

Let's Get Real

MRS. LEBA SCHWEBEL

Perhaps you've noticed that my column has not been appearing every week. As my teaching demands have increased *b"h*, my time has been taken over by more needed preparatory hours and I've had to face my time limitations square in the face. This column will be appearing bi-monthly from now on, yet I hope to continue to share with my readers Torah thoughts that impact me in a profound way, in the effort to recalculate our frantic and frenetic lives and align them with Hashems' reality.

So I've spent my month of Cheshvan by facing the clutter in my house and have been cleaning out closets and papers, giving away unused clothing and housewares, and sorting through books and unimaginable clutter. You may ask why? During this month of Mar Cheshvan, as our glorious holidays have moved into the past, we've begun the winter season, and along with the change of weather we've all been experiencing a dynamic change in our schedules. The Sukka decorations have long been put away by now, and we spend our time trying to balance all the challenges of daily living.

In the agricultural cycle of our Jewish year, Cheshvan is the planting season, and what do we do before we plant? We have to till the soil, dig it up and turn it over, in an effort to refresh the ground and make it conducive for growth. So, too, in our hearts and minds, it is beneficial to think about many of the concepts and behaviors that we often take for granted, and dig up our mind, so to speak, in an effort to gain clarity, as a precursor for growth. Cleaning out clutter helps me think in a clearer way, since I get bogged down by the muddle. Additionally, perhaps part of my attack on the clutter was a physical reaction to recent events, as terror has been gripping our lives. More so, I have been forced to face the fragility of life as I bear the loss of a dear and *choshuve* friend, Rebbetzin Henny Machlis *a"h*. I did not intend to write a eulogy about her, as my words would be a mere reflection of her astounding greatness, but I can't get her out of my heart nor can my mind stop thinking about the myriad of lessons that I learned from her in the fleeting times that we got to spend together.

Henny and I attended Central Brooklyn, (otherwise known as Yeshiva University High School for Girls) together. Our high school years were spent during the 70's, when it was common to wear a bracelet with a So-

viet refuseniks name on it, as we rallied for freedom with Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry. We were idealistic and concerned for the existence of Eretz Yisrael, as the Yom Kippur War occurred when we were in 10th grade. We collected money for Eretz Yisrael on street corners, as we held an Israeli Flag and shook it from side to side, asking for donations to send to Israeli soldiers. Henny was bright and inquisitive, with a smile that was perennially on her face and a heart that was expansive and embracing. She married Rabbi Mordechai Machlis, moved to Eretz Yisrael, and together immediately began inviting guests to their home on a weekly basis, sharing the beauty of Shabbos with anyone who wanted to join them. They became renowned for becoming the address for anyone who needed a Shabbos meal or a warm human connection. As their website states: "The approximately 200 guests each Shabbat include tourists and travelers, Israeli residents and new immigrants, university, *yeshiva* and seminary students, the intellectually and theologically curious, the homeless, destitute, poor and lonely and all who seek a Shabbat or holiday experience for either spiritual or physical reasons".

They do this all in their very regular apartment in Maalot Dafna while raising 14 children *ka"h*. Now, Rabbi Machlis and his children continue this noble work. Much has been written about them, and I encourage you to google her name and read more about them and their holy mission.

Henny and I lost touch for many years, and through a series of divinely orchestrated events we reconnected about 6 years ago. I had heard through the years of the famous Machlis family, yet I never knew that Rebbetzin Machlis was my friend Henny! When she was forced to come to New York for medical treatments a year and a half ago, I was once again privileged to be reunited with her, and we spent many hours, en route to doctor visits and beyond. Time spent with Henny was always an escapade, another worldly experience. She was suspended above time and space, never in a rush, and it was clear that she was a holy and special woman, with no agenda... just a beautiful *neshama* that wanted to connect with whomever she met. She loved to encourage people, lift their spirits and share Divrei Torah, and stories, "maaselach", that displayed Hashems' greatness in the world.

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I introduced her to some women that I learn with, and they were mesmerized by her openness and clarity of thought. She spoke about Hakadosh Boruch Hu first and foremost, and lived with unyielding belief that she was in Hashems' hands all the time. She was the one suffering yet she uplifted us all! "Leba, there is no other power in the world except Hashem. No-one can give us anything or take anything away from us. He is the only power in this world!" When someone remarked to her that the cancer had a certain prognosis, she replied: "That is total *sheker* (falsehood)! Hashem controls every cell in my body, every second, and just as He put cells in He can take them away! They have no power of their own! It is all Hashem! Are there things in your life that you want and need? Speak to Him, pour out your heart to Him, He loves you and knows you better than you know yourself!"

She went on to explain: "When we have a challenge, first we go to the doctor, lawyer, our business partner...the bank. When things don't work out the way we want, we say: "Hashem please help me!" Can you imagine what pain the Shechina feels, *kaveyachol*? That we go to Him second? We must make Hashem our First choice! We must first

speaking to Him, share our innermost struggles and pains, and realize that our pain is also Hashems' pain, and He wants us to come to Him! "

Henny *a"h* lived a life of purpose and meaning and her loss is a great one, as we've lost a great light that was shining in our world. But, I once heard that when a *tzaddik* leaves the world, many of his/her strengths and Torah are left here for us to grab if we so choose. As we leave the month of Cheshvan and enter Kislev, we have the ability to take bits of her light, create a huge flame, and carry that torch with us! I can hear her say: "Chodesh tov everyone! As we enter the month of Kislev, we may be drawn into feelings of despair and helplessness much like *am yisrael* felt during the dark and dismal Greek conquest. As terror abounds, there is the tendency to feel downcast. Yet we Jews can connect to Hashems' reality and be above nature! Hashem is the only power in this world, and He and He alone can protect us! Let us tap into the light of Hashems' Torah and share it with the world in a real way!

To elevate the *neshama* of Henna Rasha bas Moshe Chaim, donations in Rebbetzin Machlis' memory can be made to "Jerusalem Chesed". They can be reached at Jerusalem.chesed@gmail.com