes, and I know that part of my feelings were tied to the looming war and my desire to get with G-d before the unknown descended in the clouds of battle. It sounds corny, but as we downed the latkes and cookies and wiped the last of the applesauce from our plates, everyone grew quiet, keenly aware of the link with history, thinking of what we were about to do and what had been done by soldiers like us so long ago.



The trooper beside me stared ahead at nothing in particular, absentmindedly fingering his dog tag. "How'd you classify?" I asked, nodding to my tag. Silently, he withdrew the metal rectangle and its beaded chain from beneath his shirt and held it out for me to read. Like mine, his read, "Jewish."

Somewhere in a military depot someplace, I am sure that there must be boxes and boxes of dog tags, still in their wrappers, all marked "Protestant B." ❏

Reprinted from This Jewish Life ; Stories of Discovery, Connection and Joy by Debra B. Darvick (Eakin Press)

***There, in the middle of the desert,  
inside an olive green tent,  
we felt like we were the Maccabees.***

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# Taking Back Our Lives

Michael E. Snow '14

We are hooked. It is undeniable. Our generation is suffering from an addiction like no other. Media has taken over our lives.

Recent research indicates that American teenagers spend 31 hours a week watching television, 8 hours a week listening to music, 3 hours a week watching movies, 4 hours a week reading magazines and over 17 hours a week online. The only thing we consume more of than media is oxygen.

What are our symptoms? I cannot recall the last time I didn't have Facebook open. My iTunes plays music continuously. As I write this I am downloading a movie over the internet which I'll be able to watch on my phone.

The ills of voracious media consumption are well documented. Copious TV viewing reduces attention span and leads to depression. Sedentary, media-centered lives result in obesity. But our media addiction includes a far more pernicious danger.

What does popular media promote? Does it exude generosity, discipline, kindness or growth? Last time I checked, the most viewed TV shows, the most popular music and the most trafficked websites all feature gratuitous violence, sex, materialism, and greed. Worse, the media's ubiquity guarantees that we are surrounded by these values constantly, through musical jingles, billboard posters and web advertisements.

Our tradition mandates that we say Brachot, blessings, before putting anything into our bodies. Brachot force us to consider what we are ingesting, so that we not consume anything unconscious of where it comes from and how it will affect us. Why should it be any different with media?



In a clear state of mind we know that the ideals we should pursue are not those glorified by HBO but by our tradition.

But drowning – albeit, most often unconsciously-- in its influence, the media encourages us to see the world through the oversexed volatile reality it projects. With this not-so-subtle shift in worldview we lose sight of what we

as Jews truly value.

The so called “holiday season” is upon us; it is a time of conspicuous consumption. Sugary treats and gift wrapped boxes abound. Now more than ever, the media encourages us to spend, to give and to indulge. As technology advances at an ever increasing rate, the universe becomes smaller and smaller. We seek to reaffirm ourselves by acquiring more and more. Our insatiable desire to attain “everything” clutters our lives and confuses our values.

This Chanukah, we can choose to give ourselves the invaluable gifts of simplicity and clarity by resolving to actively loosen the media's hold on us. The media has subjugated our conscience and consciousness and it is time for us to reclaim them, to reassert our autonomy. We can—each one of us-- seize control of our lives. That would truly be the gift that keeps giving. 🌟

**The only thing  
we consume  
more of  
than media  
is oxygen.**

Michael E. Snow'14 is a Philosophy major. He is an opinion columnist for Pipe Dream.

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**The Annual Women's League** event highlighting the lives of **Dona Gracia Nasi** and **Gluckel of Hameln** drew a large crowd to what was roundly hailed as an extraordinary program.



## LOAVES OF LOVE



**Loaves of Love** saw community members and students come together for a **Challah Baking** session. Participants made a challah for themselves and one to give away to someone who would appreciate it. Many chose to give their Challah to the **Raff Maasim Tovim Foundation** for distribution.



**The Fascinating Facts JLI course** drew almost 80 participants! The next JLI offering, **Money Matters**, begins at the end of January.





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## GUYS NITE OUT



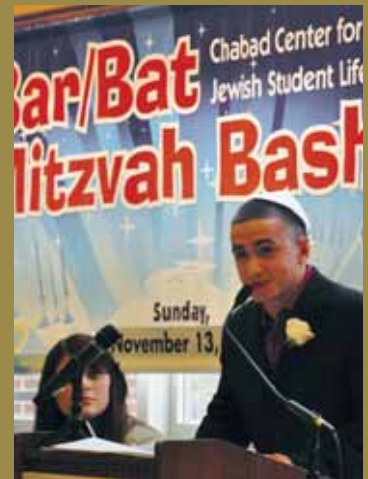
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*see back cover for photo of the seven Bnai Mitzvah.*

# MAZEL TOV!







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# FACULTY

## SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Beth Burch & Dr. Paul-William Burch

## PROFESSORS HELP A GENERATION BEAR WITNESS

Alyx Rimberg '12

The word “literature” connotes enlightenment, education, artistry, and intellectual stimulation. Literature is a wide and open field.

Dr. Beth Burch, currently the head of the MAT program in Binghamton, and her husband Dr. Paul-William Burch, a professor in the Judaic Studies department, chose a particularly challenging focus when they started one of the first Holocaust Literature classes in the country.

Holocaust Literature has the ability to pull you into a dark abyss, trapping you amongst tragic nightmares, which were someone else's reality. Yet, it holds distinct possibility to inspire as well.

The Burch's interest in Holocaust Literature was sparked while pursuing their PhD studies at Purdue University in Indiana, but it was a conference in 2003 at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington that catalyzed their efforts to develop a Holocaust Literature course at Binghamton University. University faculty members from across the country were invited to Washington for the conference. The lectures on the agenda featured premier scholars in the field, such as Geoffrey Hartman and Lawrence Langer.

Dr. Beth Burch said, it “gave us the thorough academic perspective needed to approach the field properly.”

Upon their return from the conference in Washington, they created “Literary Responses to the Holocaust,” taught every fall through the Binghamton Judaic studies department. Interestingly, Dr. Beth Burch and Dr. Paul-William Burch co-taught their class. Dr. Paul-William Burch called it, a “harmonious teaching project...a duet.”

Although Dr. Paul-William Burch specialized in poetry and the literature of witness, and Dr. Beth Burch was an expert in Jewish American Literature, with a concentration in female

writers, they proved to be a cohesive unit in the classroom. “There was no direct benefit for the students. It may have affected the tone and temper of the class, rather than the essence.” Dr. Beth Burch added, “but once we started, and got into a good flow, it was just so enjoyable to teach.”

The dynamic duo co-taught their Holocaust Literature class for four years, and due to its success, they decided to start a new project. In spring, 2007 “Post Holocaust Liter-

ature” joined the Judaic Studies course list. (Since Fall 2008, Dr. Paul-William Burch has taught both Holocaust Literature classes solo.) To date, Binghamton is the only school in the country that offers students a chance to analyze second-generation holocaust literature through an academic prism and Clark University remains the only place you can acquire a degree in Holocaust Literature.

After teaching his Holocaust Literature class for nine years, Dr. Burch admits that it is an emotionally exhausting course. The trying experiences you are forced to tackle are impenetrable. Yet, he feels that by teaching these classes, and educating students, he is fulfilling his obligation to bear witness, to keep the memory of his ancestors alive. He has found that many different types of students take his class, not only those from Jewish backgrounds. According to him, there is “no coded access to this literature;” one needs only to open the mind and heart.

Together, Dr Paul-William and Beth Burch have presented papers at conferences all over the country. The couple even traveled to Israel to read their papers at a Holocaust conference at Israel's Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem. In reflecting on their success, Dr. Paul-William Burch simply says, “we work well together; she is the best and smartest person I know.”

Alyx Rimberg '12 is an English Rhetoric and Global Cultures major. She is the opinion editor of The Free Press.



# Creating Leaders

## A story in three acts

**S**hluchim, Emmissaries of Chabad-Lubavitch from around the world, gathered for their annual five day conference beginning November 23, 2011. Addressing the 4,000 shluchim and hundreds of lay leaders during the Sunday night banquet was Lord Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom.

*The following is extracted from his remarks:*



I was asked to relate a personal story, of how the Rebbe changed my life. And I've agreed, not because I think my story is special, it isn't. But it is by telling such stories that we remind ourselves of what Chabad is about and what makes it special.

It is a story in three acts.

### Act I

The first took place in 1968, when I was a sophomore at university. I came to America to meet great Rabbis of the day, and every one of them, every single *rov* [rabbinical leader] I met in America said, "You must see the Lubavitcher Rebbe! You must see the Rebbe."

So I went to Eastern Parkway, 770, I came in; I said to the first Chassid I met, "I'd like to speak to the Rebbe, please." He fell about laughing.

He said, "Do you know how many thousands of people are waiting to see the Rebbe? Forget it!"

I said, "Well, I'll be traveling around America, here is the phone number of my aunt in Los Angeles, if it's possible phone me."

Weeks later, I was in Los Angeles,

came *motzoei Shabbat*, the phone rang, it was Chabad, "The Rebbe will see you on Thursday."

I had no money in those days, all I could afford was a Greyhound bus ticket. Seventy two hours nonstop I sat on this bus.

I came to 770, and eventually the moment came when I was ushered into the Rebbe's study. I asked him all my intellectual, philosophical questions; he gave intellectual, philosophical answers, and then he did what no one else had done.

He did a role reversal, he started asking me questions. How many Jewish students are in Cambridge? How many get involved in Jewish life? What are you doing to bring other people in?

Now, I hadn't come to become a *Shliach* [Chabad-Lubavitch emissary]. I'd come to ask a few simple questions, and all of a sudden he was challenging me. So I did the English thing. You know, the English can construct sentences like nobody else, you know? They can construct more complex excuses for doing nothing, than anyone else on earth.

So I started the sentence, "In the situation in which I find myself..." – and the

Rebbe did something which I think was quite unusual for him, he actually stopped me in mid-sentence. He said, "Nobody finds themselves in a situation; you put yourself in a situation. And if you put yourself in that situation, you can put yourself in another situation."

That moment changed my life.

Here I was, a nobody from nowhere, and here was one of the greatest leaders in the Jewish world challenging me not to accept the situation, but to change it. And that was when I realized what I have said many times since: That the world was wrong. When they thought that the most important fact about the Rebbe was that he was a man with thousands of followers, they missed the most important fact: That a good leader creates followers, but a great leader creates leaders.

That's what the Rebbe did for me and for thousands of others.

Friends, that particular episode had an unusual ending: I was due to leave to the States, go back to England on a Sunday at the end of August. The day before, on Shabbos, there was a big *farbrengen*, and the Chassidim told me, "You're



going back to England? Take a bottle of vodka, go up to the Rebbe during a *niggun*, and he'll say *le'chaim*, and you'll take it with you and that'll be the Rebbe's vodka."

So in the middle of the *farbrengen*, thousands of people there, I went up to the Rebbe and asked him to say a *le'chaim*, and he looked at me with surprise. He said, "You're going?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Why?"

I said, "I have to get back to Cambridge, the term is beginning."

He turned to me and he said, "But the Cambridge term does not begin until October."

**Here I was, a nobody from nowhere, and here was one of the greatest leaders in the Jewish world challenging me not to accept the situation, but to change it.**

I never knew then, I still don't know today how he knew it, but he was right! He said to me, "I think you should stay for Rosh Hashanah." So I stayed.

As a result of which, I heard the Rebbe on Rosh Hashanah blow *shofar*. Quite the most remarkable experience I ever had. The purity of those notes, the sight of all the Chassidim hanging from every surface, trying to catch sight of the Rebbe blowing *shofar*. And I heard a sound in which heaven and earth touched. And the echoes of that *shofar* have stayed with me ever since. That was the challenge he threw down. A challenge to lead.

That didn't immediately change my life. I went back to University, although I still felt the power of the Rebbe's challenge. So in 1969 after getting my degree, I went to study in Kfar Chabad, and it was a wonderful experience. In 1970 I came back, got married, started teaching philosophy, writing a doctorate, but I still felt I hadn't done enough to meet

the Rebbe's challenge. So I studied for *smicha*. I qualified as a rabbi, and I thought that's it. I've grown a little as a Jew, and now I'm ready to get back with the rest of my life.

## Act II

In January 1978 I was at a crossroads. My friends in Lubavitch told me exactly what to do. You put your question in writing, you give the Rebbe options; one, two, three, and the Rebbe will tell you, the one or two or three. So I set out my options. I said to the Rebbe, "I have a career in front of me, I have three choices." Number one, maybe I would like to be an academic – a professor or maybe a fellow of my college in Cambridge. Or number two – I went to university initially to study economics – I'd like to be an economist. Or number three, I'd like to be a barrister. I was a member of one of the Inns of Court, the Inner Temple where you study to be a lawyer.

I went in to the *yechidus* [private audience] not knowing what the Rebbe would answer. The Rebbe looked at me and he went through the list; not one, not two, not three.

The Rebbe did not give me time to reply. He told me Anglo Jewry was short of Rabbis, and therefore he said to me, "You must train Rabbis." He specified Jews College, where rabbis were trained in Britain. And then he said, you yourself must become a congregational Rabbi, so that your students will come and will hear you give sermons and they will learn. Well, I was a little *farblonged* – a word I've introduced into the English language courtesy of the BBC – but if the Rebbe says do it, I did it. I gave up my

three ambitions, I trained rabbis, I taught in Jews College, eventually I became head of Jews College, and I became a congregational rabbi, in Golders Green and Marble Arch.

Having given up all my three ambitions, having decided to walk in the complete opposite direction, a funny thing happened. I did become a fellow of my college in Cambridge. In fact I currently hold professorships in three universities. And I did deliver Britain's top two economics lectures, the Mais lecture and the Hayek lecture, and Inner Temple made me an honorary barrister and invited me to give a law lecture in front of six hundred barristers, the Lord Chancellor – the highest lawyer in Britain, and Princess Anne who's the Master.

You know, you never lose anything – by putting *yiddishkeit* first.

And I learned something very deep: Sometimes the best way of achieving your ambitions is to stop pursuing them, and let them pursue you.

## Act III

In 1990 Anglo Jewry was looking for a new Chief Rabbi. It was clear that I was going to be one of the candidates. But I wasn't sure that I was right for the job or the job was right for me. And so, I sat down with my family and they agreed to permit me to write to the Rebbe and ask his advice.

I set out the pros and cons of the job, and the Rebbe wrote a most extraordinary reply, a brilliant reply, without using a single word.

Towards the end of the letter I wrote the sentence, "If they offer me the job, should I accept?" This was the Rebbe's



reply: The typographical symbol for reverse word order. Instead of saying, "Should I?" The answer is, "I should."

So, thirteen years to the day after I became a congregational rabbi I became Chief Rabbi, and in that job I have tried to the best of my ability to do what I know the Rebbe would have wanted me to do: To build schools, to improve Anglo Jewish education, to reach out, and to make – not followers – but leaders.

And I did one other thing, which was a little bit unusual, and I want to explain to you, now, why.

I never said this in public before. In the 1970s and 80s, the Rebbe developed a very interesting campaign – the *sheva mitzvos benei noach* campaign – to reach out not just to Jews, but also to non Jews.

I realized that in my new position as Chief Rabbi I could do just that. So I started broadcasting on the BBC, on radio, on television, writing for the national press. I wrote books read by non Jews as well as Jews and the effect was absolutely extraordinary. The more I spoke the more they wanted to hear. The more I wrote the more they wanted to

**Most people look at others and see what they seem. Great people look at others and see what they are. The greatest of the great – and the Rebbe was greatest of the great – see others and see what they could become. And that was his greatness.**

read, and you know what that experience told me – not only the wisdom, the vast foresight of the Rebbe in understanding that the world was ready to hear a Jewish message – but it taught me something else as well. And I want you never to forget these words:

Non Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism.

And non Jews are embarrassed by

Jews who are embarrassed by Judaism.

The Rebbe taught us how to fulfill *verau kol amei haaretz ki shem Hashem nikra alecha*. Let all the world see we are never ashamed to stand tall as Jews.

So, at the three critical turning points in my life, the Rebbe was my satellite navigation system, showing me where to go and how. And though I didn't always understand why at the time, in retrospect I see how extraordinary his advice was, and how wise.

Most people look at others and see what they seem. Great people look at others and see what they are. The greatest of the great – and the Rebbe was greatest of the great – see others and see what they could become. And that was his greatness.

And you, the shluchim, are testimony to the fact that not only did the Rebbe transform lives, he transformed people into people who themselves transform lives and that is how he changed the world. Through you, his Shluchim and through all the other special people who support you and make your work possible. 🌟

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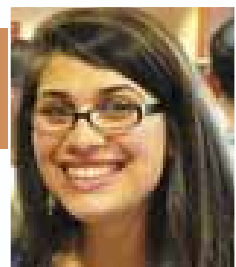
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# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Michelle (Misha) Gross '12

## STUDENT FIXES THE WORLD, ONE TREE SEED AT A TIME

by Gabriela Tilevitz '14

***“Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living.” - Miriam Beard***

Last summer, traveling to India presented Misha Gross, a senior at Binghamton University, with the dual challenge of negotiating the newness of what she experienced and building her own Jewish community.

Searching for a break from the self-involved college atmosphere, Misha found the American Jewish World Service. “I wanted to travel and I wanted to volunteer,” said Gross. “I have a list of countries in my head that I want to visit before I die, and I just needed to get to India. I didn’t even know what to expect. They tried to warn us before, but you can’t understand until you get there. There are so many colors and so many smells. There are animals everywhere. There is just so much to see.”

For seven weeks of India’s hottest season, Misha and fifteen other college students from North America lived in a small town called Little Kanchipuram. Her group did a variety of volunteer work for a specific non-governmental organization, called Ride the Rural Institute for Education, which aims to stop child labor by building schools for former child laborers.

“My favorite thing, was going to different villages and planting vegetable and tree seeds,” she said. “It was 20 unskilled laborers, so there were only so many things we could do, but we were able to dig a hole and plant a banana tree. The banana tree will grow and flourish and people who don’t have anything to eat, can eat bananas.”

Nevertheless, it is unrealistic to think that a group will go to a third-world country and “fix things.” More important were the shared experiences in a pluralistic Jewish environment. Misha learned about the social politics of the country

through educational sessions and as a sociology major, this was an extremely important part of her experience in India. Regardless of what she learned, she was still not prepared to witness instances of human rights violations. The group leaders and the head of the NGO managed, however, to turn the negatives seen into a positive.

“We talked about how we can’t just pity these people, and how not to feel guilty for what we have,” she said. “It’s about witnessing these events, and being in solidarity and using empathy to go back to your life and make a difference.”

An aspect of Judaism is the obligation of Tikkun Olam, rectifying or “fixing” the ills of this world, and despite the religious differences in Misha’s group, being part of a community where everyone shares that inherent value made her trip even more meaningful. Against the chaotic backdrop of India, this was the most unique Jewish community Misha had been a member of. It was not easy to make everyone feel comfortable, but comfort was substituted with a high level of tolerance.

Misha even had the opportunity to connect with Chabad in a similar way that she does with Chabad at Binghamton, but on a much smaller scale. Every week, Misha cooks and bakes for Shabbat for hundreds of hungry students. In Cochin, India, she and her group met the Chabad couple and of course, she helped prepare the meal for the relatively modest group of 20 people.

No matter your motive for traveling, it is impossible for your perspectives on life not to change afterward. Misha Gross took the initiative to fulfill an obligation through her faith, and in return she has gained a fresh mindset to share with the world. 🌍

Gabriela Tilevitz '14 is an undeclared sophomore. She is a contributing writer with Pipe Dream.







Roni Loeb Richter '92

# The Road that Leads to my Home


**T**here is a new sign on the road that leads to my home. It says “On the road, everyone is equal.” It says this in Hebrew and in Arabic. I don’t know who put it there, but I like it. I like it as I drive north, sandwiched between two yellow cabs with green and white plates. I smile at the guy in front of me as he moves off to make the right turn toward Beit Lechem and he waves. He goes there. I’m not allowed, according to the big red sign placed at the entrance. It’s not new. I am driving and the view I used to enjoy isn’t there anymore. I mean, the places I used to see are still there, but I can’t see them because there is a wall. That is new.

The new wall on the road that leads to my home says, ‘You guys over there and you guys over there.’ Only there is no real line that separates us. All of us who live here know that we are intertwined, living among and within in many ways. Even as our lives are separate now as they never were before. Hatred has a funny way of creating lines where there were once none. On the old road, the dusty, ancient one behind my home, the one that was home to dusty pilgrims making their way from Hevron to Jerusalem, there is a farm house. On a nice day, I walk

by the house and am greeted by the farmer and his children. They offer fresh figs and grapes and I smile. I wish I had more to offer them. Which side of the wall were we on when we traded smiles for sweetness?

The banner on the road that leads to my home says “Gush Etzion: the home of every Jew”. It doesn’t say “No Arabs allowed.” And yet, when we plant trees, they are often found uprooted. Someone doesn’t believe what the farmer knows and what I know. My daughter came home pale from the school bus one day last week

and said, “Ima, I saw someone painted “Death to Arabs” on a bus stop. Who would **do** such a terrible thing? Ima, don’t they know about the *nice* Arabs? Don’t they know that we don’t *kill* people? They’re **people** Ima.” I know. I also know the complexity of life is too twisted and too painful to explain to an eleven year old, in her beauty and boundless love for all that lives.

The newest sign on the road that leads to my home says, “Thou shalt not murder.” In both languages. And I think about the many who have died on this road, the pain, the rage, the fear. I’m driving north again and I look at the wall with sadness, missing the fields and the houses and then—I see a kite. It’s a real kite, flying behind the wall. I can’t see the person who holds it, but I imagine a child and maybe his father or big brother, excited to be living, running to keep it up high, to keep it from falling. Their hope, my dream. They can’t see me. Maybe they never will, but the kite gives me an idea. Perhaps it is time to fly my own. 

Roni Loeb Richter ('92) made aliya in 2003 and lives in Elazar, Gush Etzion with her husband and four daughters ages 15, 13, 11, and 6.



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