

MORE than the EYE CAN SEE



When Lieba Schwartz began writing for the *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* 25 years ago, she was totally blind, and trying to see what was really important in life. After years as a high-ranking member of a church, *R"l*, she read two books, *Toward a Meaningful Life* by Rabbi Simon Jacobson and *Holy Days: The World of the Hasidic Family* by Lis Harris.

These two books inspired to find her *pintele Yid*. Slowly, she began practicing Torah and *mitzvos*, and eventually moved to Crown Heights. And so Lieba titled her articles "More Than the Eye Can See."

The *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* has now collected all seven of her articles, including the story of how she regained her eyesight after many years of blindness (excerpted here). These seven articles, now in book form but with their original *NCN* layouts and photos (for the nostalgic among us), are now available on Amazon for \$9.95. Buy the book, *More Than the Eye Can See*, today! It's good, wholesome Pesach reading material for all ages.

Lieba's gratitude to the people of Crown Heights, especially the children, is heartwarming, and her writing style is fast-moving and humorous.

Lieba passed away on 13 Sivan 5782 (June 12, 2022) at the age of 82. We hope her book serves as a lasting tribute to a woman who never stopped seeing more than the eye can see, and who tried her best to be cheerful and positive despite setbacks and health challenges that would make most people rather cranky. -Ed.

THE FINAL CHAPTER

LIEBA SIMCHOVITZ SCHWARTZ



Lieba
(then known
as Marcia)
Schwartz
as a child.

something genetically wrong with my eyes and it was inoperable. This was back in 1983. I was 43 years old.

I took the rest of the day off work. There were some big decisions to make. Okay, I was going to be blind for the rest of my life. I had two choices: stay at home, become an invalid, and feel sorry for myself that I am blind, have no family, and soon no job.

Or I could hold onto Lieba and not let anything get in the way of her fulfilling her mission. I decided I would hold onto my joy, insight, love, and abilities. I would find new ways to accomplish tasks and learn how to see through the challenges (no pun intended). I would laugh about it and live above it.

How? Well, the manna fell from heaven one day at a time, so I decided to take it one day at a time. First, I phoned the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind. No, they could not offer me any help until I was legally blind (about six months down the road).

So, I had to prepare myself: When I heard a blind person tapping his cane along Huntington Avenue, I approached him and asked if he would teach me how to use the cane. "I will pay you \$10 an hour if you teach me how to use that thing," I begged. Within one week I was on my own and thanks to the cane I was no longer falling off curbs I did not see or walking into glass doors that had become invisible.

I also decided to cram everything I could into a few months, not just to prepare to be a blind person but to achieve certain goals: I learned how to pilot a plane and I parachuted out of one, took a photography course, and even swam with the dolphins.

About six months later the government examined my eyes again, sending me to three of their experts. All agreed: totally blind, genetic, and inoperable.

I tried to learn Braille, but could not feel the dots, so I devised my own method of survival.

The dreary Boston weather was a mirror of that entire day: overcast, a steady fall drizzle that is just annoying enough that you need an umbrella, the fog so thick you could barely see the Charles River. As I drove downtown, I did not feel comfortable. Well, thought is a magnet and negativity hinders receptivity, so of course the elevator to the ophthalmologist's office was broken and I had to schlep up seven flights of stairs.

The young-ish doctor wheeled his chair next to the examination chair I was sitting in and asked, "Tell me, Miss Schwartz, what is your family history?"

"Well..." I hesitated. "My grandmother and mother both went blind in their sixties, I think; I am not sure when my great-grandmother went blind."

He did not say anything but looked down at the floor. I continued, "And I assume I am going blind in my forties?"

Correct. Bottom line was that there was

Example: I recorded on small cassette tapes what color dress was on each hanger, then put each tape on the appropriate hanger, so I could find the right clothes. I also purchased talking clocks, watches, calculator, and microwave. I trained myself to count the steps to the front door of the apartment building, and to feel my way to the correct mailbox.

It was a great challenge. I could do everything I used to do, just needed to find a different way to do it. And there were many positives to not being sighted. For example, I have always loved being close to people both emotionally and physically (hard for me to resist a hug). Now I found myself holding onto a friend's arm as she would guide me in the street. I always loved and appreciated music and began appreciating voices, which the Alter Rebbe describes as "the pen of the soul," as a special kind of music.

Also, I could not be distracted by the *gashmius*. When I met you, I did not know if you were wearing 18K gold or plastic; when I visited you I did not know if you lived in a mansion or a shack. Coming into Chabad as a blind person was wonderful. Who cares if someone is tall or short, fat or thin, wealthy or poverty-stricken? What difference does it make? I learned to see only the *neshamah*. For some people it is a huge undertaking to not judge by outer appearance. For me it was the only way possible.

Sixteen years later (years that loyal readers of the *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* know all about from my previous six articles), I moved to Crown Heights. As soon as I arrived word spread that I needed someone to help me with my mail. Chanie Rothman, whom I had met several years before when visiting Crown Heights, made about a zillion phone calls and finally found someone who said she would love to read me my mail every Sunday morning. Problem: "I have a three-year-old," she explained to me on the phone.

"Oh, bring her," I exclaimed (I LOVE children and, quite frankly, prefer them to adults), "I will buy her a coloring book and an etch-a-sketch so she can play while you read my mail to me."

I could hardly wait, not so much to get the

mail read but to meet three-year-old Mirel, with whom I became instant best friends. Sensitive to my situation, she quickly learned to not move anything (I have it all memorized and if you move anything you have to return to the scene and find it for me), to answer "yes" or "no" and not just nod your head and to never stand in front of me unannounced or I would trip over you.

How do you explain blindness to a three-year-old? "Close your eyes; what do you see?" I asked. "It's BLACK," said Mirel. "Well, that is what I see all the time," I explained. She got it.

How I looked forward to Sundays with Mirel (no relation to Tuesdays with Morrie). Her every wish became my command, much to the surprise of her mama who did not know how an older single woman who never had siblings or children would react to a typical three-year-old. (I am really not capable of being objective about that little girl; I just love her too much.)

Several times Mirel brought her cousin Zeesy on Sunday mornings and would instruct her about the life of a blind lady. "Now don't move anything, and don't be too noisy while my mother is reading the mail, and don't stand right in front of her..."

Mirel's mama confided to me that after Mirel would light her little Shabbos candle she would continue praying. Not for a new bike. Not for pretty jewelry. Not to be mommy's favorite or to get her way. After lighting the candle and saying the *brachah*, she would add, "Hashem, please help Lieba to see." (Be still, my heart!)

Adults see limitations. Children see possibilities. I had never *davened* for sight. I reasoned that if this is what the Aibershter had given me it was for a very good purpose and

Adults see limitations. Children see possibilities. I had never *davened* for sight. I reasoned that if this is what the Aibershter had given me it was for a very good purpose and I was determined to hold onto my *simchah*.



Lieba with some of her girls.

I was determined to hold onto my *simchah* despite the obvious challenges, not be a burden to anyone, be as independent as possible, and go around the country giving talks about how a blind lady becomes and stays *frum*.

Mirel's mama never *davened* for me to recover my sight either. Quite frankly, she told me she felt this would be a waste of a good prayer opportunity, since it was genetic and inoperable. She tried to tell Mirel that Lieba was blind permanently and had accepted it and was not so unhappy. But Mirel closed her little eyes, saw darkness, and her heart broke. She knew how I counted the steps, depended on talking machines, was forever bumping into my coffee table and banging into walls that I forgot were there. She saw my slow recovery from a fall I took when the delivery boy left the boxes on the kitchen floor instead of on the counter as instructed. She even came to my apartment two years in a row to help me clean for Pesach, for she understood that while a blind woman can certainly clean her house, she cannot be sure it is Pesachdik.

My only living relative, my elderly father who lives in Florida, may he live and be well, says he does not believe in G-d or prayer, so he certainly was not praying for me to see again.

Only one little three-year-old...every Friday night...consistently...for FOUR years.

Fast forward to January 2003. I was nicely

settled in Crown Heights. I had been totally blind for about 13 years, after seven years of gradual dimming. Various friends had recorded different parts of the *davening* for me; another recorded Ethics of the Fathers; one teenager even recorded all 150 chapters of *Tehillim* for me. I had dedicated friends walking me on errands, rain or shine (Leah Schechter every Wednesday, Tsivia Leah Yaffee every Monday). Leah Silverstein became my *chavrusa* and devoted best friend and learned with me daily. My life was organized, methodical, and consistent, all very important in order for a blind person to feel somewhat secure.

Sometimes, however, I wanted to go out on days other than Monday and Wednesday. So I would phone three friends to see if any of them could go with me. If they couldn't, or all I got was answering machines, I would put a few coins in the *pushke*, say a little prayer, and head out by myself. Between my apartment building and Kingston Avenue, there are 18 driveways, so I would tap my cane along the stoops and then count the driveways.

What I did not know was that I was being watched. The Shaffers live down the block and across the street. They had kind of adopted me and there is not one of them that has not helped me out of a tough situation: Devora taught me how to find the incinerator way on the other side of the apartment building; Sheina took me to *tashlich*; Batya became my substitute mail reader when Mirel's mom was out of town; Yitzchok is my general carpentry-repair-maintenance man (I still think my super should pay him); Chanale recorded *Hayom Yom* for me (well, most of it); Yehuda koshered my kitchen for Pesach and Yosef dealt bravely with several mice! Gedalia patiently answers my endless Torah questions and Bronya creates a home where everyone feels secure and accepted. And then there was little Michaly...

Not only is Michaly the youngest, she is also the quietest. I do not like to call a Jew "shy" because in *Likutei Diburim* the Frierdiker Rebbe says that before a *neshamah* descends it is allotted a specific number of letters that it

will utter in its lifetime. I figure Michaly was allotted fewer letters than I was.

Early one Thursday morning, I wanted to go out to pick up a few things for Shabbos. I did not have the heart to ask anyone to walk me, since I knew all the women were probably busy preparing for their families and guests, so I put two coins in the *pushke*, said a little *Tehillim*, and began my journey. Since it was Thursday, there had been garbage collection and the garbage cans were not where they were supposed to be (remember what I said about not moving anything?).

As I was falling into garbage cans and off curbs, 11-year-old Michaly was at her window watching. Suddenly, she threw her coat over her night clothes, pulled on some boots, and ran down the stairs to help me, mama asking, "And where do you think you are going, young lady?"

When you do not know which way to turn or what to do, STAND STILL. With garbage cans all over the sidewalk, I stopped cold and began to pray because, quite frankly, I was completely disoriented. That was when I heard little footsteps running toward me and soon Michaly was walking me on my errands, with my left hand on her little shoulder and my right hand tapping the cane. And so I got to know the quiet, sensitive little *neshamah* called Michaly Shaffer. "Why don't you phone me if you need help?" she asked, and after that I did, quite regularly.

Right before Chanukah, Michaly was about to have her *bas mitzvah*. She wanted me to give a talk to her class at Bais Rivkah Elementary. Although I was a professional speaker, I was not up to speaking. Not only was I too ill to travel, many days I was too ill to get out of bed. How could I get to the school and stand and talk for an hour? But I simply could not say no to the little friend who had rescued me from so many garbage cans.

"Okay," I said, "I'll be happy to talk to your class. What would you like me to talk about?" She and her mama decided on the subject of *davening*. "Bronya," I warned, "You may not like my talk about *davening*. I have some very...very

...shall we say radical ideas, you know."

She took a deep breath and bravely said, "I trust you."

Bronya drove me to the school and we took the elevator upstairs. I spoke to the girls:

I know I am old enough to be your Bubbie but let me tell you that we think alike. You see, I love to learn, but do not like school; I love to daven, but do not like shul.

The little rhyme made the girls laugh, the ice was broken, and I fell in love with every seventh grader in the room. Then I continued:

But we should like shul. Know why we don't? Because we wake up Shabbos morning and RUSH to get up. We RUSH to get dressed, RUSH to eat breakfast, RUSH to shul, where we RUSH through the davening, to RUSH home and RUSH through the meal, RUSH through the bentching... ALL SO WE CAN TAKE A NAP? Something is wrong here.

What kind of a relationship would you have with your Tattie if the only time you ever spoke to him was when you were reading from a script, in a language you hardly understood, as quickly as you could get through it? If you were having yechidus with the Rebbe, would you be in a hurry? You are having yechidus with the Aibershter, so what is your hurry?

Lieba, while still blind, at her birthday party, hosted by Frida Schapiro. Frida is letting Lieba touch the Friediker Rebbe's coat





Lieba always loved children and especially babies.

So how does one daven correctly? Slow down. Think. Connect.

Once when the Baal Shem Tov was going from village to village helping Jews become closer to Hashem, he approached a shul and stopped at the front door. When someone came up to him and asked why he was not entering, he said because it was full. Yet there were no people inside.

“It is full of your tefillos,” he said, “You did not daven correctly, so they never left the shul.”

Since I could not see the girls, I was not sure how the talk was received. Children are not so easy to read, especially when you cannot see them. I was not sure I had gotten through.

But Michaly and several of her friends began to *daven Shacharis* together Shabbos morning in her home. Slowly. They also began to say *Tehillim* together on Shabbos Mevorchim. Slowly. Then, after *davening*, some would come across the street and visit the elderly blind lady who had come to their school to talk to them. Soon we became friends and occasionally they would also visit or phone during the week.

Shortly after the bas mitzvah talk, Michaly was walking me on Kingston Avenue. She

seemed a bit more serious than usual that day. Something was on her mind. As we walked with my hand on her shoulder, I waited for her to open up to me and finally she asked in almost a whisper, “Lieba, do you think you will ever see?” Children will ask what adults are thinking.

I realized the courage and love it took for her to verbalize that question. So I explained the whole *megillah* to Michaly, then I said, “But...”

“Yes? But what, Lieba?!” she exclaimed.

I explained that I had this friend in Florida, Hensha Gansbourg, who is very up on the latest developments in technology, and she had read that there may be some hope for the future. There was now laser surgery, although I was not sure I was a candidate for it. But anyway I would not have the money for about three years. When I would turn 65, the government would pay for laser surgery, if indeed it made sense for me. In the meantime, I tried not to dwell on it. I didn’t want to get my hopes up in case they could not help me.

Never underestimate a 12-year-old. After helping me put things away, Michaly ran home and asked her mother if her parents could please pay the ten or twelve thousand dollars for the surgery. Her mother regretted to inform Michaly that they could not afford to do that.

Again, adults see limitations. Children see possibilities.

Michaly and her best friend Raizel started collecting money, “So that Lieba Schwartz can have eye surgery and maybe regain her sight.” Needless to say, I knew nothing of this.

One Friday afternoon there was a knock at the door. I stopped preparing for Shabbos, opened the door, and Michaly handed me a small envelope.

“What is this?” I asked, puzzled, and invited her into the apartment.

She sat on the sofa and explained: “We understand that you have not had surgery on your eyes because you do not have the money, so we collected for you. Here is \$154.” I slowly sat down in my big recliner, open-mouthed, teary-eyed. How could I tell her that \$154 would not

cover the surgery? Not even the taxis to and from all the appointments I would need.

I gave her a big hug and sat back down, envelope in hand. She left, and I was left holding \$154 that a bunch of caring, compassionate children had raised. What would I do with it?

Shortly after being handed the little envelope, I was learning with my *chavrusa*, Leah. I suddenly said, "Stop reading to me. The Rebbe is calling me."

When my thoughts go to the Rebbe, am I calling him or is he calling me? Either way, we put down *The Heroic Struggle* and my friend got all five volumes of the Rebbe's letters in English. I closed my eyes (which is stupid when you think about it) and picked a volume. It was Volume I. I groaned, "I never get any answers from Volume I." But I believe in *hashgachah pratit* and there had to be a reason the Aibershter had my hand land on that volume, so I opened it "at random" to pages 114 and 115 (1997 edition by Otsar Sifrei Lubavitch, Inc.).

We were doing this on the 18th of Shevat and the letter began, "I received your letter of the 18th..." Hmm... this looks promising.

Then the Rebbe writes about not being depressed (I am not); not shaving your beard (I do not). Groan. I was ready to forget it when Leah said in her soft but reassuring manner, "Hang onto your seatbelt..."

On the bottom of page 115, the Rebbe writes, "In regard to the question of your eyesight, you should consult a good specialist, who should give you the proper instruction as to what you have to do in this connection."

Leah was excited. I was numb. "Eyesight?" What eyesight? I could not see a blasted thing. And how do I go about finding "a good specialist"?

I phoned Dr. Feldman and said I needed to know the name of "a good specialist," but I had conditions: I wanted him to be *frum*, *shomer Shabbos*, with *mezuzos* on the doors. "I know just the man," he said.

"And I have only \$154," I added.

"I know just the man," Dr. Feldman repeated.

Three weeks later, Leah and I were in the eye doctor's office. I swore Leah to secrecy until we learned the prognosis.

There were many tests. Four technicians examined my eyes.

Finally, after several hours, Dr. Dennis Metz himself came to look at my eyes and the test results.

The doctor looked into my eyes with all kinds of large instruments and machines and asked a very puzzling question: "Have you ever had eye surgery?"

Eye surgery? I have never had eye surgery! That is why I am here. I do not see a blasted thing, doctor.

More examinations. Sonogram. Drops. It seemed endless and after 20 years of blindness, nerve-wracking. Leah kept holding my hand and reminding me of the Rebbe's line, "*In regard to the question of your eyesight...*"

For the second time, Dr. Metz asked, "Have you ever had eye surgery?"

"Look, doctor," I said rather impatiently, "I have had only one surgery in my life and that was for gall bladder."

He paused, then said something startling. "Well, it surely looks as though you have. There is nothing genetically wrong behind your eyes." The Aibershter must have taken care of it. When I was saying *Tehillim* for someone else, did He heal me? I will let you figure out the answer.

I gasped. Leah squeezed my hand harder.

"THEN WHY AM I BLIND?" I asked.

He went into all the details: ripe cataracts full grown, glaucoma, eyes that are not shaped correctly (I have survived both a plane crash and a car crash), diabetes that had destroyed some vessels behind the eyes, etc.

Perhaps that is why I was blind for all these years, so no one else will have to be. What a privilege if this is so. I often said that whenever I elevated whatever I was supposed to elevate as a blind person, this particular challenge would end.



I took a deep long breath and asked the question: Can these things be corrected?

“I think so.”

“Will I be able to see?” I asked, sitting forward in the chair and squeezing Leah’s hand until it was almost blue.

“Yes.”

YES? Did he say yes?

“Doctor, will I be able to read?” Oh, to *daven* from a *siddur*, to be able to do my own research and read *Tanya* and *Chumash* and the words of the Friediker Rebbe. Not with tapes with noise in the background, but just between the Aibershter and me.

He said, “Come in next Thursday and we will operate on the left eye.”

Why the left eye? Because it responded better to light.

As we were about to leave the doctor’s office, I turned around and handed the doctor the little envelope with the money in it.

“What is this?” he asked.

“The children of Crown Heights are collecting. And although I will probably be paying this off from now until *Geulah*, here is the first payment of \$154 from the children of Crown Heights.”

He stood silent for a few moments, then sighed. “I cannot take this.”

“Look,” I explained, “For 20 years I have been blind. I have missed 20 years of sunsets and roses and seeing the faces of children. Now children are making it possible for me to see.”

Dr. Metz said softly, “No one should be blind because they cannot afford surgery. If there is anyone else in Crown Heights in your situation, send them to me.”

Perhaps that is why I was blind for all these years, so no one else will have to be. What a privilege if this is so. I often said that whenever I elevated whatever I was supposed to elevate as a blind person, this particular challenge would end. I also used to say that if because I do not see, one Jew can see what they have as a Jew, then the Aibershter should leave me as I am and use my blindness to bring Yidden home to Yiddishkeit.

On the way home in the cab, my thoughts went all over the place: What does Crown Heights look like? Do flowers still bloom every

spring? What must it be like to *daven* from a *siddur*? What do all my friends look like? What do I look like?

And what about my Mirel and my Michaly? Many times I had imagined their faces. Now I would see them. I never married, never had children. How gentle of the Aibershter to send me children. Now, because of children, I had the hope of becoming sighted again.

As soon as I got home, I phoned my father. I had not told him any of this. He is older, with a heart condition. “Papa,” I asked, “do you like surprises, or do you like to be told in advance?”

“I HATE surprises,” he said. So do I. Must have inherited the trait.

“I am having surgery on my left eye, Papa.”

“Papa? Are you there?”

“Surgery? To see? Tell me, daughter, how do I pray?”

My next phone call was to Michaly. Yes, she was still collecting, but now she really got busy. She went from school to school, making announcements over the loudspeakers: “Please, everyone, on Thursday, the 4th of Adar I, at 1:30, *daven* for Lieba bas Rose, and tomorrow bring in \$2.”

All the children of Crown Heights became a Tzivos Hashem for me.

Thursday came and I was prepped and wheeled into the operating room. Awake for the entire procedure, I just kept thinking of my last visit to the Ohel a few days before when the Rebbe had said on the video, “You will see a great light.” After a few minutes on the operating table I yelled, “What is that?” The doctor had removed the cataract and the first thing I saw after so long was a great light.

Then everything went black again. “What happened?” I asked. He had taken out the lens. Next, he had a lot of repair work to do and then I saw something round being dropped into my eye. It was a perfect man-made lens.

“This is going much better than I thought it would,” Dr. Metz said.

“Well, you have an entire town of children *davening* for you,” I replied.

‘Stop talking to me while I am operating on you,’ he said. Me? Stop talking? One miracle at a time, please.

“Stop talking to me while I am operating on you,” he said. Me? Stop talking? One miracle at a time, please.

As the doctor worked on the eye I tried to think of other things. For example, it was one year almost to the day since my *mezuzahs* had been checked. We know our *mezuzahs* are there to take care of us, but they cannot take care of us unless we take care of them. Not one *mezuzah* in my home had been kosher (they were all replaced immediately). The one in the bedroom was missing the crown to the letter *Ches*. That letter corresponds in *Kabbalah* to “sight and perception.” Could replacing that faulty *mezuzah* have been the first step toward this miracle of the underserved gift of sight?

Suddenly I heard the doctor say, “Nurse, put a transparent patch over her eye. By tomorrow morning she will be seeing.”

Someone wheeled me into the recovery room and I sat in a chair. I asked if Leah could come in (she was in the waiting room *davening* her heart out). She came in and handed me a cracker. As I put it to my mouth, I saw my finger and let out such a squeal that the doctor came running into the recovery room.

“I CAN SEE MY FINGER!” I exclaimed, wiggling it as a little baby does at its first recognition of its fingers.

“This is most unusual,” Dr. Metz said. I smiled and reminded him about the children of Crown Heights.

As soon as I got home I called Papa, then Michaly.

All the seventh-graders came over with their cameras. When we turned on the overhead light in the small living room, I could make out people, colors, movement. Leah was in the kitchen preparing food for me (you have to fast before surgery which is not easy for a diabetic).

The girls had collected more money and now they handed me a bag of single dollar bills. I reminded them that the doctor was not going to charge me more than my insurance would pay, but they insisted that I would need lamps, clocks, and a watch that I could see (not talking ones), books, Shabbos candles (I had been lighting an electric one), and my electricity bill would definitely go up. (They think of everything!)

Michaly then handed me something very special. I became *frum* shortly after Gimmel Tammuz. I always wanted a dollar from the Rebbe, and imagined what it must have been like to stand in line, anticipating looking into his blue eyes and having him hand you a special dollar just for you. An impossible dream, I thought. But nothing is impossible, not when you have a bunch of brave, loving girls caring for you,

As they were counting the money collected, Michaly’s brother Yitzchok noticed there was some writing on one of the dollars. It was a dollar from the Rebbe! On top was written the month of Sivan (the month of my birth), the Hebrew year that I lost my sight and the *parshah* that was the *parshah* of the week I was born. I had my dollar from the Rebbe.

The next day, Michaly, Leah, and I took a cab to the doctor’s office to get the transparent patch removed. The first person I saw was lovely Leah, then beautiful Michaly. Everyone had said they hoped I would like Crown Heights after I could see it. So the Aibershter made it pretty for me... there was a blizzard so severe that Bronya had to come pick us up (no cabs were available).

As we drove home, I saw snowflakes for the first time in 20 years. And my Crown Heights was beautiful. I phoned Papa, “Papa! I see snowflakes. I SEE. It is so beautiful.”

I phoned Mirel. Her mama answered the phone.

“Is Mirel there?” I asked.

“Don’t you want to talk to me?” asked the puzzled mama.

“Nope. May I speak to Mirel, please?”

“Okay.”

“Mirel, is that you? Mirel, are you still *davening* for me?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Every Friday night?”

“Yes, Lieba, every Friday night.”

“Mirel?”

“Yes, Lieba.”

“Mirel? IT WORKED!”

“MOMMY, LIEBA CAN SEEEEEEE!!!!!!” I heard her holler before the phone was hung up.

The first thing I had to learn was how to balance myself. For 20 years I learned how

to balance myself by what I heard, felt, and smelled. Now I had to learn how to balance myself by what I saw. So, I stayed home for several weeks until my vision became clearer and my head stopped spinning. If I walked too much, I would get nauseous from motion sickness. In a few weeks, I “fired” my regular walkers.

Then one day I noticed flyers in the lobby of the apartment building. I picked one up and was looking at it when I realized what I was doing. *I was reading.* I phoned Bronya. “Bronya! I can read. And it is Erev Shabbos. But I do not have any lamps or bulbs or timers.” Bronya jumped into her car and she and Michaly went off to find me the needed equipment.

Soon I called Mirel’s mom, my mail reader, “You’re fired,” I said. I could read my own mail

again after all those years!

That Shabbos, everyone I knew (and did not know) came to visit, to see me seeing them. My friend and neighbor Henya Laine asked, “Do you really see me?” I commented on her pretty plaid jacket and she was convinced. Rochel commented that I had always looked at her when speaking to her, so how could she be absolutely 100% positive that I saw her now? “Well, you have nail polish on and you told me you wore contacts but you are wearing rimless glasses.” Another friend sighed that from now on she would have to wear make-up when coming to see me. Rose and Miriam tried to disguise their voices, since I knew them from their deep voices, and make me guess who they were.

The left eye was perfect. I needed glasses only

LIEBA SCHWARTZ’S FAVORITE QUOTES ON THE SUBJECT OF DAVENING

| BOOK | PAGE | QUOTE |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|---|
| <i>Testament of the Baal Shem Tov</i> | XIX | The ideal prayer is the prayer that is altogether from within, inaudible and immobile. |
| <i>Likutei Diburim</i> Vol. IV | p. 89 | Chabad <i>chassidim</i> should <i>daven</i> in the unhurried, meditative Chabad tradition. |
| <i>Likutei Diburim</i> Vol. V | p. 38-39 | If one’s prayers welled forth spontaneously, why, that was really praying; that was really being alive... There was no rushing; people understood that their <i>davening</i> was their source of life. |
| <i>Tanya</i> | p. 631 | These shall be men who worship word by word ... out loud, neither overly prolonging the prayers nor racing intemperately, G-d forbid. |
| <i>Proceeding Together</i> Vol. I | p. 39 | It was the custom of one of the sons of the Tzemach Tzedek to first go to shul to hear <i>Borchu, Kedushah</i> ... He would then pray privately. When asked how he discharged his obligation of praying with the congregation, he replied that he endeavored to congregate and marshal all ten faculties of his soul; and with this “congregation” he would pray. |



for reading. The distance was better than when I was a sighted child. But I did not know that the right eye was in trouble.

As Leah and I were learning in my apartment (I was not yet up to walking all the way to 770 for the *shiurim* each morning) she said that the right eye did not look right. I tried to shrug it off, figuring that it just was not as clear as the now-perfect left one. But she insisted, pointing out that the right eye was completely gray; no pupil, no iris.

We phoned Dr. Metz's office and they said to come in immediately. Again, Leah and I were in a cab, she holding my hand assuring me again of the Rebbe's letter, "In regard to the question about your eyesight..."

Three doctors examined the right eye. The ripe cataract, having no more room to grow, had exploded in the eye, shattering the lens and causing a great deal of damage. It was doubtful the eye could be saved. Emergency surgery was necessary. Tomorrow morning. One week after the first surgery.

My main fear: what to tell the girls. Their *emunah*, their *bitachon*, had grown so with this miracle. Would they understand that

everything is for the good? That everything that happens to us is part of our mission and part of G-d's great plan for us? I decided only to tell them, "We're operating on the other eye tomorrow. PRAY."

And did they ever. In one afternoon, they contacted all the schools again.

The preparation for the surgery was the same, except this time I admit there was some fear in my thoughts. Then I remembered the end of the Rebbe's line in that letter, "...consult a good specialist who should give you the proper instruction as

to what you HAVE TO DO in this connection." YOU HAVE TO DO... don't think about it. Don't *daven* about it. You HAVE to just do it. The doctor said that if I had waited even one more day, I would have lost the eye.

This surgery took longer than the first, of course. There was more to do. Picture a glass shattering on the floor. The cataract had shattered in my eye and it took a long time to get out all those little pieces, reconstruct the damage, stitches, etc. There was no lens to remove (the explosion took care of that). None of this hurt, by the way.

It is now four months since the surgery. The left eye is perfect. In fact, in New York I qualify to drive (have no fear, it is faster to walk). The right eye is blurry and I cannot read through it, but this is a blessing in disguise. You see, I needed a miracle. I needed to see to take care of myself, for it was getting more and more challenging as I grew older. But I also needed a disability check in order to survive. How could the Aibershter do both? He would make the left eye perfect and leave the right eye just not good enough that I still qualify for disability.

And how is Papa doing? Just a few weeks ago,

this man who said he never believed in G-d or prayer said to me, "G-d put His hand on my head and answered my prayer and gave my only child back her sight." I love you, Papa.

Every day is a new discovery. Let me share a few of them with you.

Over the past half dozen years, I have had four dreams of having *yechidus* with the Rebbe and the Frierdiker Rebbe. Shortly after my sight was restored a friend showed me pictures of the different Rebbeim. I immediately picked out the Rebbe and the Frierdiker Rebbe. They looked exactly as I had seen them in my dreams.

Then I wanted to see my M & M, Michaly and Mirel. If there are any children reading this article and you think that being a child there is not much you can do to change a grown-up's life, think of my M & M.

After several weeks, it was time to see ME. I had seen what 20 years had done to my hands and figure, but had not looked at my face yet. Then one morning after brushing my teeth, I closed the medicine cabinet door and found myself facing the mirror. I saw this silver-haired lady looking back at me. "Hi mom," I laughed.

When did my wavy black hair become silver-gray and straight? My deep dark eyes look tired. My full mouth has become two little slivers. But my skin is nice. The Aibershter has softened my appearance and although I missed out on 20 years, I have no complaints. Dare I ever complain about what I see? Okay, the right eye is blurry. But I SEE the blur!

The real challenge was balancing myself. For a while I continued holding onto friends' arms. Then one day I decided to go to Kingston by myself without the cane (which now has a "RETIRED" sign hanging from it as it sits in the corner of my living room, collecting dust). I still have to work on it. I get disoriented and light-headed. I take it very slowly.

Now I am seeing my first spring in 20 years. Yes, even in Brooklyn, there is spring. I literally gasp at the beautiful brightly colored flowers and graceful leaves.

Two months after the surgery, it was time

to have a *seudas hoda'ah*. The Lubavitch Yeshiva across the street donated the large room and Henyale got busy organizing the refreshments. My dedicated friend and teacher Frida Shapiro chaired the evening's program, Hensha Gansbourg flew to New York to give a little talk, and my teacher, Rabbi Yossi Paltiel, spoke brilliantly and movingly as always. Rabbi Simon Jacobson also spoke memorably.

Then it was time for me to thank everyone. You see, this was not just my miracle. It belonged to everyone in Crown Heights who for all these years were rooting for me, helping me, encouraging me through my ups and downs, never giving up on me.

First, of course, I thanked the Aibershter who every moment is giving us many miracles. Then the Rebbe, for Chabad, and for that letter. A thank-you to my Mirel for all those years of *davening* (she is now *davening* for Moshiach and that little girl has real connections so I hope you are ready) and Michaly who made the channel for the gift of sight.

Thanks to sweet Leah for holding my hand throughout the months of expecting good and of course to Dr. Metz (when I asked him what I could do to help the right eye his comment was one word: *daven*). And thanks to my dear friend Miriam Feldman who got the world *davening* for me.

Whenever you think, "I am only one little human being; what can I do to affect someone's life?" please remember one three-year-old and one twelve-year-old who made a miracle and opened a channel so we could all see the healing Hand of G-d. ❄️

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