

My Whirlwind Chabad Trip

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Thanks to my article, “A Sane, Effective, Torah Approach to Bullying,” in the *N’shei Chabad Newsletter* (see nsheichabadnewsletter.com, Archives/2015), my wife Miriam and I embarked on a five-week speaking tour to North America this past October (we live in Israel). Rishe Deitsch promised me I would have lots of speaking engagements, and she kept her promise, made easy because she was able to bully her own children into booking me.

I will be documenting some of the highlights of our trip, but first I want to say how impressed I was by the remarkable growth of Chabad, its dedication to the spread of Yiddishkeit wherever Jews are to be found, and the warmth and hospitality shown to us by our hosts, who without exception made us feel like family members. Our stays in bustling child-centered Chabad families gave us more pleasure than we could have gotten from the most luxurious hotels. Neither my wife nor I are strangers to Chabad, but it was a special experience to be deeply immersed in so many different Chabad settings within such a short time.

It was interesting to meet many men who are successfully supporting their families, yet didn’t receive any formal secular education. I didn’t think that was possible, yet I discovered that in Chabad, it’s common.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who invited us into their homes, schools and organizations. Additionally, I offer my apologies to those who were disappointed by my presentations or interventions. While my aim is always to help, I can foster exaggerated expectations. I ask forgiveness if you feel your time or money was wasted.

Before describing the trip, I will discuss a few issues of a

At the Chabad Israel Center of Staten Island. L-R: Rebbetzin Chaya Segal holding Yisrael; Rabbi Nachman Segal holding Baruch; Izzy and Miriam Kalman.



psychological and educational nature.

About anti-bullying efforts

I would like to make a plea to those of you who have children in school.

I had the opportunity on this trip to speak to numerous parents, and an unfortunate trend became apparent. As a result of the teachings of the anti-bully movement, friendships between adults are being destroyed. It happens something like this: One

adult says to another, "Your child bullied my child!" The other insists, "My child is a nice kid. He/she would never bully anyone!" And before you know it, people who used to be friends get into a bitter argument and turn into enemies.

This trend is not limited to Chabad families. It's been happening throughout the modern world ever since it embarked on the campaign to get rid of bullies, but because Chabad communities tend to be so close-knit, these feuds can be especially damaging.





Ever since the anti-bully movement was ignited by the Columbine school shooting in 1999, I have been warning that it is going to cause more harm than good. Not only would it fail to reduce bullying among children, it would escalate hostilities between parents and the schools, and between parent and parent.

*The most dangerous social policies are not the ones that are obviously bad, but the ones that **seem** obviously good.*

When a policy is obviously bad, people simply reject it. But when a policy *seems* obviously good, they blindly follow it, even if the results are bad.

The anti-bully movement is probably the most popular social movement in history. The idea of eliminating bullies from society, and especially from schools, sounds so obviously virtuous that the entire world has jumped on the anti-bully bandwagon, and hardly anyone bothers to consider that there might be anything

wrong with it. Thus society adopts it with gusto, and when the policies for eliminating bullying aren't working, it concludes that the policies must be implemented more intensively. Whenever someone (such as yours truly) publicly criticizes the policies, anti-bully advocates pounce on them as though they are demons trying to undermine their saintly endeavors.

The anti-bully movement has been spearheaded by academic psychologists seeking to promote a political goal of "social justice," a nebulous term that sounds indisputably virtuous. In reality, this movement could be more accurately described as a witch-hunt.

A witch-hunt is set off by some kind of epidemic. Not knowing about bacteria and viruses, society figures epidemics are the work of evil witches casting spells. They conclude if the witches are apprehended and burned at the stake, the epidemic will end. However, since the epidemic is not really caused by witches, the

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Izzy Kalman and student role-playing possible responses to bullying.

community ends up destroying innocent people while the epidemic continues to spread. (Throughout history Jews have been a common target of witch-hunts.)

Because witches aren't easily identifiable, people start suspecting and accusing each other of being witches. And the reason the witch-hunt becomes so popular is that everyone thinks the witch is someone else. If people thought they were the witches, they wouldn't be eager to get themselves burned at the stake.

The anti-bully movement was born because of the epidemic of school shootings and further fueled by concern over bullying-related suicides. These tragic acts of violence are almost always committed by children who perceive themselves as victims of bullying. Therefore the academic experts figured that the problem must be bullies, and that if we get rid of them, then there will be no angry victims who will want to shoot up schools or take their own lives.

But bullies don't shoot up schools or commit suicide. People who feel like helpless victims do these things. By targeting bullies, we are focusing on the wrong problem. Furthermore, the reason everyone is so eager to go on an anti-bully campaign is that they think the bully is someone else. Thus we have the common phenomenon of parents who are in favor of getting rid of bullies becoming shocked and enraged when they find it is their own child who is being labeled a bully.

Meanwhile, the academic bullying experts have informed us that schools must guarantee children a bully-free environment, and that parents are to blame for raising children who are bullies.

So today, when a child is treated badly by another student, parents typically complain to the school that it is failing to protect their child. The school then gets busy following anti-bullying protocols and conducts an investigation to determine who the bully is and administer punishment. However, few people think they are the bad guys. Children and their parents are likely to claim they are innocent and the other is to blame. This often erupts into a feud between the families, with the school acting as judge. If the school fails to make both sets of parents happy—and judges rarely make both sides happy—the disgruntled parents become angry with the school, too.

Ironically, the bullying experts who have fought for anti-bullying policies and laws don't know how to make bullying disappear, for the research shows their programs have dismal results, yet they demand that schools be held responsible for making bullying disappear.

Therefore, parents, I implore you to stop blaming other parents or the school for the bullying your child is experiencing. It is not their fault. The school does not make students bully each other, and it is doing the best it can to prevent it. No parents raise their children with the intention of turning them into bullies or victims. You have probably discovered that our children don't always turn out exactly the way we want them to. We simply don't have that much control over them. There is an excellent

I noticed a striking psychological difference between males and females decades ago.

Izzy Kalman and student role-playing possible responses to bullying. To understand how Izzy's role-playing helps students respond effectively to those who want to hurt them, watch his video at nsheichabadnewsletter.com, home page.

chance that your own children at home are mean to each other on a daily basis and your efforts to stop them aren't working. Do you get into a feud with yourself because you can't make them be nice to each other? So why would you get into a feud with other parents because their child isn't always nice to yours? It is unfair and immoral. Parents should love each other even though their children may not be angelic towards each other.

And please, stop using the word "bully." It is not a diagnosis but an insulting, negative judgment against a person. The closest Hebrew translation of the modern academic definition of bully is *rasha*. Yiddishkeit, and certainly Chassidus, do not encourage us to think of anyone's children as *resha'im*. *Pirkei Avos* instructs us to judge everyone favorably. The modern instruction to identify the bullies among children in school is a violation of our religion. Would the Rebbe approve of labeling *Yiddishe kinderlach* as bullies?

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS

A few decades ago, with the advent of the women's liberation movement, it became common for academic scientists to claim that there is no real psychological difference between males and females. These scientists were letting political developments influence their judgment.

I noticed a striking psychological difference between males and females decades ago. When I first began my career in the late 1970's, I served as a psychologist in the school system in Israel.

I loved doing group work with children, and I ran a number of weekly group sessions during the course of the school year, some only for boys, and some only for girls. These groups were purposely non-directive, meaning I did not instruct the children what to do, but the room was stocked with discarded furniture and crafts materials. The first thing every group of boys did, regardless of their familial or socio-economic backgrounds or their psychological or neurological problems, was look for what they could dismantle and destroy. The first thing groups of girls did, regardless of backgrounds and problems, was to organize the environment and arrange constructive activities.

Fortunately, the boys didn't stay destructive. When they were done destroying, they would then embark on reconstruction. But the initial and seemingly universal drive for boys to destroy made a lasting impact on me. It is no wonder that warfare is an activity dominated by men!

Because this trip afforded me the opportunity to teach at several yeshivas in a concentrated time period, I was reminded clearly of the difference between boys and girls. In the boys' yeshivas, there was a constant need for the teachers and me to work to keep the boys quiet, still and cooperative. It seemed they thirsted for mayhem! In the girls' yeshivas, on the other hand, the students





were eager to learn and participate. Many girls, in fact, stayed after my lessons to ask questions, understand the lesson better and get further advice.

There is a need for both males and females in the world, and Hashem in His wisdom certainly created them different for a good reason. Chassidus teaches that our different natures help us fulfill our different roles. But my respect for those who choose to teach boys has increased tremendously. Their jobs are so much harder!

FLORIDA

My first stop was Southern Florida. Brooks Gibbs, one of our country's leading youth motivational speakers, has been studying and teaching my approach to bullying for about five years, and established with me the Golden Rule School organization

(goldenruleschool.com). Gibbs took advantage of my trip to the States to arrange our first Golden Rule School Conference on October 16, at which I presented to an audience of professionals, parents and youth in Boca Raton. Brooks also invited me to co-present with him at the Turn on the Light Conference in West Palm Beach.

The Golden Rule Conference was held on a Friday, so I needed to stay in the area for Shabbos. Rabbi Zalman and Mrs. Hindel Levitin, who run the Chabad House on Northern Palm Beach Island, engaged me as guest speaker at the Friday night dinner they provide for the Jewish community. The regulars greatly look forward to the combination of sumptuous home-cooked meal and farbrengen. For some, it is their only connection to Jewish observance.

I am happy to say that my presentation, “Turn Your Enemies Into Friends,” was well received, and I’m sure it was partially due to the delicious food the guests were eating while I spoke.

Zalman and Hindel were the most gracious of hosts. Since the one children’s bedroom in their home was occupied by one of their regular Shabbos guests who no longer drives on Shabbos, they put us up at the luxurious Brazilian Court across the street, a hotel frequented by former U.S. presidents. But more than the hotel, Miriam and I enjoyed spending time with the Levitins and their adorable children in their home. I did some of my role-playing shtick with them, and we all had a great time.

I also got to appreciate the difficulties involved in running a Chabad House in a location with few committed Jews. The Levitins traded the option of a life in a vibrant Jewish community for one where getting a *minyán* on Shabbos is a struggle, and where their children have only one another as friends. Granted—sunny, affluent Palm Beach is not Siberia, but life there nevertheless demands a great sacrifice from the Levitins.

The Levitins are looking forward to having us return, and hope to find funding for trainings at the Chabad schools in the region for my next trip.

BROOKLYN

My subsequent Chabad engagement was arranged by Mrs. Chanel Lipskier and Mrs. Dvora Lakein of the Beis Medrash Women’s Circle in Crown Heights, and co-sponsored by the *N’shei Chabad Newsletter*. I presented my approach to bullying to a packed house.

In the following days I met with a few classes in Oholei Torah, teaching 2nd and 3rd grade boys how to use the principle of *v’abavta l’reiacha kamocho* to handle bullying on their own. I hope the little *talmidei chachamim* got some ideas that will stick with them. To be honest, presenting to rooms full of rambunctious seven- and eight-year-old boys is challenging. Girls are so much easier!

My friend Rabbi Avraham Frank took advantage of my trip to schedule a board meeting of A Moment of Silence (AMOS) organization. Avraham created this organization to fulfill the Rebbe’s wish that all schools implement a moment of silence at the beginning of the school day. I have written up a psychological groundwork for this activity and been promoting it for the past few years. The meeting was held at the home of the eminent Chabad physician, Dr. Robert Feldman, who serves on the Board of Directors of AMOS.

MONTREAL

Mrs. Rivka Lison, on behalf of The Parent Network of the Beth Rivka Elementary School for girls in Montreal, made the arrangements to have me come, and Rabbi Pinny and Mrs. Dini Gniwisch volunteered to provide accommodations for us. What struck me most about their home was the extremely long dining room table. Pinny simply loves instilling youth with Yiddishkeit, and they always have a crowd over for Shabbos meals.

And what a neighborhood! I knew there was a strong *frum* community in Montreal, but this looked like another Crown Heights—a working-class neighborhood dominated by Chabad

chassidim coexisting with mostly non-European ethnic groups.

The Beth Rivka girls’ school is housed in a modern, spacious building with extensive facilities for educational enrichment and special services that would make most Jewish schools envious. The staff effuses love for the students and the desire to do the best for them.

In the evening, I conducted a workshop on bullying to the parent body, and was impressed by the number of parents that showed up. It was one of the largest parent groups I had ever addressed. The adults who volunteered to role-play with me were terrific actors and helped make the program exceptionally entertaining.

Tuesday I spent at the Tomchei Temimim yeshiva for boys, where I was again struck by the dedication of the *rebbeim*, as well as with the greater challenge of teaching boys than girls. Whatever the *rebbeim* are getting paid, they deserve more!

BUFFALO

After the boys’ yeshiva in Montreal, we were off for the long drive to Buffalo, where principal Rabbi Shmuel Shanowitz had invited me to present to the students and staff of Ohr Temimim School. It is a lovely yeshiva for boys and girls and because of the relatively small student body it really feels like a family, with Rabbi Shanowitz and his wife as the parents.

After my presentation, a few of the 8th grade girls requested extra time with me to ask more questions about solving social problems. Where would the world be without girls who seek to make it a better place?

May Ohr Temimim—and the Jewish community of Buffalo—be blessed with a growing enrollment. They deserve it!

TORONTO

Next stop, Toronto, where Principal Rabbi Yaacov Vidal invited me to the Bais Chaya Mushka elementary school for girls on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning. On Thursday evening, I gave a presentation at the Chabad Center in Thornhill to parents of both the Shmuel Zahavy Cheder Chabad and Bais Chaya Mushka.

Of all the principals I met on my trip, the one I had the opportunity to get to know the best is Rabbi Vidal. I am not trying to play favorites here, but he simply was the one who spent the most time with me, not only consulting with me at the school, but also at his home, where he invited us for Friday night dinner. Rabbi Vidal greatly impressed me with his desire to give the school the best environment possible. He had begun working in the school only in the beginning of this school year, and his dedication is remarkable. He stays up late at night, especially on Thursdays, when he drives to the school to prepare the weekly newsletter.

My wife and I wanted to spend Shabbos in a Chabad environment, so Mrs. Faigy Vidal arranged to have us stay at the house of their neighbors, a family with five incredibly cute children.

Married for 15 years, the couple had fruitlessly invested fortunes of money on medical efforts to conceive. Then the husband read a letter from the Rebbe to someone struggling with infertility in which the Rebbe advises daily *Chitas*. He began doing it,

and one year later they had a girl, followed by two sets of twins. The *simchas chaim* the family displays is unforgettable. The couple loves playing, singing, dancing, learning and just being with their children. While most of us come to take our children for granted, they obviously experience their children as the greatest gift for which they are unceasingly grateful to Hashem.

I must say something about the Toronto Jewish community. If you are looking for a nice place to live and enjoy cold weather, Toronto is a place you must consider. The Chabad community is huge, and they are concentrated in a beautiful neighborhood. The magnificent houses are all brick and the streets are spotless. There are Jewish supermarkets and stores, lots of shuls, *shtieblach* and schools. The main Chabad center is in a large, modern building with the address of 770 Chabad Gate! If you decide to move there, tell people I sent you!

MICHIGAN

From Toronto, it was off to West Bloomfield, a heavily Jewish suburb of Detroit. Rabbi Shneur and Mrs. Zeesy Silberberg scheduled me to do a workshop entitled “Anger Control Made Easy” for the Jewish Women’s Circle. Again, a packed house. These Chabad women should work in public relations; they’d make a fortune. We had a great time, especially enjoying (and learning from) a role-play with a woman who just wanted her husband to change (that’s all).

While playing Jewish Geography with the Silberbergs, I realized I had known Zeesy’s father-in-law, Rabbi Elimelech Silberberg, when he was a child. We attended the Lubavitcher Yeshiva of the Bronx at the same time half-a-century ago.

After the workshop, we took off for a three-hour drive to my last stop, Muskegon, Michigan, where I was hired to do full-day presentations to inmates at two prisons (not Chabad organizations). Mary Berghuis, who had served for decades as the Warden of the neighboring Brooks and West Shoreline Correctional Facilities, attended my seminar a few years ago, and jumped on the opportunity to bring me when she heard I was coming to the States.

From what I’ve learned of prisons, few of them today actually deserve the title of “correctional” facilities. They have become more about punishing than correcting. However, Warden Berghuis has truly sought to reform the inmates under her charge, and for years has been introducing programs to help them become better people.

I had often wished for an opportunity to present my approach in a prison setting. While I have had prison mental health professionals who attended my seminars inform me later that my approach helped them in their jobs, I had never addressed a prison population. Finally, thanks to the Chabad tour, my wish came true.

In my first session, I had neglected to adequately clarify the limits of what I am presenting and after about 30 minutes I ran up against a barrage of skepticism. The biggest skeptic was someone I soon learned goes by the name of “Tattoo,” as his body is entirely covered with tattoos, including his shaved head. After a while, a tall bearded African-American inmate stood up and

said, “The man came here to teach. Let’s give him a chance.” Fortunately, they listened to him, and I was able to continue uninterrupted.

At one point, I wanted to demonstrate that my approach could work with insults about one’s race or religion, something that is considered the biggest no-no in modern society. I announced that I wanted a volunteer to come up and insult me for being a Jew. Who do you think jumped at the opportunity? You guessed it. Tattoo.

When he began insulting me, I began doing what comes naturally: I treated him like an enemy, getting angry and defensive. Of course, Tattoo had a great time and went on a roll insulting me. Then we did it over again, and I treated him like a friend. After a while, he stopped insulting me and said, as though thinking aloud to himself, “Hey, now we’re talking!” [To understand Izzy Kalman’s method better, view the video “Victim-Proof Your School—How to Turn Enemies Into Friends” on nsheichabad-newsletter.com’s home page.—Ed.]

From my biggest skeptic, Tattoo turned into my most enthusiastic supporter and volunteered for another couple of role-plays in the course of the presentation.

I am happy to say that at the end of my presentations at each prison, the prisoners lined up to shake my hand. (I think the Rebbe would have been proud of me!)

My work at the prisons was over around noon on Thursday, and then we faced the most daunting portion of our trip—the twelve-hour drive from Muskegon to Staten Island, as we wanted to get back in time for Shabbos.

We made a brief stop in West Bloomfield to meet with the son of one of the women who had attended Zeesy Silberberg’s event. She wanted me to meet with him because he had been bullied most of his school career. I found him to be a terrific “student,” smart and talented, who thoroughly got what I taught. Several days later he informed me that his school experience had greatly improved. I wish I had such dramatic success with everyone I worked with!

We got back to Staten Island in time to enjoy a great last Shabbos with our “family” at the Chabad Israel Center (which was home to us before we made *aliyah*), led by Rabbi and Mrs. Nachman Segal.

My work wasn’t completely over yet. I had been contacted by Rabbi Menachem Vail, vice-principal of the Darchei Menachem School for boys in Brooklyn, who wanted me to do a workshop for the staff. The only opportunity left was Sunday, the day before our flight back to Israel. So I left the brunt of the packing burden to Miriam and went off to Darchei Menachem. I was grateful that Rabbi Vail let me know recently that the workshop was worthwhile and had come to good use.

May the Rebbe’s followers continue their spectacular work, and I hope to be able to come for another such tour in the not-too-distant future. ■

To get on the list for Izzy’s next tour, planned for November 2016, email izzy@bullies2buddies.com.