# SLICE OF LIFE

Moshe Cunin

## Teachers Come in All Sizes

by Steve Hyatt

Almost every adult can remember back to his childhood and recall a teacher who changed his or her life forever. As Jewish adults, hopefully we also can point to someone who impacted on us Jewishly. But it is a truly humbling experience for an adult to realize that an important spiritual lesson can be taught by two six-year-olds who stand just over four and a half feet tall.

Like many late bloomers, I am not a master of reading Hebrew. I can, as they say, get by, but the only way to gain real proficiency is through practice. And therein lies the rub. I am fine when it comes to the weekday prayer services, because with the exception of holidays, the text of the weekday morning, afternoon and evening *"Amida"* prayer doesn't change much from day to day. Over time, the repetition of each service enables me to become more confident and competent with the Hebrew words and one day you are stunned to see you can keep up with the experienced readers.

But the Shabbat morning service is more challenging. First, you only say it once a week. Second, the prayers are much longer. So, unless you actually practice reading the Shabbat morning prayers, you don't develop the same proficiency as you do with the weekday payers.

Thus, over the years I have found myself reading many of the Shabbat prayers in English. To be honest, I wasn't completely comfortable with this situation. But I didn't have the push to do anything about it. That is, until one Shabbat morning when Chana Cunin, one of the six-year-old triplets of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's emissaries in Reno, Nevada, asked me to show her where we were in the prayer book.

I showed Chana that we were on page 159. She looked at me and innocently asked, "Why are you pointing to the English words." I babbled some incoherent explanation and Chana, satisfied, scurried away. But I couldn't get her question out of my mind. Here was a small child, standing in front of me, asking me an honest and sincere question. "Why?" I asked myself. "Because this way is easy and requires less effort," I answered myself. Echoing the words of numerous Chabad Rabbis I've met over the years, I asked myself, "Since when is the easy way the right way?"

Just as I was contemplating this perplexing dilemma I heard a small deep, throated voice off to my left. The voice was slowly and methodically sounding out the Hebrew words to the prayers I was supposed to be reading. The voice was enunciating every letter, every syllable with great care and clarity. As I looked up from my prayer book, Chana's six-year-old brother Moshe was standing proudly next to his father, Rabbi Mendel Cunin, reading the last line of each of the Psalms in the first part of the Shabbat service. Without a moment's hesitation, self-consciousness or inhibition, Moshe proudly sounded out the words for all to hear. As he came to the conclusion of each line, he emphasized the last word of each sentence with gusto and an arm pump that would make golfer Tiger Woods proud.

As the weeks went on Moshe gained confidence and his speed noticeably increased. He obviously spent time with his father practicing, gaining greater skill and proficiency along the way. One Saturday morning as my dad and I strolled along the two mile walk to *shul* my mind wandered away and I started to think about Moshe and his passion for praying. I couldn't help but wonder why I was so reluctant to follow Moshe's example and start reading the prayers in Hebrew for Shabbat as well.

Truthfully, other than admitting I was a little lazy, I couldn't come up with a good answer. So as we passed the halfway point of our journey, I turned to my dad and told him that beginning today I was going to be just like Moshe and start reading nothing but the Hebrew words.

When the service began I found myself falling behind almost immediately. The old fear of being left behind began to creep into my brain. I was about to start reading the English text when I heard that distinctive deep, throaty melodious voice drift into my ears. Like a powerful energizing force, Moshe's rendition of the Hebrew text pulled me back to my pledge and I began to recite the Hebrew. In order to keep up I started reading as much of the beginning of each paragraph as I could until I heard Moshe start reading the last line of the paragraph. I'd jump to the last line as well and we'd finish together. I would quickly go to the next line and read as fast as I could. This "competition" between the 52-year-old and the 6-year-old was all in my mind but it compelled me to push myself beyond my perceived limitations. When Moshe started the last line I'd drop down to join him. In this way I could keep up with the service and read as much Hebrew as possible.

Over the last month my speed has improved dramatically. In most cases I am almost done with each paragraph when Moshe begins his recitation. We now finish each paragraph at about the same time and I mentally share his arm pump to emphasize the last word. But I have to admit that while my speed and proficiency have improved so has Moshe's. I've accepted the fact that it will only be a matter of time before I am struggling to keep up with him as he zips through the Hebrew. But to tell you the truth, that's okay with me. No one ever said the student had to be better or faster than the teacher. Moshe may soon surpass me in skill, speed, and proficiency but all is not lost. I am still faster than his younger brother Dovid who, as I write this, is 6-months-old. I figure if I practice and stay committed, I will have a good four years to get ready for my new teacher.

Come to think of it, four years may not be long enough. I better go practice.■

# etc.

## New Emissaries

Rabbi and Mrs. Yosef Yitzchak Morozov arrived in Ulyanovsk, Russia, in time for the High Holidays. The Jewish community, numbering approximately 4,000 Jews, has welcomed the young couple and are looking forward to enhanced religious programming under the Morozovs' leadership.

Rabbi Chaim and Kaila Danzinger will soon be moving to Pasadena, California where they will serve as program directors at the existing Chabad of Pasadena.

The University of Central Florida (UCF) is the newest campus to have a Chabad-Lubavitch Student Center opened. Rabbi Chaim Boruch and Rivkie Lipskier will arrive soon in Orlando, Florida to open the Center which will serve as a "home away from home" for college students at UCF.

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The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbitzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.