

Spirit!

MAGAZINE

FALL 2003 / תשס"ג

VOL 2. NO 1



Exploring Family Issues and Developmental Disabilities

Feature Story

What are we
Davening for?

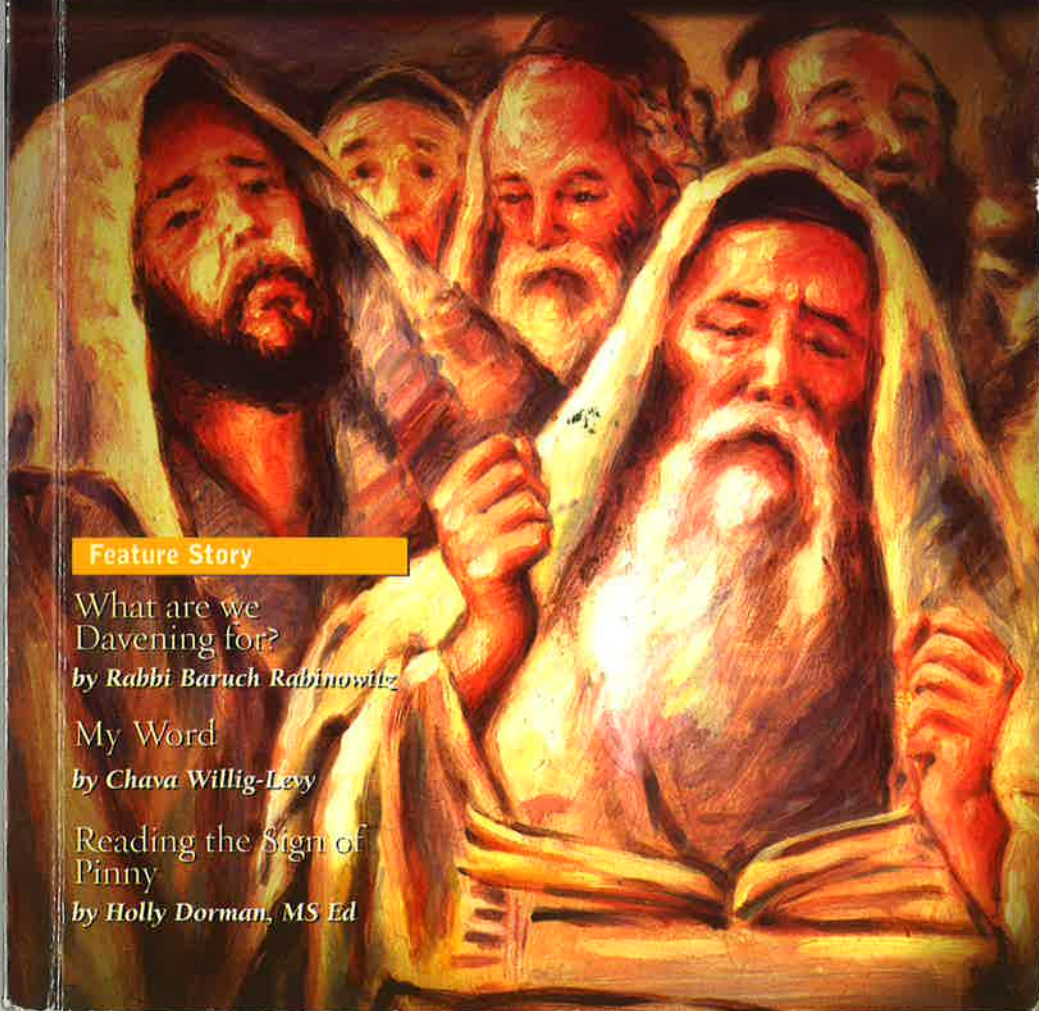
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A child's uneasy query triggers a mother's flashback of a suspicion, denial, and confrontation of the developmental delays of her older child. By providing honest answers, the author not only allays her child's fear, but together they gain strength and learn the joy of acceptance.

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Trust your gut feeling when it comes to your child's development. Never give up hope, but don't lose sight of reality, is the message.

by Judy Gruenfeld



False Hope/Perseverance: The Fine Line in Between

As the mother of an autistic son, who is now an adult, I have experienced the full gamut of emotions. First, you get that uneasy feeling that something is not quite right. You can't put your finger on it, but you know this child is not like others his age. You dismiss the feeling, telling yourself that every child is unique, (and, indeed they are). But way down, deep inside of you, the truth is festering and leaving no peace.

Then you think, Einstein didn't speak until he was four; Beethoven's music teacher told him that as a composer, he was hopeless; Thomas Edison's mother was told by several of his teachers that he was too stupid to learn anything; Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor who told him he didn't have any good ideas; Enrico Caruso's music teacher told him he had no voice at all; Louis Pasteur was rated as mediocre in chemistry; Louisa May Alcott was told by her editor that she could never write anything with popular appeal; Leo Tolstoy flunked out of college; and Winston Churchill failed sixth grade.

"So," you figure, "my child is in good company. He must be a genius. Besides,

he is only two years old." But the festering continues so you discuss it with your husband.

"What?" he says, as his male ego takes over. "There is absolutely nothing wrong with my son!"

"He's my son, too," you respond. "Please don't be so defensive. Maybe we should take him to a specialist."

"You're talking nonsense," your husband says as he stomps out of the room.

"Maybe he's right," you hope. So you put it out of your mind. But after a while the gnawing feeling in your gut resurfaces. So, you call your mother.

"Mom," you say, "something's not quite right with the baby."

"What's the matter?" she asks. "Is he sick?"

"No," you respond. "It's something else. I think something is wrong. He's not doing what other children his age are doing."

"Nonsense," says your mother. "His only problem is that he is too smart for his own good. You mark my words; he'll

by Judy Gruenfeld

grow up to be a doctor. Besides, Einstein didn't speak until he was four;

So you hang up the phone but the uneasy feeling continues.

The next time you go to the pediatrician, you express your concerns.

"Frankly," says the doctor he would be fine if you didn't hover over him so much. I think you need some help." Then he hands you the name and phone number of a psychologist and suggests you make an appointment to see him.

You walk out of the pediatrician's office fighting back the tears. By the time you have the baby safely secured in his car seat, the floodgates open up. It's obvious that there's either something wrong with the baby or there's something wrong with you, or maybe even both!

You make an appointment with the psychologist and you pour your heart out to him.

"Well," says the psychologist, "you definitely have several unresolved issues to work on. Come twice a week for the next three months and we will assess the situation then."

Three months go by. You forgive your mother for not buying you the doll you wanted when you were five. You forgive your father for grounding you the time you stayed out too late. You even forgive them for caring about you so much they insist you check in with them when you are on a date with someone for the first time. Dad was always there with his car keys ready to pick up his only daughter

at any time, and from any place. Mom was always awake when you got home, waiting to hear if you had a good time. Did they hover too much? Maybe. But with the help of the therapist, you are now able to forgive them for this, too.

In the meantime, Baby has not shown improvement. So you bring him to a child psychologist, who says he is fine.

"I must be crazy!" you think. By now there is a second child on the way, and you've been on an emotional roller coaster for so long you are dizzy beyond belief. You don't know how you will manage to get through this pregnancy, but you do. And, of course, you are worried about this baby, too. But *Baruch Hashem*, he turns out to be healthy, well adjusted and smart as a whip. By now your first child is almost four and you've changed pediatricians. When you express your concerns to this doctor he suggests you take your son to a pediatric neurologist, which you do. Finally a diagnosis is offered, Minimal Brain Dysfunction, or MBD, now referred to as ADD or ADHD. Alphabet soup for dinner again! Your concerns have at last been validated but you don't know where to turn. Since there is no Early Intervention, you enroll him in a reputable nursery school, where he succeeds through kindergarten.

In first grade, he is put in a special education class. At this point, he is seen by the school psychiatrist, who diagnoses him as autistic.

The emotional roller coaster that ensues makes the earlier years seem like a long, dreary ride on a boring highway.

I'm reminded of the joke where this guy gets the blinkers on his car fixed. He wants to know if they are working, so he tells his friend, "I'm going to turn on the blinker. You stand in front of the car and tell me if it's working."

"Okay," says the friend as he steps in front of the car. The friend looks at the lights and says, "It's working...it's not working... it's working...it's not working."

In our endless quest for stones unturned, we tried a nutritional approach, which had no effect. We took my son to a family who had supposedly brought their own son out of his autistic world. This, too, failed to "cure" my son. He attended several different schools, none of which met his needs, until I found one suited to his needs. With every new approach, my heart would soar in anticipation. With every failure I would become more depressed.

"Maybe this will do it," I hoped. "There are only so many years left until he is grown and then the dye is cast. There are times when I considered refusing treatment because I just couldn't live through another disappointment. But this was not about me. This was about my son and regardless of my feelings, I owed him every opportunity to reach his potential.

It wasn't until I went to one PTA

meeting that I was able to put things into focus. This particular PTA meeting was for parents of gifted children. You see, my younger son was in the gifted program at his school. All we wanted were "normal" children and ours were at both extremes of the spectrum.

The parents of gifted children at this PTA meeting were somewhat distraught because their children were not typical. One mother even stood up and, in tears, asked how she could deal with a child who was quicker on the uptake and knew more than she did. Not one parent at the Special Needs PTA meeting had been so negative.

"Excuse me," I interrupted, as I stood up. "My older son is in Special Ed, and the parents there have a much more positive outlook than I'm witnessing here. We were blessed with gifted children. Indeed, they are special gifts. Why can't we love them and accept them the way they are and do everything in our power to help them reach their full potential? They certainly can bring us a lot of joy."

It wasn't until I sat down that I realized what I had said. I had found the key that would overcome the barriers to my son's and my own achievements. I have learned to accept my situation today, even as I strive for a better tomorrow. This positive combination of facing reality without losing hope for a brighter future is an attitude which impacts on my whole life. And it does wonders for maintaining my sanity. ■

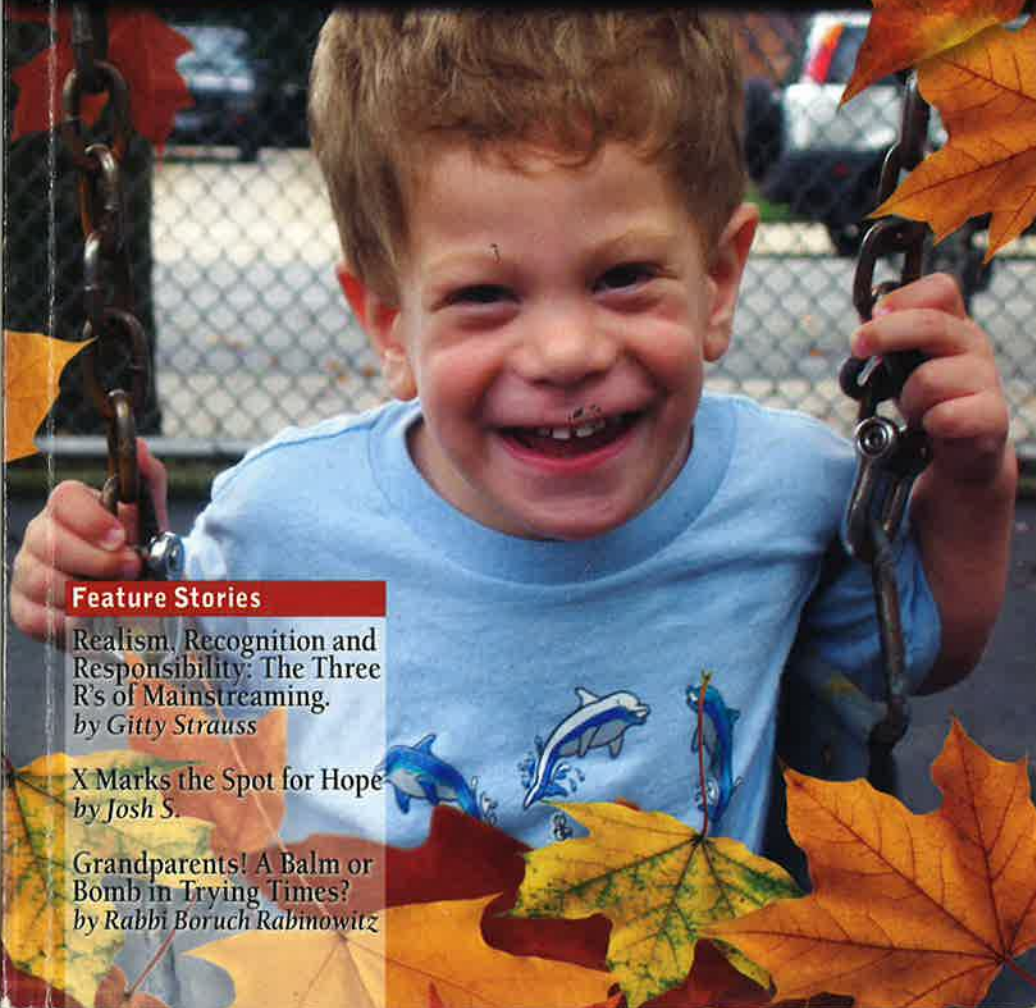
Spirit!



FALL 2004 / תשס"ד

VOL 3, NO 1

Exploring Family Issues and Developmental Disabilities



Feature Stories

Realism, Recognition and Responsibility: The Three R's of Mainstreaming.
by Gitty Strauss

X Marks the Spot for Hope
by Josh S.

Grandparents! A Balm or Bomb in Trying Times?
by Rabbi Boruch Rabinowitz

f the Shoe

If the shoe doesn't fit quite right there are many ways to accommodate any defects. The first remedy to cross your mind might be not to buy it. But this is not an option as the "shoe" was given to you by Hashem, the greatest presenter of gifts.

So, you proceed to the next option. Maybe you could give the shoe to a friend or neighbor; someone with more "flexible feet," so to speak. The neighbor across the hall is pretty agile. You're sure she can find a way to mold the shoe into something useful. She's done a great job with her own "shoes." But she still has a pair at home that she exercises with regularly. Another one may be too much.

Maybe there is a couple somewhere who have no "shoes" as yet and would welcome this very special one.

"But it's my shoe," your inner dialogue begins. "Hashem," you think, "Why me? I am very average. There's nothing special about me. No special challenges and no special talents or gifts."

"But, my child," says Hashem, "you now have **one** of my most precious gifts. You are special and I have chosen you. If cared for properly, you will get a lot of mileage out of this "shoe." And you, too, will do things of which you never dreamed you were capable."

With ambivalent feeling you pay for your "shoe" and bring it home, not sure what to expect or what to do with it. Little do you realize that you have just put down a deposit on your "shoe" and will continue to make long term payments, both



Doesn't Fit

By Judy Gruenfeld

financial and emotional, in order to maintain it at its peak functioning level.

The first requirement is to love the "shoe." It really is beautiful. Not like all the other run of the mill shoes, definitely unique!

Now you try it on. It's not very comfortable. It pinches here and there. It wobbles a bit. You're not sure how it looks on your foot and you're a little embarrassed to walk outside with it.

"New shoes always feel uncomfortable until you break them in," you try to reassure yourself. But in the back of your mind you know the road you must walk with this "shoe" will be far more bumpy than the road you traversed with your other "shoes."

As the weeks and months go by, you become more comfortable with your "shoe." You need to buy orthotics. The heel is a little high and needs adjustment. The laces need to be replaced, and it requires a lot of polishing. But, your "shoe," which you have come to love, begins walking on its own. It has a very unsteady gait and trips and falls a lot, but it is walking, nonetheless. It's very hard for you to let go and allow it to walk alone but you know you must. It is a very proud moment for both of you. And all your other "shoes" surround it and help it get up when it falls down.

And when all your shoes are lined up, examine them. You'll be surprised to notice, that as diverse as they may seem, each becomes a part of your wardrobe. "Hey," you think, "I didn't order these shoes, but they sure complement the rest of them!" ■



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Parent or Child?

From Crib to Chuppah; a Mother's Journey

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Parent or Child?

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Major-General Doron Almog has overcome daring military challenges in his career. But ask him about his toughest mission, and he'll tell you it's nothing he's done in the army. Raising his brain-damaged son is his greatest challenge by far – and the most important one in his life.

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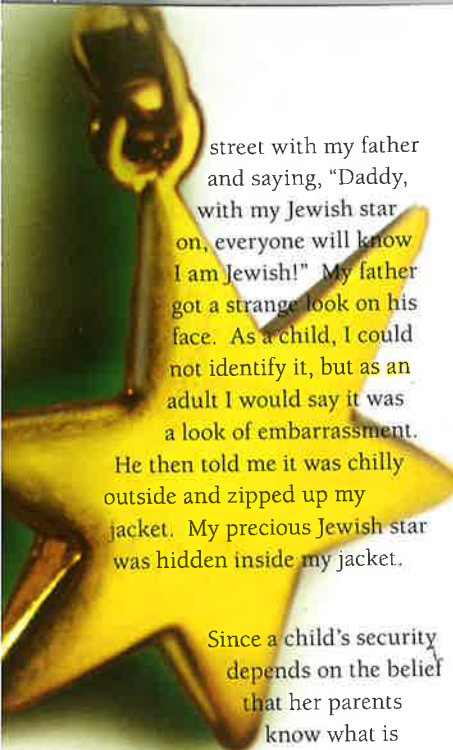
When the Bough Doesn't Break

We, as parents of children and adult children with special needs, have a special mission in life. The exact moment when we realize that we have been chosen for this mission varies. Sometimes, it is when the baby is born, and sometimes, it is when we realize that baby is not doing what other babies his age are doing. Whenever this realization occurs, we are not ready for it. "Why me?" we think. "What egregious sin have I committed?" "Why am I being punished?" We run from doctor to doctor, hoping to hear more encouraging words from the next one we see. But each desperate visit only serves to

confirm our suspicions. It takes a long time before we come to the realization that we are on a special mission. And a special mission it is, indeed.

I was not raised in a totally secular home. As a small child I felt a need to connect with my Creator, but my parents told me that G-d did not exist. When I was six years old, my aunt and uncle gave me a Jewish star for my birthday. I was so proud! I remember walking down the

By Judy Gruenfeld



street with my father and saying, "Daddy, with my Jewish star on, everyone will know I am Jewish!" My father got a strange look on his face. As a child, I could not identify it, but as an adult I would say it was a look of embarrassment.

He then told me it was chilly outside and zipped up my jacket. My precious Jewish star was hidden inside my jacket.

Since a child's security depends on the belief that her parents

know what is true and good

and right, I came to feel as my parents did. However, while I came to deny G-d's existence, I was totally and literally a lost soul. As a teenager, I began searching for meaning in my life. I investigated eastern religions, prominent religions in the United States, and almost anything and everything that would give my life meaning and purpose. There were several self-help books on the market and I devoured each and every one of them. I learned how to meditate. I learned how to twist my body into a pretzel. (I was much younger then.) I began singing songs of injustice and man's cruelty to man and animals (though horribly off-key). I stopped eating meat. I joined


a youth group and got a uniform and paraded up and down streets and avenues proclaiming to have all the answers to life's mysteries. I didn't then, nor do I now, know what that organization was.

I became more and more withdrawn as each of these paths led nowhere. However, the years went by, I met and married a nice Jewish boy, though obviously not religious, and settled down to live out the American dream. I had no idea that the dream would turn into a nightmare and that the very thing I was taught to deny would eventually wake me up, help me face reality, and bring a peace to my soul that I had never known before in my entire life.

I cannot speak for those of you who were *frum* from birth. I know everyone goes through the same anguish when learning that their child is not all that they hoped he or she would be. I suppose we all go through the process of questioning G-d in our own way, but the main thing is that we know He is with us on our journey. He is the source of immeasurable strength. Without our faith in *Hashem*, we could not get through the day.

My son was born on a beautiful day in May. He was, naturally, the most beautiful baby I had ever seen. Three days later, we went home and began our new life as a family of three.

By the time my son was two, his golden



hair framed two brilliant sapphires that glistened beneath a long forest of eyelashes. He knew the alphabet, could count to ten, and knew about six colors. His vocabulary was adequate, though his sentences were short and choppy. He definitely lacked communication skills. Eventually he was diagnosed with autism, a pervasive disorder that is characterized by the child rocking back and forth, hand flapping, head banging, and spinning of objects. As Ronnie became more and more immersed in his own world, mine felt as if it were falling apart. We did not know what to do, where to go, or how to help him. My parents lived two hours away, there was no early intervention at the time, and the support system that is available today was non-existent.

Bringing him to family gatherings was very difficult, at times. Everyone didn't understand, or try to understand. I was often told that I was spoiling my son, and that was at the root of the problem. But, I am pleased to say, we have all grown. Not just our nuclear family, but also our extended family. And those who didn't understand back then are Ronnie's biggest champions now.

Guilt also plays a large part in our dealing with a handicapped child. We certainly did not do this to our child on purpose, but the guilt is there, nonetheless. We have no problem being tough with our kids when they are in

imminent danger, for example, if they run into the street and a car is coming toward them or if they go near a hot stove. But when it's a question of giving in to their desires, the heart often wins when doing battle with the head.

Needless to say, we love our children and we want the very best for them. There is no question that we derive a lot of *nachas* from our disabled children just as we do from our other children. But, the *nachas* is bittersweet. Every smile seems to be accompanied by a tear. And this, of course, makes us feel all the more guilty. It took a while, but I have learned to appreciate Ronnie for the wonderful human being he is, without mourning the human being he could have been.

My son grew up to be a fine, sensitive young man. He now attends a workshop with other developmentally disabled individuals. He is a hard worker and derives a great sense of accomplishment from his work. He bowls, swims, reads, learns every week, uses a computer, and is more at home in the kitchen than his father. He makes the best rice pilaf I have ever tasted and he has his own indoor grill on which he can cook just about anything.

While Ronnie was growing, I was also growing. I had discovered *Yiddishkeit* and was grabbing onto it for dear life. As an adult, I decided that what might be right for my parents might not be

ht for me. I began learning *Torah* with an insatiable appetite, which, I delighted to say, continues to grow longer. Suddenly, I had a different look when it came to my son. I wasn't being punished. I was being chosen to nurture a special soul that *Hashem* had brought into this world.

ere is an expression, "Attitude is everything." When my attitude changed, my whole life changed. Instead of trying to stop the "bad" behaviors, I could encourage the appropriate behaviors. Instead of looking at my son as a punishment, I began looking at him as a blessing and a test: a test that I would pass with flying colors. Why am I being tested? I don't know. But what I do know is that my life definitely has purpose and meaning. This is not to say that every day is delightful. (And I'm not always in the mood to take a test). There are days when I say, as the old man in the joke once said, "Next time, *Hashem*, please choose someone else."

In many ways, it is harder for those of us who are still "raising children" well beyond the age when most adult children are already on their own. In the case of my son, he is acutely aware of what his limitations are and in many instances is very resentful. When I stop feeling sorry for myself, my heart really goes out to him. There are times when he is in a terrible emotional pain. He so desperately

wants to be like everyone else, to have a car like his younger brother, to be independent of his parents. There are times when he will tell us, "I don't have to listen to you. I am a grown-up."

It is very hard to correct him and insist that he do the right thing while preserving his self-esteem and dignity. It is a delicate balance that must be maintained. I often feel frustrated for both of us. This is where attitude plays such an important role. If I feel we are in a no-win situation, we will be. If, on the other hand, I make a point of emphasizing the positive, which, I must admit, isn't always easy, we all come out winners.

I am still not free to come and go as I please, as are my contemporaries who do not have children with developmental disabilities. My son must always be my first priority. But I do believe I have grown as a person, as has my husband. It is said that when you are put to the test you will either progress or regress, but you cannot stay the same. I have definitely found this to be true. And with *Hashem's* help, we will all continue to grow each day, as we take life one day at a time.

One of my great releases is writing poetry. It is very cathartic for me. On one particular difficult day, I wrote the following:



Your Sonny or Your Life

*My life I think I have neglected
But my child I have protected
As mother of a handicapped son
He was priority number one.*

*He's come so far; it's been so long
Now, it's time to sing my song
The house is quiet in the night
And poetry, I like to write.*

*Throughout his life my
son has soared
And now it's time to hear my word
The trouble is, I must confess
Inside my head lies a jumbled mess.*

*From years and years of day-to-day
I don't know what I have to say
My heart won't mend to my chagrin
Where does he end and I begin?*



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MAGAZINE

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Exploring Family Issues and Developmental Disabilities

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By Judy Gruenfeld

A young child with light brown hair, wearing a black kippah and a dark blue and red striped sweater, is sitting on a patterned rug and opening a large blue gift box. In the background, a silver menorah with seven lit blue candles is visible on a wooden surface against a dark wall.

The Chanukah Gift



T

he weather was reasonably mild for December. The forecast was for some snow flurries but it rained instead, much to my delight. We were due at a friend's house for a Chanukah party and I am loathe to drive in the snow.

So many memories came floating back in my head. When I was a child I got Chanukah *gelt* (money), not presents. However, in my husband's family, presents were exchanged for eight nights, and he insisted we do the same with our children when they were young. But, they are not young any more and now *gelt* would suffice. But, we did wrap presents for our friends' grandchildren, lots and lots of presents.

"Let's get going," I said. "We want to get there before all the *latkes* are eaten, to say nothing of the donuts."

"Relax," said my husband. "Did you ever notice a shortage of food in the Rosen house?"

"Mom's right," Ronnie chimed in. "There are also lots of kids there."

"Don't worry," my husband said.

"There will be enough food even for you. And, by the way, don't stuff yourself."

"Well, maybe just a little," Ronnie said.

"After all, it is a holiday."

"How are we going to get you to lose weight if you keep stuffing yourself?" my husband asked.

"Well, I lost seven pounds," Ronnie said.

"And how many did you gain back?"

"Only three."

"That's not good," I said. "If you want to be healthy you have to lose twenty pounds."

"I won't stuff myself too much," Ronnie repeated.

"I give up," my husband and I said in unison. So much for the obsessive/compulsive behavior that manifests itself in adults who were diagnosed with autism as children.

Half an hour later, presents in hand, we arrived at the Rosen's. After greeting everyone, our noses led us to the kitchen.



The smell of potato pancakes and donuts put us in a holiday mood and made our stomachs grumble. Mrs. Rosen had put food on the dining room table from one end to the other. Her pot roast is the best in town, as are her chicken, *kugels*, *kishka*, and every kind of dessert you can imagine. I must admit, my husband and I had a problem not stuffing ourselves. How could we ask that of our son?

We watched the children play *dreidel* and Ronnie joined them for a while. Then he began wandering through the house, as he usually does. We kept an eye on him at all times to make sure he did not get into something he shouldn't. He's pretty smart, my son; smart enough to get himself into trouble but not out of it.

By the time the children were finished playing *dreidel* and the adults were finished with their dessert, it was time to give out the presents.

Our host gave Ronnie a box that was wrapped with love and had a beautiful bow fastened on it as he wished him a happy Chanukah. Not one to stand

on ceremony, Ronnie ripped the paper off. Inside was a box of his favorite candy. But, something happened at that moment. He did not rip the box open to get a piece of candy. Instead, my son with Autism, which is associated with cold and uncarving emotions, stared at the box. There were tears forming in his eyes.

"Mom," he said. "We have such wonderful friends."

We all had tears in our eyes by then. Words from the heart do indeed enter the heart, especially when the heart is accompanied by a pure *neshama*. ■



By Judy Gruenfeld

On the Offensive

I was absolutely exhausted.

For some reason, I couldn't keep my eyes open that afternoon so I decided to lie down for a while. There was plenty of time before Ronnie was due home. I woke up with a start at four o'clock. He's usually home by three thirty.

"Ronnie, are you here?" I called out. No answer.

I got up and searched the house. Ronnie was nowhere to be found, nor was his lunch box on top of the refrigerator, where he usually puts it when he comes home.

I called the workshop. No answer. I called his case manager at home. No answer. I called the van driver. After four

rings, she picked up.

"Oh, my," she said, when I explained the problem. "I took a personal day today. There is a substitute driver. He must have gotten lost. I'll call the boss and see what I can find out."

"Thank you," I said, and then I called my husband. "Ronnie isn't home yet. There's a substitute driver and I'll bet they're good and lost."

"Relax," he said. "I'll be home in five minutes. I'm sure Ronnie won't be much longer."

"Do you think I should go looking for them?"

"Where would you look?"

"Good point. But at least I'd feel as if I were doing something. I hope they didn't get into an accident."

"If they got into an accident the boss would have told the driver

**"See, what did I tell you?
They just got a little lost."**



when she called.”

“I haven’t heard back from her yet. I don’t know what to do with myself.”

I was glad my husband was coming home soon but I still felt so helpless. All sorts of images started going through my mind and the more I thought, the worse the images got.

“I’m sure she’ll call back soon,” he said.

I began to imagine what parents are put through when their children go missing. It was unthinkable. After all the years of loving, caring and nurturing your child, to have him swept away by a deranged individual was not within the framework of my consciousness. Still, he was three-quarters of an hour late by now.

The phone rang. I picked it up immediately. “Mrs. Gruenfeld?”

“Yes.”

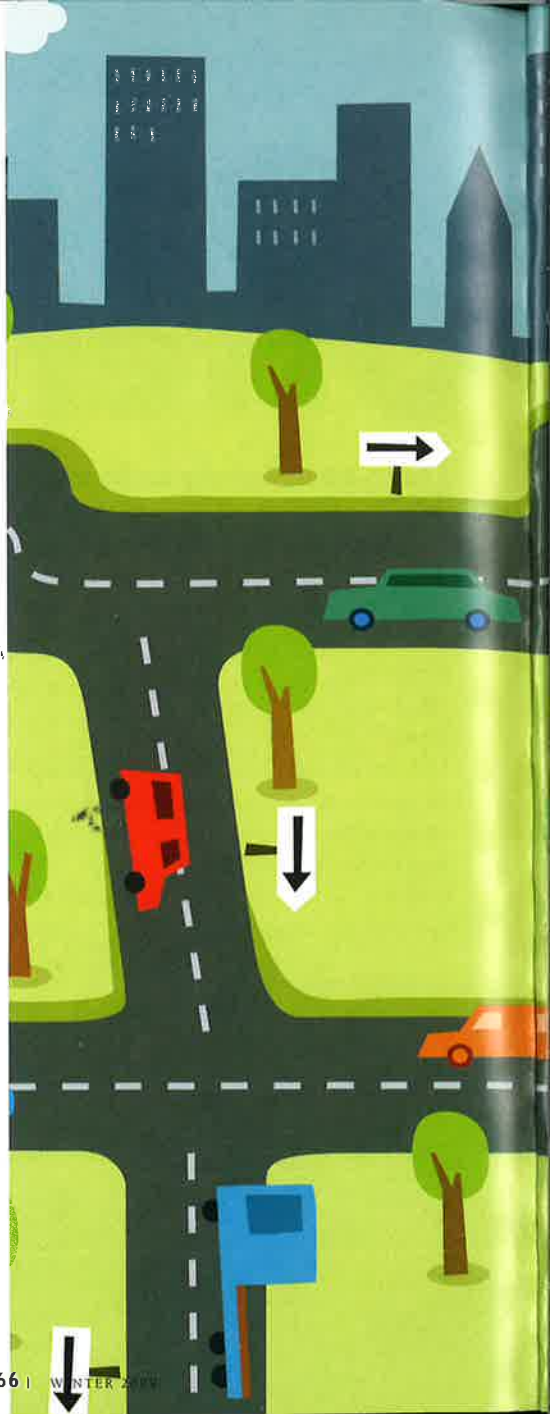
“This is the driver from the workshop. I just spoke to the boss, who spoke to the substitute driver. Apparently they got lost. There are only two individuals left on the bus and Ron is one of them. He should be home shortly. I apologize for the distress this has caused you.”

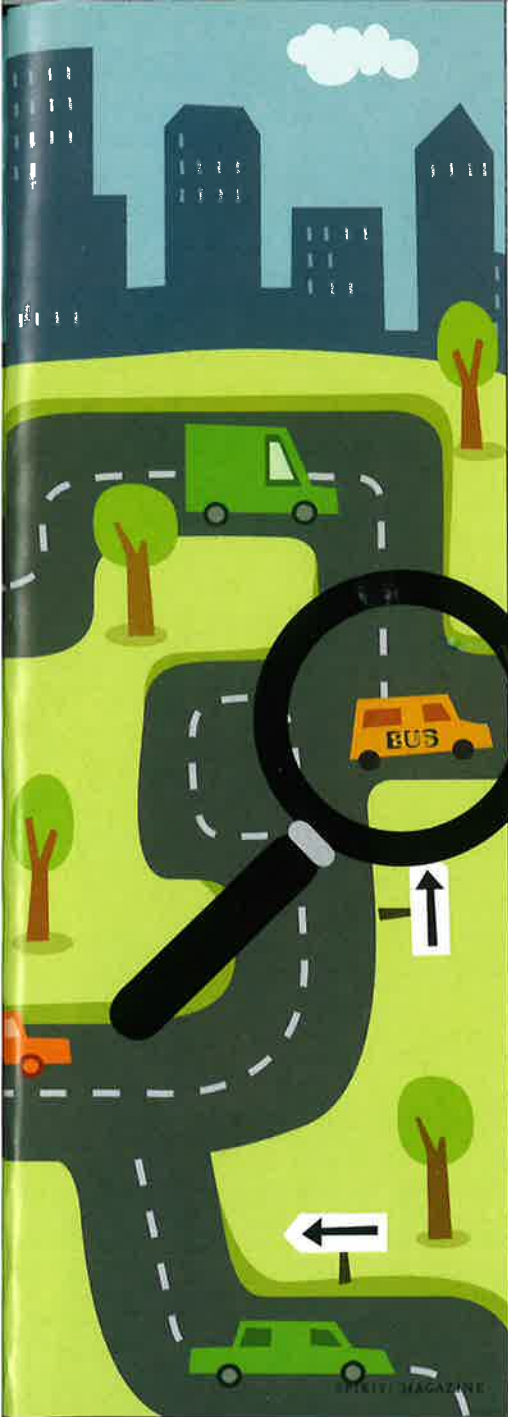
“Thank you so much for letting me know. I just wish someone had called to tell me what was going on.”

“I understand,” said the driver. “But, they never seem to tell us anything, either. Unfortunately, we are often as much in the dark as you are.”

“Not very comforting,” I said.

“I’m sure it isn’t,” she said. “You might want to take it up with his case manager at the workshop.”





"I think I will do just that," I said. "Thank you, again. Bye."

"Bye."

I was relieved but I would not be happy until I saw Ronnie walk through the door. I called my husband and told him what the driver had said.

"See, what did I tell you? They just got a little lost."

"A little! He's almost an hour late!"

"You might want to look out the window," my husband said. "I'm pulling up in front of the house and there is a big, beige van right behind me."

I hung up the phone. Window! Nothing! I ran out the door!

By the time I got outside, Ronnie was walking up the driveway and the van was heading down the street.

My husband and I both gave Ronnie a bear hug.

"What happened?" I asked. "Why are you so late?"

"Well," said Ronnie. "The regular driver was absent today and we had a substitute. He took a wrong turn and then he got very lost."

"I bet you know the van route by heart now. Do you know where he made the wrong turn?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you tell him? You could have saved everyone a lot of time and trouble."

"Well," said Ronnie, "I didn't want to offend him." ■



**My
Brother's
Keeper**

By Judy Gruenfeld

It was 3:30 in the afternoon. They were usually home by 3:30. I say "they" because this was the one year Ronnie attended the neighborhood public school that Kevin attended. We lived fairly close to the school so the boys walked. Needless to say, I was getting a little worried.

While I was debating whether or not to go to the school, my doorbell rang. It was Kevin's friend Adam. Adam was completely out of breath and could barely speak. He finally swallowed a few gulps of air.

"Mrs. Gruenfeld," he said, "there are some boys who are teasing Ronnie and won't let him come home. Kevin is trying to keep them from hurting him." Ronnie was ten and Kevin was six.

"You sit down and rest," I told Adam, and then I took off. Fortunately, I was able to run a lot faster than I can now.

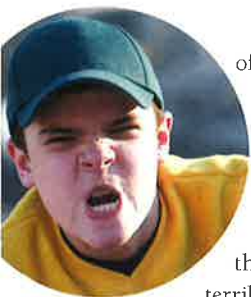
As I approached the scene, I was totally amazed. There were three boys who were considerably bigger than Ronnie, blocking the path and not allowing my boys to pass.

Ronnie kept asking, "Why won't you let me go home?" and Kevin was threatening to "beat them all up." When the boys still wouldn't move, Kevin started hitting the biggest of the three. Luckily, they all started laughing and ran away when they saw me. I would deal with them at a later date. Meantime, I was concerned about my boys.

"Adam came to the house to get me. What happened?" I asked.

Kevin said, "Those boys started teasing Ronnie and wouldn't let him pass." (there was a path in the woods that the kids took to and from school). "I sent Adam to get you while I tried to protect Ronnie."

"You did a fine job," I said. "I'm very proud



of you.”

“Why wouldn’t those boys let me go home?” asked Ronnie, “and why did they call me such terrible names?”

What did they call you,” I asked.

Stupid, retard, and baby. Am I retarded?”

Absolutely not,” I said, and you are a much nicer person than all three of those boys put together.

I don’t know why they wouldn’t let you come home but they obviously aren’t very happy boys and are probably criticized a lot at home. Do you know who they are?”

No,” said both boys. “What are you going to do?” asked Kevin.

Don’t you worry,” I said. “I will think of something. This incident will not be ignored.”

When we got back to the house, Adam was still waiting and breathing a lot easier.

Adam, why don’t you call your mother and ask her if it is okay if I take you for ice cream?”

A resounding “Yay” changed the tenor of the day. I think the boys enjoyed that ice cream more than any, prior or since.

The next day I called the principal.

“Do you know which boys were involved?” he asked.

“No, I’m afraid I don’t.”

He apologized profusely and then said, “You know what,” why don’t we have an assembly regarding the matter? Would you be willing to speak?”

“I certainly would,” I said. “Just tell me when and I will clear it with the boys. I wouldn’t want to embarrass them.”

The assembly was scheduled for the following week. I spoke to the entire student body from kindergarten through sixth grade about having understanding for those who are different from us.

It appeared that I was well received and

Ronnie had no further problems. As a matter of fact, several children wanted to befriend him and he became somewhat of a celebrity in the school. He never brought friends home after school as Kevin did, but our little school, in our little corner of the world, now has a zero tolerance policy towards bullies.

Oh, and the Karate lessons didn’t hurt, either. ■

I don't know why they wouldn't let you come home but they obviously aren't very happy boys and are probably criticized a lot at home.

Spirit!

MAGAZINE

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Exploring Family Issues and Developmental Disabilities

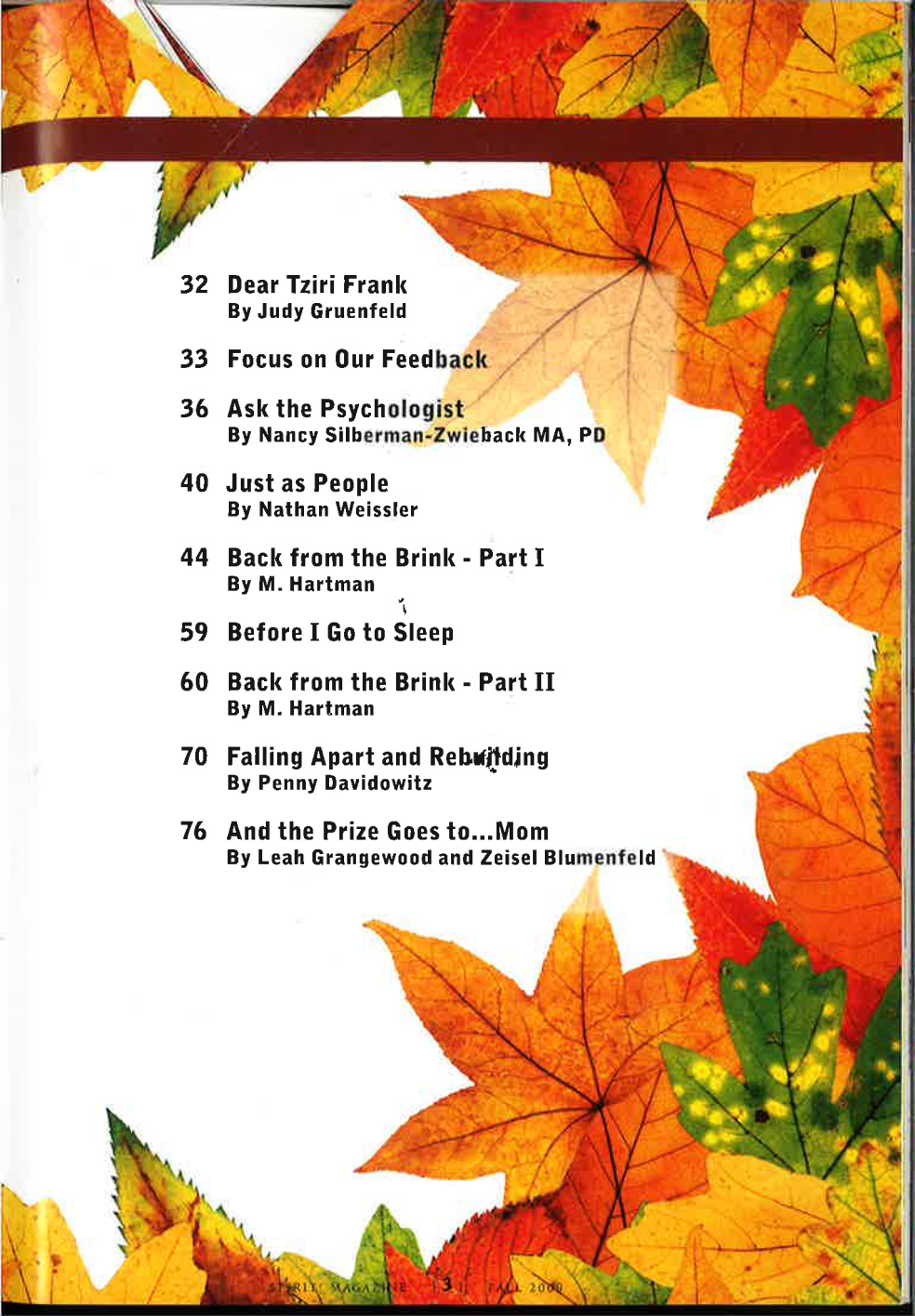
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Dear Tziri Frank,

Whole

*Of all you've gained...
a page tear-stained...
some of sadness,
some of gladness.*

***A special child,
pure, soft and mild,
came down to earth
when you gave birth.***

- Judy Gruenfeld

***But,
G-d had plans for him, you see,
no one knew what was to be...
oh pure of heart, oh pure of soul,
returns to G-d and now is whole.***

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MAGAZINE

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VOL 9 • NO 4

Exploring Family Issues and Developmental Disabilities

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When there is more than
One Child With A Disability
By Tzivia Ross
Reiter, LCSW-R

The Grass is Always Greener

By Chavi Gut

Care Notebook for Parents

A Great Tool for Every
Parent of a Special
Needs Child!

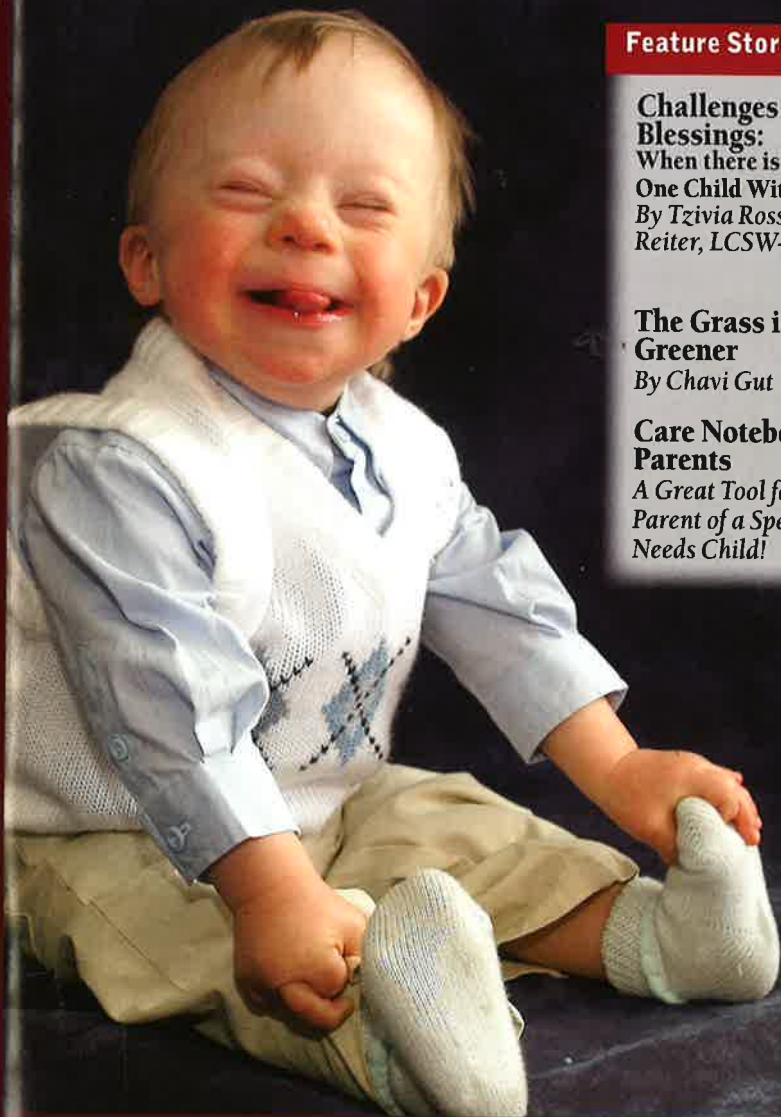


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By Judy Gruenfeld

Just So You Know

Just so you know...I wouldn't trade any of it...not the shock and disbelief, not the worry, not the sleepless nights, not the list of diagnoses until we zeroed in on the right one, not the difficulty dealing with people who don't understand, not the IEP's, not the uncertainties about the future, and not one blond strand of hair on my golden boy's head.

Ronnie has turned my life around, toward a direction I never thought I would be privileged to embrace. He has chosen my friends, all very special individuals, he has taught me patience,

he has shown me courage, and he has exposed me to a love that I never knew existed.

Just so you know...if I were to turn the clock back...if I knew then what I know now...I would not change a thing. But, we do have our difficult days and we are entitled to be a little self-indulgent once in a while.

Just so you know...it is normal to have an off day...it is normal to feel that at times you and your disabled child are tied together by...

Iron Apron Strings

A special soul this day is born,
Some say not whole, begin to warn...
of troubled times and future woes...
discordant rhymes, as baby grows.
The years have gone, replaced by wrath,
and tears upon an epitaph.
A self that's torn by brittle deeds,
and left to mourn, in pain I bleed.
My heart won't mend, to my chagrin.
Where does he end, and I begin?
Just so you know...I would not be me
were it not for Ronnie.