

Rabbi Eli and Dabrushy Pink, Lubavitch Centre of Leeds, England

A Bracha for Children in G-d's Own Country

By Chaya Chazan

As native Brits, we settled in London while searching for shlichus opportunities. As a bochor, I'd had some experience working for shluchim in Ukraine, so for a while, moving there permanently was a very viable option.

For various reasons, it didn't work out. Instead, the Shlichus Placement Bureau, a branch of the Shluchim Office, offered us a place in Leeds, UK, working with Head Shliach Rabbi Angyalfi, Rabbi Cohen, and their families. Another couple, the Danows, moved here around the same time to open Chabad on Campus, resulting in a giant leap for Leeds' Jewish involvement.

Leeds is an hour away from Manchester, in northeast England. The crown jewel of Yorkshire, it's been nicknamed *G-d's Own Country*, and features some of Britain's most beautiful scenery. The people here are very typically English - reserved, polite, and traditional, but also, hospitable and warm.

The Chabad Rebbeim often spoke about the power of Lag Ba'omer, especially for couples who need a bracha for children. Bringing up such a deeply personal - and often painful - topic can be extremely uncomfortable, especially in England, where propriety and politeness rule supreme. However, knowing the great power of the day, I swallowed my discomfort and went to visit the Barretts*, a couple from our young professional group.

Anna* and Greg* didn't have any children. I wasn't sure whether it was because of fertility issues or simply a matter of choice, but I somehow had a feeling they'd be receptive. I visited them on Lag Ba'omer, explaining the

power and significance of the day. We made a l'chaim together, and I gave them a heartfelt bracha for children.

"G-d wants to pour His blessings on you, but He needs a vessel to hold His bounty," I explained. "Making an increased commitment to keep the laws of Taharas Hamishpacha is the perfect way to make yourselves into keilim to receive Hashem's brachos."

Anna and Greg agreed, and I helped them draft a letter to the Rebbe, detailing their new resolution, and their desire for children.

It was nine months later that Greg called me, jubilant, to announce the birth of their beautiful new baby.

Now, every year on Lag Ba'omer, Greg messages me and says, "Don't forget to use your special power of brachos!"

Jenna*, another young professional member, had been told by doctors that there was a large chance she'd never have children. We invited her and her husband over on Lag Ba'omer and wrote to the Rebbe, including the fact that they'd taken on a hachlata for this. Jenna now has two beautiful, miracle children.

In England, and especially in Leeds, going to mikvah is a prerequisite for getting married by any Orthodox rav. However, many times, kallahs receive minimal guidance on this special mitzvah. Even if they somehow manage to cram in all the halachos in one or two classes, they miss out on the beauty and richness of this incredible mitzvah. I started offering engaged women opportunities to learn more about the beauty of mikvah and Jewish marriage, focusing on the unique power we have as women to create life and establish the atmosphere in our homes.

Vicky* was at one of our Shabbos dinners when the topic of mikvah came up. She told me that, for her, going to mikvah seemed impossible. After all, if she didn't keep all the halachos and harchakos perfectly, she'd contaminate the mikvah for everyone else!

I was shocked and upset to hear that she'd been taught this erroneous fact, and I made sure to impress upon her the positive aspects of the mitzvah, as well as the practical details of what exactly she needed to do.

Vicky was always perfectly dressed, coiffed, and polished, right down to her nails. She had a regular appointment with a nail technician in her home to make sure her nails were always done to perfection.

It was supposed to be Vicky's mikvah night, but she couldn't bring herself to cancel her regular nail appointment. She sat back in her chair as the nail technician began, trying to ignore the nagging feeling of guilt.

"I'm so sorry," the nail tech apologized. "I forgot my nail machine at home! I can run back and get it right now. I don't know how this happened. I never forget it!"

"Never mind that," Vicky told her. "I just won't have my nails done today."



Vicky immersed in the mikvah that night with nails free of polish. Within the year, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. She is now a mother to three beautiful children.

Charles, a member of our JMT committee, took a leadership training course, where he got the opportunity to meet Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, obm.

Charles, like many of his friends, was single, and having lots of difficulty meeting Jewish girls. He blurted out his frustration to Rabbi Sacks, asking, "What can we do to get more people to marry Jewish?"

Rabbi Sacks turned to him, and, with a telltale twinkle in his eye, asked, "What are you going to do about it?"

That inspired Charles to start a group called *Young Jewish Singles*. He organized two singles weekends, complete with kosher catering and us there as Rabbinical support, and we ran a third weekend together under CYP International. Baruch Hashem, these Shabbatons were very successful at producing many Jewish marriages and establishing wonderful Jewish families.

The Rosen's* connection with Chabad goes back a long time. After the birth of their daughter Mikaela*, they experienced secondary infertility. Mr. Rosen poured out his heart to Rabbi Cohen, a senior shliach here, who advised him to write to the Rebbe. The Rebbe replied to check their mezuzos, advice which Mr. Rosen followed immediately. They found one pasul mezuzah and quickly replaced it.

A short time later, Mrs. Rosen went to her doctor for some tests.

"Before we begin," the nurse said, "We just need to make sure you're not pregnant."

"Ha!" Mrs. Rosen answered. "I wish!"

The nurse followed protocol anyhow, and came back into the room with a smile on her face.

"I have good news and bad news," she said. "The bad news is we'll have to postpone your appointment today. The good news is, you're pregnant!"

Their miracle baby, Audrey*, was born not long later.

The Rosens continued to attend Chabad over the years, and Mikaela was an active member of our young professionals group. She was engaged to Jonah*, a wonderful, Jewish young man, and their wedding was fast approaching, so when I bumped into Mr. Rosen and noticed a somber look on his face, I was surprised.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

"It's Audrey," he sighed. "I just don't know what to do. She's off in Australia, living with her non-Jewish boyfriend. Mikaela wants her to be a bridesmaid, but Audrey insists on bringing her boyfriend along. I don't want to invite him!"

I sympathized with him, knowing how difficult it was for a proper English gentleman to betray even the slightest impropriety, let alone un-inviting a key member of the family.

"Audrey was born from the Rebbe's bracha," I told him. "It will all be okay."

Mr. Rosen refused to issue an invitation to Audrey's boyfriend. She insisted she wouldn't come at all if he wasn't invited. Just a couple of days before the wedding, Audrey relented - somewhat.

"I'll come, but just for the ceremony!" she said. "I'll do my bridesmaid's duties, but I'm leaving immediately after that! I won't stay for the reception!"

No one was truly happy with this solution, but it was better than nothing. In any case, Audrey ended up staying for the entire wedding.

Whenever I'm invited to a young professional's wedding, I do a "shtick" by the sheva brachos. I take the kos and announce that drinking its wine is a segula for a shidduch, and anyone looking for their bashert should come take a sip. I walked around, handing out some of the wine to those I knew needed it. I specifically made sure to include Audrey.

After the wedding, Audrey and her boyfriend had a major fight, resulting in their breakup. Audrey stayed in Leeds, and started coming to our events. Eventually, she joined the committee and made a firm decision to marry Jewish. Since Jewish boys can be hard to come by in Leeds, she went to London. It was there that she met Ted*!

Audrey and Ted are now happily married, raising a lovely Jewish family.

One of my guys landed in jail. Of course, I went to visit him, but after a few visits, the prison governor told me I could either become an official chaplain with unlimited visitation rights, or I'd be counted as one of the limited visitors he was entitled to each week. That's how I became a prison chaplain.

In this official capacity, I visit everyone who requests a meeting. One prisoner in a high-security prison had been arrested for terrorist activities. I was surprised

when I heard he wanted to see me. I'll admit that I was also uneasy about meeting with him, especially since none of the prison guards are equipped with weapons, and, since there were no complaints about his behavior, we'd be meeting in private, with no supervision. All I had was a whistle and a panic button to summon the nearest guard, at least two locked doors away.

While I contemplated a paper clip left on the table, wondering how much damage it could do, the prisoner unburdened his soul.

"I've been reading the newspapers, and I can see that Bibi and Trump have plans to build the third Temple in Jerusalem. I'm very concerned about the Al-Aqsa Mosque and what they plan to do with it."

Of all the things I expected him to say, that was definitely not on the list. I wasn't even sure how to answer such a concern.

"Well, when the Messiah comes, there will be peace for all mankind," I explained. "Everyone will be happy, and there will be no more arguments or disagreements. Also..." I hesitated. "According to our tradition, the third Temple will not be built by presidents. We actually have a song about it."

So there I sat, in a maximum-security prison, singing a children's song to an Islamic terrorist.

Way up high/In the sky/There's a building still not finished/Way up high/In the sky/It's the Mikdash Hashlishi/And for every mitzvah/That we do so carefully/Hashem adds a brick/To the Mikdash Hashlishi.

"I'm so happy you came," he told me with a smile. "Everything will be as G-d wants it, Inshallah."

And that's how a Muslim terrorist came to believe in Moshiach.

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