



*Tzippy
Remembers
When...*

BEING BULLIED AS A CHILD

From my earliest childhood, I remember being disliked and made fun of by my classmates and the *chassidische* girls on my block. One reason was that my parents were not typical *chassidische*-looking adults. My father did not have a beard or long *payos* and my mother did not cover her head. Another major problem was that I was very overweight as a young child due to my severe asthma. In the 1950s there was a limited number of asthma medications; there were no pumps or nebulizers, and I was treated with high doses of codeine cough medicine. This was a major drug that kept me very slow and sluggish, and I spent most of my early childhood doing nothing but eating and sleeping. This caused me to be extremely overweight.

When I started school at Bais Yaakov of Williamsburg as a first grader, most of my classmates were *chassidische* girls recently emigrated from Europe after the Holocaust. They saw my mother bringing me

daily and knew I was not in their league. First of all, they spoke only Yiddish or Hungarian, while I did not know one word of these languages. They also saw how overweight I was, and they made sure to let me know exactly what they thought of me.

“*Kook oiyf di grosse grube goyishe maidele,*” or in English, “Look at the big fat *goyishe* girl.” This was a song that they sang to me on a constant basis, and at least I can say I learned my first Yiddish sentence very quickly. At recess time the teacher would leave the room for 20 minutes and older girls would come in and monitor us. I remember one group of counselors came in with a whoopee cushion that they would blow up and it would make a funny noise when someone sat on it. Their attention turned to me and my extreme obesity, and decided to have me sit on it. The counselors laughed while asking me to sit on it, and I started crying in total humiliation. “Oh, come on, sit on it. You are so fat it will explode and make the loudest noise!”

I started to cry my eyes out and put my head down in total despair. At the age of five-and-a-half, I was heartbroken and my self-esteem was down in the basement.

My parents saved me by taking me out of that school in third grade. They placed me in Bais Yaakov of the Lower East Side, which had a more modern, Americanized student body. From being the

Tzippy holds up her 8th grade graduation diploma from Bais Yaakov of the Lower East Side. L to R: Aunt Shaina Ester Szmerkes, Chasha Rifka Ostrov, Aunt Sally Ostrov, Tzippy.



“goy” of the other school I became known as the *tzadekes* of this one. The reason I was the *tzadekes* was because of the modest dress that I had adopted from the first school.

By the age of eight, I had learned an important lesson from being in the previous school, and that was the importance of being unconditionally kind and loving to your classmates and friends, no matter who they are or what they look like. Those first three years of torture in Williamsburg gave me the education of a lifetime. I learned not to judge people by their looks, actions, or personalities, but to give them the benefit of the doubt. I learned to look at every Yid as a valuable gem. Some gems shine very brightly at a quick glance, but some need a jeweler’s eyepiece to find their special qualities.

In my years in Bais Yaakov of the Lower East Side I met children of all shapes and sizes, with different modes of dress, all kinds of parents, with different attitudes and dispositions. I treated them with love and respect no matter what, and together we blossomed and became the most faithful, caring friends.

I had a close friend who came to school very infrequently. She was from a broken home and lived with an elderly grandmother who would not let her out the door in the morning. The grandmother would tell her that she was a very weak, ill child. The winter would make her catch cold; the hot sun would also cause illness; the fall winds were bad and spring allergies were problematic. You can imagine that this girl managed to come to school only one or maybe two days of the week. Most likely, her bubby did not like being alone and used her grandchild as a companion. It was almost impossible for this girl to make any friends as the girls in the class barely knew she was there. I

made it my business to call her every evening and keep her posted to what went on in class. I’d tell her about all the things that happened in her absence and let her know that she was missed. This girl felt fragile and weak because of the way her bubby treated her, but she did pull through. As she got older she slowly built up her stamina and eventually met a wonderful man, and now is a bubby herself, enjoying lots of *nachas* from her children and grandchildren.

There was another girl who probably was the same size and shape as I was, but she was very quiet and not friendly at all. I learned that her father had died a couple of years ago, and her mother had already lost two previous husbands and had many children from each marriage. Her mother worked long hours to support them all. This girl probably over-ate due to her sadness from losing her father and not seeing much of her mother. When we got to know each other well, I found her to be a very special person. The last thing she needed was to be teased and hurt by others because of her size.

It took her time to reveal her friendly, kind side, as she also had been a victim of teasing in her previous school. Thank G-d, this girl grew up to be a very happy young lady, got married and lives a good life with her husband, children and grandchildren.

There was a very unfortunate young girl in my class whose father was the neighborhood drunk. Her parents were very poor and her mother came to school each day wearing tattered clothing that were



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Top, L to R: Bubby Bracha Ostrov, Tzippy’s mother Chasha Rifka Ostrov, Tzippy, Aunt Sally Ostrov, Zaidy Meir Ostrov, Cousin Barish Ostrov.

Bottom: Tzippy, as a child, at a family birthday party. Her mother, Chasha Rifka Ostrov, is seated behind her and her brother Yeshia Leib Ostrov is next to her.

totally mismatched. The girl herself dressed very poorly, and she was very withdrawn. She never kept up with the class, and just sketched with her pencil and pens and erasers, creating a wonderful make-believe haven that she surely did not have in real life. Most of the girls in the class ignored her and laughed when her mother walked in each morning in her mismatched outfits. We became good friends, but despite all I tried to do to make her life happier, there were many complications in her life that couldn't be remedied even by having friends.

We had a couple of fatherless girls in our class who were a bit on the wild side. Their mothers were struggling to make ends meet and they even came to school daily to work in the school instead of tuition that they could not afford. One girl, whom I will call Ronnie, was an only child. She was very limited in her knowledge of Torah and *mitzvos*. Her father had been murdered when he tried to defend another Jewish man who was being attacked by a robber. The regular girls would ignore them and considered them to be "stupid." But they weren't stupid, just disadvantaged. They never had any foundation in Yiddishkeit, no father at their Shabbos table, and a mother who was out working to try to pay the bills. As I got to know them better I discovered that these girls had wonderful personalities and we became life-long friends.

In my primary school days I was everyone's best friend, except for those who decided that they did not want to be part of my group. They felt that by being my friend they were lowering their standards. They only wanted to be part of a clique of smart, perfect-looking girls with fancy clothing. The truth is that

RESPOND LIKE A FRIEND

IZZY KALMAN

Mrs. Clapman's story filled me with admiration. She did not allow her experiences of mistreatment by her peers in her early childhood to turn her into a bitter person angry at the world. Instead, she used her pain to transform herself into an angel of sensitivity, saving other unfortunate children from torment at the hands of insensitive and even cruel children. She has undoubtedly earned a place of honor in *olam haba* a long, long time ago.

Human nature hasn't changed since Mrs. Clapman's school days. Children are still cliquey, and can be insensitive and even cruel. It would be wonderful if every classroom had students like young Tzippy to protect vulnerable children from rejection and denigration by their peers. Unfortunately, there will always be children without such *mazel* who have to fend for themselves. Is there anything they can do by themselves to avoid becoming a perpetual victim?

If we know of such a child, we can try to teach them how to deal with the painful situations they are facing. I have the advantage of having been a school psychologist helping bullied children for four decades, so I can't expect the typical adult to do this as well as I can, but I recommend using role-plays to show kids the way out of their dilemmas. [Visit nsheichabadnewsletter.com and click on Archives/Videos to see this acted out.] I put the child in the role of their insulters and I play the victim. First I demonstrate

the "wrong" way to respond to being insulted, then the "right" way. The "right" way involves treating the insulter like a friend. My preferred method is to respond to an insult with the opposite compliment.

One of the most common insults is about kids' weight. So I'll tell the child, "Let's say I'm overweight, and you'll call me fatso." It might go something like this:

Child: Hey, fatso!

Me: Don't call me fatso!

Child: But you are! Don't you look in the mirror?

Me: So I'm a little overweight. You have no right to call me fatso!

Child: Yes, I do!

Me: No, you don't! Shut up or I'll tell the teacher!

Child: What a baby! Now you're going to go tellllll!

After a while, when it's clear I'm not stopping the insults, and in fact they're only escalating, I'll give up. Then I'll ask the child to play again. It'll go something like this:

Child: Hey, fatso!

Me: You're so skinny! That's terrific.

Child: Yes, it is!



Izzy Kalman role-playing with a boy who will not be victimized by bullies.

those girls had the most problems of low self-esteem, because it would make them feel low to associate with anyone who was less than perfect in their eyes. These girls gravitated to girls who were mean and shallow, but as long as they looked good and were well-off, they felt secure in that circle. Girls with good self-esteem were more inclined to associate with everyone regardless of their “league.”

In my first year of high school, 90% of the incoming girls were newcomers from many of the Brooklyn yeshivos and Bais Yaakovs. Since I was one of the very few old-timers, having been there since 4th grade, I decided to make my mark.

I personally greeted each newcomer who walked into the door with great enthusiasm. I knew how nervous a girl can be entering a new school for the first time, worrying if she will make new friends and be accepted into the group. I made sure to give them a mini-tour of the place, as our school was a very large building taking up a full city block. There were around eight staircases leading to many different parts of the building, which was four stories high.

That first summer in high school, I was planning to work in a day camp as a junior counselor, but things did not work out as I planned. I was sent to a brand-new summer camp that my school had opened just that season, and I entered the second trip. There were very few girls entering camp for the second trip, and I guess the girls who were there from the first trip looked down on us as “invaders” of their cozy little turf.

I arrived happy and excited to unpack my bags after a long trip, but when I went to the bunk house that I was assigned, the girls in that bunk told me they were not sure they wanted me. “You see,” one girl said, “there is another girl from the other

Me: Yes, it is!
And the situation fizzes out very quickly. It is important to teach the child that the real reason they get insulted over and over again is not *because* of their difference or imperfection, but because *they get upset* when they are insulted for their difference or imperfection. No one is perfect, and we all have things we can be insulted about.

Here are some other effective responses to common insults:

Response to “idiot”: Well, I think you’re smart!

Response to “ugly”: You’re so pretty!

Response to “Your clothes are weird”: You dress so cool!

Response to “No one likes you. You have no friends!”: You’re so lucky you’re popular!

I hope you get the point. What happens when you respond to an insult with a compliment: 1. You are showing that the insult doesn’t upset you; 2. You are catching the insulter off guard, as they don’t expect such a response; and 3. You make them like you better because you told them something they like to hear.

It’s easy to help children who are attacked repeatedly with the same insults because they know what to expect and can be prepared. It is more difficult to help someone who is facing a one-time unpleasant incident, like when Mrs. Clapman was faced with bunks of girls who preferred to have their previous bunkmates instead of her, the newcomer. Nevertheless, I would like to show how a child might respond like a friend in such a situation:

Bunk girls: Don’t unpack.



We don’t want you. We want Rochel, from the first session.

New girl: I don’t blame you for wanting Rochel. I wish I had a different bunk to go to, but I was told I have to be here. I hope you’ll get to like me.

Bunk girls: We won’t.

New girl: Maybe not, but I hope you will.

As long as the new girl stays calm and lets the other girls know she understands how they feel, they will probably stop snubbing her, and will accept her before long.

In 2005, Izzy Kalman published a book called Bullies to Buddies: How to turn your enemies into friends. It teaches young people from age ten and up how to understand bullying within the context of human nature and how to make it stop by using the Golden Rule, Vahavta I'reiacha kamocha. The book was written for a general audience; however, in response to concerns from chareidim that some of the concepts and illustrations are not appropriate for them, Izzy Kalman is now adapting the book for a Jewish readership, working closely with Rabbis and relying on their guidance.

Izzy's daughter Lola, who did the original set of illustrations, is creating a new set of drawings.

Izzy Kalman visits the U.S. approximately once per year and can speak for your school or parents' group, teaching them how to decrease or eliminate bullying. Email him at izzy@bullies2buddies.com to find out when he is coming next.

Follow N'shei Chabad Newsletter on social media to stay posted re new developments about the book or about Izzy's visits to the U.S., or visit bullies-2buddies.com. -Ed.

bunk that we would rather have in our room, so we will find out if you could go to the parallel bunk.” When I got to the other bunk, the girls gave me angry looks and said that they did not want me taking that girl’s bed, and that I should not unpack.

This went on until late that night, with me standing like a misfit and crying from being exhausted with no place to go. It was not very flattering to have everyone telling me that they wanted another roommate and not me.

Things were finally settled, but for many years I had fears of sending my own children to the second trip of camp.

We in Chabad are fortunate to have the Rebbe, the consummate role model of an *ohav Yisroel*, who showed unconditional love to every Jew in the world. Whoever passed by the Rebbe for a dollar merited his complete, undivided attention. The Rebbe listened to all our requests and gave freely of his wisdom and guidance. The Rebbe’s eyes were certainly able to see the shining facets of every person who came his way. He taught us that every Jew has a piece of Hashem inside of us; no doubt our Rebbe saw our essence immediately.

We may not see as deeply as the Rebbe did, but we should certainly look at every Yid knowing that they are of infinite value and worth getting to know better. No matter what they look like or dress like, no matter what their disposition, they are created in the Image of Hashem. By relating to every Jew with unconditional love, we can certainly be deserving of the coming of Moshiach now. ●

Tzippy Clapman, RN, MS, FNP, lives in Crown Heights with her husband, Rabbi Yehuda Clapman, a certified sofer. Formerly a NICU nurse and now a provider in school-based clinics, Tzippy has written extensively for the N’shei Chabad Newsletter, always with the goal of convincing parents of the supreme importance of creating warm, happy, Yiddishe memories for their children. This is the 16th installment of “Tzippy Remembers When.”

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