

LETTER TO A SIX-YEAR-OLD

NECHAMA GOLDING



The author, accompanied by her mother, Mrs. Zeesy Posner, receiving a dollar from the Rebbe. JEM Photo #151029.

MAKING MYSELF BIRTHDAY PARTIES is not my thing. But last year, I just couldn't get the idea of making one for myself out of my head. I tried, but I couldn't.

The reason, I think, is because it was a *hakhel* year.

So this is my story about birthdays and *hakhel*.

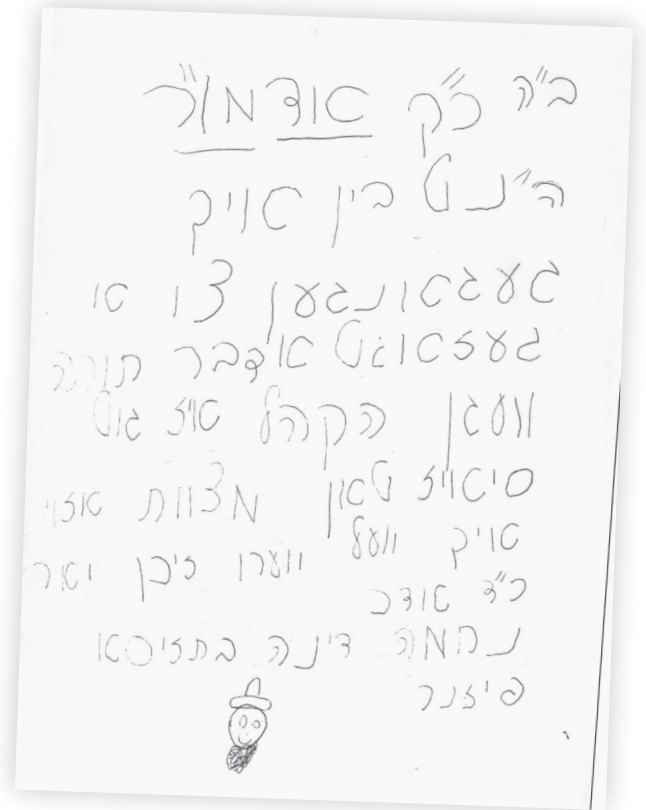
It starts with someone else's birthday party, when I was a little kid, six years old. The year before I'd gone to an afternoon preschool program attended by Jewish kids of all religious backgrounds, and gone home by van. Now I was invited to the birthday party of a girl I had met on the

van, who was not *frum*. I know that because I specifically remember that instead of the ice cream, or whatever the other kids were having, the mother of the birthday girl gave me little triangle cheeses individually wrapped, with a *hechsher*. I knew only the birthday girl, nobody else, at that party.

Before the party, my father asked me if maybe in honor of *hakhel* I would like to say a *dvar* Torah at this party, and that would make it a *hakhel* gathering. He prepared a very short *dvar* Torah with me that I carefully memorized. It



Nechama Dina Posner, age six.



Loose translation: Today I went to a [birthday party] and said a dvar Torah about hakhel; [that] it is good to do mitzvos. I will become seven years old on the 24th of Adar. -Nechama Dina bas Zeesa Posner

was probably just a sentence or two. Something like, “This year is a *hakhel* year. In the times of the Holy Temple, in a *hakhel* year, all the people would gather and hear the king read to them from the Torah so they would want to do more *mitzvos*. Now we don’t have the Holy Temple but in a *hakhel* year we remind ourselves that it is good to do *mitzvos*.” As my mother drove me to the party, she told me that I don’t have to say the *dvar* Torah, only if I want to. She did not want me to feel stressed.

I remember many parts of this birthday party—I remember that one game must have been some sort of candy or peanut hunt. I remember combing through the shaggy carpet with my fingers, looking for them. And then I also remember the triangle cheeses. And I remember the mother of the birthday girl asking if I want to say something,

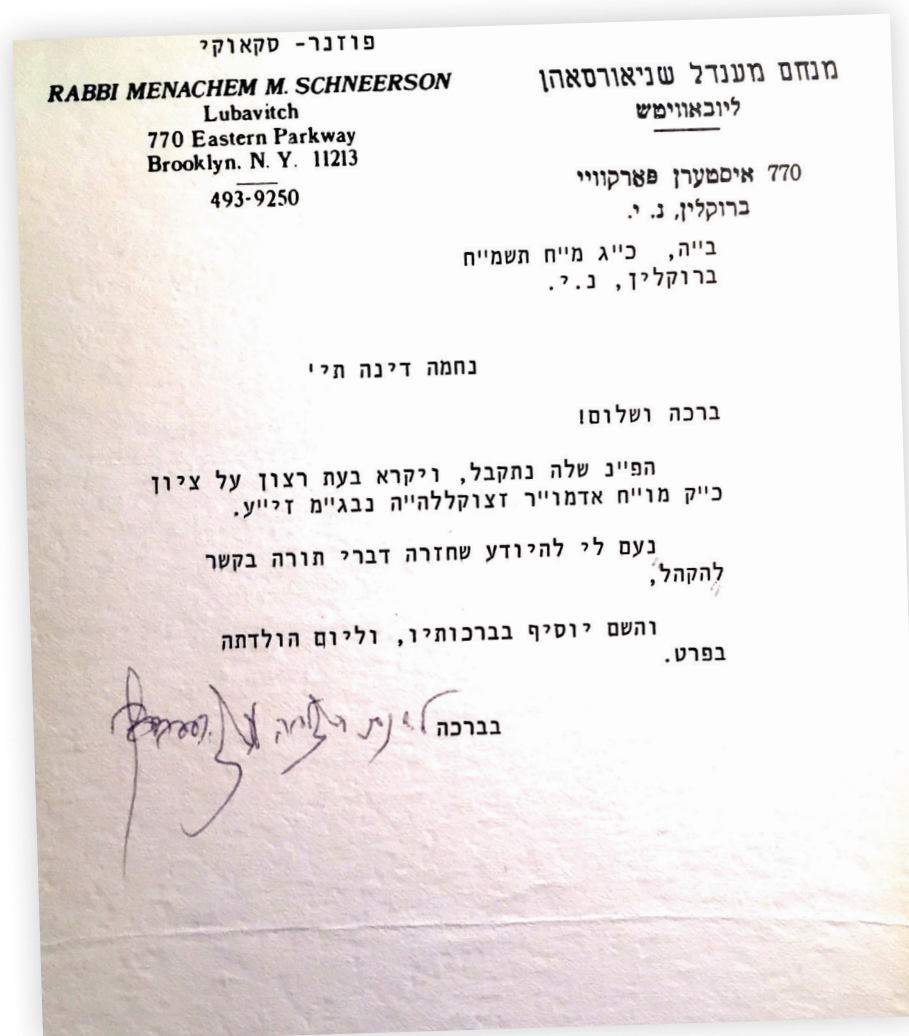
and this sort of scared-thrilled-stage-fright feeling.

And I said my *dvar* Torah.

After the party, my father asked me if I wanted to write a letter to the Rebbe about what I had done. I did so [see above], and that was that.

The next memory attached to this event was a feeling of huge excitement. I had a letter from the Rebbe. Even then I knew it was a huge deal. I remember seeing the return address, 770 Eastern Parkway, and thinking either I am very special, or I am in very deep trouble because why would this happen (which is something that I still wonder today)?

In the letter that I wrote to the Rebbe—maybe because I said the *dvar* Torah at another kid’s birthday party or maybe because I was six, so birthdays are always on-topic—I



Loose translation: To Nechama Dina... Blessing and Peace! Your pidyon nefesh was received, and will be read at a fitting time at the gravesite of [the Friediker Rebbe]... It pleased me to be informed that you repeated words of Torah in connection to hakhel. ...And Hashem will increase His blessings, and for your birthday specifically. With blessing, [the Rebbe's signature, plus the Rebbe's handwritten words "To a year of success"]

told the Rebbe about my own upcoming birthday. So in the Rebbe's response to me, he wrote, "It pleased me to be informed that you repeated words of Torah in connection to *hakhel*," and also added a line with *brachos* for my birthday.

That is why for me birthdays and *hakhel* are intertwined topics. So even though I am not really a party-making person, I could not drop the idea of trying to gather people for my birthday.

B"H, I live in a city with lots of friendly people. When I invited people to my birthday party/*farbrenge*n, they came. It was a great night. (And it led me to assisting my neighbor Rivka Fishman with her fantastic kids' book, "Sara the Bucket Filler," which you can look forward to reading more about in a future issue.)

I am happy that I fought with my nature and made

myself a birthday party last year. I am very, very grateful that my father encouraged me way back then to do something that was against my nature then too (and to my mother too, for giving me strength and confidence). Now I have this letter of the Rebbe to treasure and wonder about.

Now that I am a mother myself, one of my deepest hopes for my children is that they know they can make the Rebbe happy, on an individual level, and that their contribution is not anonymous. I want them to be certain of that, even though I can never arrange for them to get a letter in the mail addressed from 770—to the point that they might sometimes feel compelled to do things that do not come naturally to them.

We invite you to partake of our birthday supplement in this issue, and we hope it leads you to do good things. ❏