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**The Importance of Looking**

**Into Mirrors and Improving Ourselves Spiritually**

**By Daniel Keren**



Last Week, Rabbi Doniel Osher Kleinman, Rav of K’hal Nachlas Dovi and the mechaber (author) of the multi-volume Sifrei Koveitz Halachos spoke at the Flatbush Hakhel Veterans Day Yarchei Kallah on the topic of “Our Duty in Times of War”. He began by remarking on the fact that we are living in a time where there is a lot of activity around the world, especially as it relates to Acheinu Bnei Yisroel, our Jewish brethren.

This is not just regarding the serious situation in Eretz Yisroel, the Land of Israel, but also closer to home in Boro Park. The calls from those who hate Israel for aggression and for violence has become a wave that causes us as Jews [everywhere] to stop and think. What exactly are to understand from these events in a tekufah, period like this.

**The Four Things G-d Regrets Having Created**

In Mesechta (the Talmudic tractate) Sukkos 52b, Rabbi Chana bar Acha said: There are four things G-d regrets having created: galus/ the exile, the Chaldeans the Casdim (the Babylonians who destroyed the Bayis Rishon, the first Holy Temple in Jerusalem), the Ishmaelites (Yishmaelim or the Arab nation), and the Evil Inclination (Yetzer Ha-ra).

Rabbi Kleinman asked what does it mean that Hakodesh Baruch Hu (the Holy One blessed be He) has harata (regret)? He knows all that will transpire even before He creates them. The only explanation why these four things exist is only to bring Klal Yisroel to teshuva. There is no other reason.

Furthermore, the Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, (1138-1204) writes that when tzoras (troubles) occur and Klal Yisroel, the Jewish nation cries out, it is important for us not to look out the window, but rather into a mirror in order to examine our ways and to improve ourselves [spiritually.] So, we the Bnei Yisroel, Jews have to accept responsibility and not just blames ourselves for superficial mistakes.

**The Spiritual Danger of**

**Discovering Logical Explanations**

Some people after the terrible events [of the October 7th massacre of Jews in southern Israel) began pointing out logical explanations for this terrible tragedy (i.e., the failure of the Mossad, the Shin Bet and the Israel Defense Forces.] The Rambam continues that if the Jews don’t daven [after such a horrible event,] by crying out to Hakodesh Baruch Hu, such behavior is similar to that of people who are akzorius, cruel.

The responsibility, Rabbi Kleinman said, is for us as Jews to take this terrible tragedy to heart. Otherwise, the Rambam warns such an attitude will G-d forbid only lead to things or events that are much worse.

Instead of having 100,000 Jews take part in a pro-Israel rally in Washington, DC [our nation’s capital], Rabbi Kleinman said that we should rather get together in MetLife Stadium for an Asifa to pray to Hakodesh Baruch Hu and recite Tehillim for rachamim, mercy. He also suggested that what we as Jews should do is to have a tainus, a fast. Today, it may be difficult for us to physically fast [by not eating or drinking.]

Ideally, Rabbi Kleinman suggested that restaurants and pizza shops should be closed during these months [when Israel is fighting to destroy Hamas and free the hostages]. Also, ideally the Jewish entertainment industry should be closed. Our lives should look different. It doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t go to work. Rather, we should do something different and meaningful, showing Hakodesh Baruch Hu that we aren’t living our lives as if nothing happened.

**Hashem’s Response to Avraham’s Request**

In Bereishis/Genesis (17:18) Avraham requested of G-d "If only Yishmael will live before You!" In response to this request by Avraham that his son Yishmael should walk in the ways of Hashem, Hashem answers that He would make of Yishmael a great nation. And that is what the Gemora mentions was one of the four regrets that Hakodesh Baruch Hu had with regards to things He had created.

Rabbi Kleinman quoted from the Pirke D’Rebbe Eliezer who forecast almost 2,000 years ago the terrible afflictions that Yishmael would do against the Jewish people. He also recalled once that his Rosh Hayeshiva – Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky brought down a copy of the Zohar from a bookshelf regarding the question of whether or not a person with a bris milah (circumcision) has a spiritual connection to Hakodesh Baruch Hu and thereby a chelek (share) in Olam Habah (the World to Come.) Does this also apply to the Yishmaelim who also have a bris milah?

**Yishmael’s Reward in This World**

According to the Zohar, Hakodesh Baruch Hu answered the question of Shimon Bar Yochai by saying that the Yishmaelim will not have a chelek in Olam Habah because their circumcision is not a spiritual one. Instead as a reward, Hakodesh Baruch Hu has granted them power in this world, especially in these days of the Yamim Acharonim, the final days before the coming of Moshiach.

The whole purpose of this tekufah, Rabbi Kleinman said is for us to internalize within ourselves and find those things in which we need to improve in our spiritual avoda, service and not get lost in examining the external causes for our distress.

Chazal in Mesechta Sanhendrin teach that Moshiach, the Jewish redeemer will come when many Jews are in despair of his arrival. The coming of Moshiach will be like the woman giving birth, which consists of a series of contractions, each with a sharp pain. But these difficult pains are a sign of the coming birth of the child and also when we as Klal Yisroel when suffering tzoras such as the recent events in Eretz Yisroel will have to push ourselves with even more teshuvah that will definitely bring us closer to the coming of Moshiach.

*Reprinted from the November 17, 2023 issue of The Jewish Connection;*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**How to Deal with**

**My Husband’s Mother**

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**QUESTION:** How do I deal with my husband’s mother who I would consider a difficult mother-in-law?

**ANSWER:** The best answer to that is to make sure to love your fellowman like you love yourself. And you can be sure that if your mother-in-law is difficult right now, part of it is due to difficulties in you. And you love yourself anyhow.

And so, at all times make your mother-in-law feel that you like her. Because that’s what you’re going to want your daughter-in-law do to you

That which you don’t want done to yourself, don’t do to others (Shabbos 31a). And remember that someday, you too will be a mother-in-law, and your daughter-in-law will ask the same question about you.

**Training for When You Will Become a Mother-in-Law**

And therefore, get busy now and utilize your mother-in-law. Being a daughter-in-law is a training school for you because you will learn how to be a mother-in-law. If you pay attention, you can prepare yourself by learning about what not to do to your own daughter-in-law.

In general, a mother-in-law must be treated with great diplomacy. You must treat everybody diplomatically but your husband’s mother especially deserves a good deal of thought. Whenever she gives you advice without being asked, don’t resent it. Now, I’m not saying you should encourage it; don’t go and ask her – even if it’s just for politeness sake – unless there’s no risk of her going too far. But if she does tell you something, act like you accept it; and then when she hangs up the phone or when she leaves the house, forget all about it.

In case she resents the fact that you don’t consult her, make it a plan to frequently send her small gifts. Always remember her anniversary and you should do it on other occasions too. And sometimes you can ask her advice about things that are not important – how to make a certain dish or how to soak a certain object. But don’t get her too much involved in your affairs.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Toldos 5784 email of Toras Avigdor based on Tape #40 (November 1974).*

**Thoughts that Count**

**For Our Parsha**

*And behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven* (Gen. 28:12)

If a person thinks that he has already perfected himself and "reached heaven," it is a sure sign that in fact, he has a long way to go. For it is only when an individual considers himself lowly and "on the earth" that he is able to ascend to greater spiritual heights. *(Toldot Yaakov Yosef)*

*And, behold, the L-rd was standing over him ("Vehinei Hashem nitzav alav")* (Gen. 28:13)

Rearranging the first letters of the above Hebrew verse results in the word "anav," meaning one who is humble. For it is precisely through humility, self-abnegation and acceptance of the yoke of Heaven that a person attains a sense of G-d's closeness. *(Ohr HaTorah)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeitzei 5761/2000 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Learning from Jacob How**

**To Serve G-d in Difficult Times**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



The Torah portion of Vayeitzei begins: "And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Charan."

Beersheba is symbolic of a state of peacefulness and tranquility. The name itself commemorates the covenant of peace that was made between the Philistine King Avimelech and Abraham, and the seven wells that were dug after the covenant was made.

Jacob left this state of tranquility, left the study hall of Shem and Ever in which he had studied Torah and served G-d for 14 years, "and went toward Charan," the lowliest and most despicable location on earth. The name Charan comes from the Hebrew word meaning anger or wrath, as Charan was an alien and degenerate place.

In the metaphorical sense, at some point in his life, every Jew must leave Beersheba and go to Charan. Just as Jacob left Beersheba to find a wife in Charan, so too must every Jew leave the rarefied world of the yeshiva to establish a Jewish home, and involve himself in the world.

The most appropriate way to prepare for this is by being in Beersheba, i.e., complete devotion to Torah study. But life itself must be lived in "Charan" - in the material realm of the physical world. A Jew's mission is to serve G-d in even the most mundane or difficult circumstances.

This, then, is the lesson to be derived for every Jew: It is precisely through the trials and tribulations one encounters throughout life that a warm Jewish home is built. For it is these trials that temper the Jew and prove his mettle, making the foundations of his home strong and stable.

Let's examine Jacob's behavior during his journey:

Setting out in a foreign land to find a suitable match, one would think that Jacob would have tried to learn the local language, or dressed himself in expensive clothes to make a favorable impression. And yet, the first thing he did was pray, as Rashi comments on the words "and he reached a certain place."

Jacob understood that his success would not depend on taking simple physical action. A Jew must know that the very first thing he must do when going out into the world is pray to G-d. He must never think that just because he already prayed and learned Torah in the past, he must now emulate the "ways of the world" if he is to succeed.

On the contrary, when setting out from "Beersheba" to "Charan," a Jew must pray even harder! For the tests he will be subjected to in "Charan" are far more difficult than any he encountered before. He must therefore pray even more diligently, and ask G-d's help to withstand these new trials.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeitzei 5761/2000 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted from Volume 1 of Likutei Sichot..*

**More Thoughts that Count**

*The land on which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed* (Gen. 28:13)

As Rashi comments, "The Holy One, blessed be He, folded up the entire land of Israel beneath him." Unlike his forefathers, Jacob did not have to travel the length and breadth of Israel in order to refine the sparks of holiness contained in each location. Rather, when G-d "folded up the land beneath him," he was able to refine all of them at once, in one place. *(The Baal Shem Tov)*

*And Jacob answered and said to Laban, "What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued after me?" (*Gen. 31:36)

Jacob was disturbed by Laban's insistence on maintaining their relationship, as he interpreted it as a reflection of his own behavior. He worried that he might have committed a sin, for had he been completely innocent of wrongdoing, a person like Laban would be uninterested in being his friend. *(Der Torah Kval)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeitzei 5761/2000 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Vayetzei 5784**



Our father Yaakov leaves his home, he who is accustomed to study, tranquility, and to “dwelling in tents,” and immediately finds himself alone and endangered in a hostile world. A rock is his pillow and he must erect barriers at night to protect himself from wild animals (both four and two footed) as he sleeps on the ground. Though he is reassured by Heaven and by his grand dream and vision it is clear to him that his future is still uncertain and fraught with dangers, peril and challenges.

When he finally arrives close to his destination he encounters the neighbors and daughters of Lavan who are unable to water their flocks because of the great rock that seals the opening to the well of water. The Torah then describes for us in great detail how Yaakov greets the people and the family of Lavan and in a selfless gesture of help and compassion to others - who he has just met - singlehandedly removes the rock from the mouth of the well.

It is interesting to note that the Torah lavishes a great deal of space and detail to this incident at the well while the Torah tells us nothing about the fourteen years of Yaakov’s life that passed between his leaving home and arriving at the house of Lavan. Rashi, quoting Midrash, tells us that Yaakov spent these fourteen years in spiritual study and personal growth at the yeshiva academy of Shem and Ever. So, if this is in fact the case, why does the Torah not tell us of this great feat of spiritual challenge and self-improvement – fourteen years of sleepless study - while it does seem to go into mystifying detail regarding the incident at the well of water? Certainly, it would seem that the years of study would have a greater impact on the life and persona of Yaakov than rolling a rock off of the mouth of a well would have had.

As we see throughout the book of Bereshith, if not indeed regarding all of the Torah generally, the Torah places utmost emphasis on the behavior that one exhibits towards other human beings. Not everyone can study for fourteen years in a yeshiva day and night. Yet everyone can care about others, can demand justice for the defenseless and can provide, to the best of one’s abilities, to help those who so obviously need it. Though Yaakov, like the great figures and founders of our people that appear here in Bereshith, is unique in spiritual stature and blessed with Divine vision and revelation, he is also essentially everyman. His actions are meant to be a template of attitude and behavior for his descendants and the people who bear his name.

The Torah, while making it clear that we can never personally be the equal of our ancestors in their exalted spiritual state and accomplishments, we can and should attempt to emulate their values and behavior. We can all help those in need to roll the rock off of their wells and thereby to nurture an environment where the Yaakov within all of us can grow and expand.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**Appreciate the Bread**

“He will give me bread to eat . . .” (28:20) R’ Meir Chadash z”l (1898-1989; mashgiach ruchani of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) related that he learned as a refuge during World War I how to look at events with the right attitude. One day, he was trudging along a road with four friends during a torrential downpour.

As they slowly made their way, the young men complained aloud about the deep mud that impeded their progress. Suddenly, a farmer passed them and heard their complaints. Turning toward them, he rebuked them angrily saying, “This is not mud. It’s bread.” (Ha’mashgiach Rabbi Meir)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayetzei 5784 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s parsha sheet whY I Matter for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn, NY.*

**‘When I Found Authentic Torah, It Was Like Electricity’**

**By Abigail Pogrebin**

A roundtable with ‘baal teshuvah’ Jews—who grew up non-Orthodox but later chose Orthodoxy—about why they started their journeys, what they had to leave behind, and which aspects of religious life they love the most

**The “Master of Return”**

When secular or non-Orthodox Jews decide to become Orthodox, they are called baal teshuvah, which literally means “master of return.” Their numbers are large: According to a [2019 study](http://nishmaresearch.com/assets/pdf/Nishma%20Research%20-%20Report%20on%20Baalei%20Teshuvah%20Nov%202019.pdf), 42% of the modern Orthodox community in America is baal teshuvah; in Haredi or Hasidic circles, the numbers are smaller but still significant. The median age when they started to identify as Orthodox is 23.5.

For baalei teshuvah—the plural of baal teshuvah, sometimes colloquially called BT’s—this transformation does not happen overnight and involves a significant commitment when it comes to learning about Torah, Shabbat, kashrut, holidays, and the laws and customs around everything from tznius (modest dress) to niddah (purity laws).

Some baalei teshuvah I spoke to reported feeling persistent judgment from FFB’s—“Frum From Birth,” meaning those who were born into frum, or Orthodox, families. Some FFB’s worry that their children will be negatively exposed to a BT’s nonreligious friends or relatives. One baal teshuvah rabbi told me, “People question the potential for purity if someone has previously had a defiled existence.”

**A Feeling of Inadequacy – “Like I’ll Never Catch Up”**

Other baalei teshuvah told me that they remain overwhelmed by all the texts and tradition they will never master, no matter how diligently they try. “There’s a feeling of inadequacy,” one said, “like I’ll never catch up.”

However, in the roundtable discussion I had recently with 11 baalei teshuvah, the sentiment was overwhelmingly positive. Yes, some had to overcome misconceptions—their own, as well as those of other observant Jews—and some had felt friction from friends and family members who didn’t understand their transitions.

But they were mostly focused on what they had gained, how their lives had changed for the better, the things they valued most about their lives today. Virtually everyone I spoke to said that living a life oriented toward G-d and Torah added “truth” and “meaning” to their lives, and gave them a sense of purpose and community.

**THE PARTICIPANTS**

**Their ages, locations, and when they became observant**

**Judy:**63, Los Angeles. “It probably started around the time I was 25 and I was fully committed by the time I was 27, when I got married.”

**Yaakov:**34, Monsey, New York, originally from Częstochowa, Poland. “My journey began when I left Poland at the age of 15 in 2004.”

**Fred:**71, Riverdale, New York. “It was a process; I don’t have the date.”

**Esther:** 37, LA, originally from Russia. “I decided to seriously observe Torah when I was in ninth grade.”

**Yitzchok:**60, Bay Area, California. “The process was from age 20 till 23.”

**David:** 42, Michigan. “I started my journey at 18 and became frum—religious Orthodox—at 21.”

**Bracha:**67, Baltimore. “I became observant at 22.”

**Nina:** 67, Skokie, Illinois. “I was in my mid-30s when it really started to stick.”

**Chaya:**56. Denver. “I became observant at 26.”

**Debby:**63, Toms River, New Jersey, originally from Australia. “I became shomer shabbes at 27.”

**Yehudah:**43, Huntington Woods, Michigan. Became baal teshuvah at 33. “Your question of when we made the transition is a little bit tricky. I just answered it based on when I became shomer shabbes [observing the Sabbath], shomer kashrus [keeping kosher]—just the basic elements of being able to live in an observant community. But I don’t feel like it’s a binary.”

**Let’s address the term “baal teshuvah.” Can some of you weigh in on whether you use it?**

**Debby:** I’m very comfortable with it. It’s something that was hard-earned, and there’s so much we can share with others. It’s a term that doesn’t have any negative connotations for me, only positive.

**Bracha:** I love telling people that I’m a baal teshuvah. It’s an interesting term because it means you’re a person who is returning to who you were, but it’s not like I’m returning to being observant, because I wasn’t. I’m returning to the essence of who I am. Another term that is used is mevakesh emes—a seeker of truth. I relate to that so much; we’re people who are seeking truth, and that’s what motivated us to return to a path of following the Torah’s guidelines.

**Yaakov:**I would describe myself as a deep thinker and spiritual person. What really began my journey was knowing that I’m Jewish, but not knowing what that means. I wanted to know. My grandfather attended cheder [religious elementary school] and learned Talmud; I wanted to taste that for myself. So in a way, I became baal teshuvah because I returned to the ways of my grandparents and my great-grandparents.

**I’m also interested if anyone is not comfortable with the term?**

**Yehudah:**It is a little bit fraught with some issues. I don’t think it’s a negative term, but it might be a loaded term in some Jewish communities.

**What do you mean by “fraught”?**

**Yehudah:**You’re not supposed to remind somebody about when they weren’t observant. It’s similar to why you’re not supposed to remind somebody if they’re a ger [a convert]; it’s not necessarily helpful to the person in their own development. The other side of it is I think that the term baal teshuvah is limiting because we’re human, and humans do a lot of things that aren’t ideal, regardless of how observant they might be externally. People do sometimes make a lot of assumptions about people based on that term or status. So, I don’t find that to be a helpful descriptor. I don’t have a problem being called it; I just think it’s too limiting.

I became ‘baal teshuvah’ because I returned to the ways of my grandparents and my great-grandparents.

**Can I just see a show of hands: How many of you changed your name because of the transition to a more religious life? I see five: Bracha, Yitzchok, David, Esther, Yehudah—you’re gesturing “sort of.”**

**Yehudah:**I was Yehudah at my bris, named after my great-grandmother, who escaped pogroms when she was 16 years old. I added my second name, Leyb, when I got married and became religious.

**What is one of the best, beautiful aspects of the life that you live now**—**religiously?**

**Debby:**That life is not random. I know that now—intellectually, instinctively, emotionally: It’s not random. There is a G-d in the world and everything is run by that Creator. Just living with that awareness—I don’t know how people live without it. We all go through so much. I don’t know how people survive trauma or tragedy without that awareness. I am so grateful that that is my reality.

**Judy:**Our grandchildren. We have 11 grandchildren and almost all of them carry the names of our parents or even my grandparents. So, I have a Dov Ber, a grandson, named for my grandfather, who—when he came to the United States—couldn’t go by Dov Ber. I feel a chill even saying this, looking by contrast at relatives and acquaintances of my vintage whose kids are barely Jewish. Seeing that continuity in my family and that they’re happy and being raised with a sense of who they are. It’s just unbelievable. It’s overwhelming.

**Fred, do you want to share something that changed for the better?**

**Fred:**Sure, it actually comes to mind pretty easily. I sound like a real *baal teshuvah*. *Shabbes*, the *chagim*—the Jewish calendar overall. If you don’t appreciate it, I don’t know *what* you would appreciate. It’s remarkable how it sets your year and also the things that it yields: community, family. You know, Judy has 11 grandkids, so I know she’s cooking all the time. She has her shopping, cooking schedule, all on the holidays, right? That would be it for me in a big sense: the Jewish calendar.

There is a G-d in the world and everything is run by that Creator. Just living with that awareness—I don’t know how people live without it.

**David:** Contrasting how I grew up—in a completely secular environment—to religious life, one of the things that’s been amazing is just how everything has meaning and purpose. We have a blessing after we use the restroom! With Torah and with the idea that there’s a G-d in the world and that He gave instructions for living, knowing that there’s objective meaning to things that we’re doing is extremely powerful. There’s no action in our lives that is without meaning. There’s an idea that Talmud Torah [Torah study] is *k’neged kulam* [opposite all]: There’s nothing that’s outside of Torah. So, when we’re walking down the street, checking out at the supermarket, with our family, Jewish holidays, every single thing is infused with objective meaning—there’s something real going on in the world and it’s meaningful. That’s what is magical, that every minute of life is meaningful.

**Yitzchok:**Children and grandchildren, seeing them reach milestones—get married, have children, the way they raise their children and seeing the way they go after their ambitions.

**Since nonreligious people also talk about the power of seeing children and grandchildren grow up and reach milestones, what would you say is unique about it through an Orthodox lens?**

**Yitzchok:**Our children have taken to things Jewishly with a gusto. They teach. They lead. And seeing them pursue that has been a Jewish experience, in addition to being obviously the family experience. These are all magical things. One thing that also stands out about my religious life is the fact that I got the chance to learn for a long time. In the 10 years between when I finished college until the time I came to [the Bay Area], I got to spend in yeshiva. So even today, having access to the discourse of big *talmidei chachamim*—of very big scholars—and to be able to sit there for two hours and follow, decode everything that they’re saying because I was given access to learning, to this day is still a magical thing.

**Esther:** I feel very content and accomplished living this lifestyle because my son is now living this lifestyle. My life is now more intentional and purposeful; I feel very fulfilled. I’m happy that my son will be carrying this on, and I’m doing this with the help of Oora Somayach, because my son has *chevrusas* [study partners] and I’m trying to make the Torah lifestyle be sweet and fun for him. So, he will continue.

**Nina:** What everyone said really resonates. I’d add to that: being in a community. I know other people have communities, but this is a community that’s dedicated and focused on creating and celebrating Jewish lives, supporting each other.

**I’d ask each of you to speak about the decision to make this journey to a more religious life.**

This is a community that’s dedicated and focused on creating and celebrating Jewish lives, supporting each other.

**Judy**: I met my husband when he was fresh off of a trip to Israel; he had discovered Torah. He had grown up in Chicago, totally secular. We hit it off right away, except for this one problem: He was really interested in Orthodoxy. So, I thought, “There goes another one.” But I just liked him too much; he was too much of a mensch. We continued to go out and I realized that he was looking not just for a career, but a life. And even though I had grown up with a full engagement with Conservative synagogue and all my friends were Jewish, I started to realize that I didn’t really know very much about Judaism—what it really taught. I had a lot of stereotypes, preconceived notions, a lot of prejudice against anything that even had the word “Torah” in it. So that began the process. It was almost three years until we got married because I was fighting tooth and nail. But I saw that there was truth. And when I started really learning with Torah teachers, I thought, “This is real, and if I care about what’s true, then I need to pursue this.”

**Debby:** I think the starting point was a camp that my school miraculously instituted, which brought amazing Y.U. madrachim [Yeshiva University guides] into our lives. It was called Counterpoint, very radical, and it was my first really emotional experience of Judaism. It planted a seed that there was something here for me; that was around age 14, 15. Then I did really nothing. After I left school, I was focused on my career. Fast-forward to moving to LA to become an aspiring screenwriter, and Hashem [God], through Divine Providence, led me to the very beginnings of [Aish HaTorah](https://aish.com/). They started teaching me and I was hooked. It played out from that point. I was in.

**Yehudah:**I’ve always been a spiritual seeker of some kind. I grew up in a secular environment where what I was exposed to from a Jewish perspective wasn’t scratching the itch of my thirst for spiritual development. So, I dabbled in a lot of areas and eventually had the chance to study Hasidus [Hasidic thought] with a rabbi, even though I wasn’t observant. I went through a divorce and found for the first time the ability to imagine a more observant lifestyle in line with what I was learning. I think it’s really a whole family project; I met my current wife soon afterward, and alongside me, she really took to pursuing observance. It was something we did together with a mission to make sure that when we had children, which was really important to both of us and brought us together, that they would feel a real sense of belonging, identity, and a source, a heritage, for how they could seek and find healthy ways to answer those questions.

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