




Morah Yehudis Fishman with the Rebbe on 4 Iyar 5750 (1990). JEM Photo ID#45129.

# ‘ALWAYS HAPPY, NEVER SATISFIED’

*And other lessons the Rebbe taught  
Morah Yehudis Fishman*

ETTI FUTERFAS

*Morah Yehudis Fishman, esteemed educator and newly published author of the book **Garden of Time**, shares how she developed a strong connection to the **Lubavitcher Rebbe** and how he helped shape the way she finds fulfillment and happiness in her life.*



Growing up in Boston as the only child of two Russian immigrants, both challenged with their own set of physical disabilities (her mother had cerebral palsy and her father was deaf and mute), Morah Yehudis's early life was far from conventional. After her father's untimely passing when she was 11 years old, her mother took on the sole responsibility of raising her.

***She sent me to Maimonides Educational Institute, which is a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school. In the sixth grade, she wanted to take me out of there and put me in public school, but I said, no, I've got to continue with this Jewish education!***

However, it wasn't until she first attended overnight camp as a teenager that Morah Yehudis truly began to recognize the importance of living with Jewish values and principles as opposed to merely learning about them.

***When I first started to keep kosher on my own, my mother wanted to take me out to a restaurant. I said the only way I'm going to go is if I can order some kind of salad, since I didn't want to have anything that might be questionable. As I was eating, the waiter came over and asked, 'Young lady, how do you like your lobster salad?' I threw up on instinct immediately afterwards, and that was when I realized that I was taking this Judaism thing seriously.***

Morah Yehudis was friendly with some other girls who attended a Lubavitch day school. Through this association and due to her avid love for reading, she happened to come across

*The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Memoirs* by the Frierdiker Rebbe.

***I was enamored by the idea that there could be religious, holy people in this world who still felt so connected to the earth and had a desire to improve our civilization!***

In high school, Morah Yehudis had come to know that the author's son-in-law had taken over the leadership of Chabad-Lubavitch and was now the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Wanting to know more about how people could connect to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, she was told that people often wrote in letters and thus she decided to write one herself.

***Foolishly, I didn't save any letters, but I did receive several from the Rebbe encouraging me to continue in my new Jewish lifestyle.***

Upon reaching the milestone of her high school graduation in 1961, Morah Yehudis was strongly encouraged by Rabbi Joseph B. (Yoshe Ber) Soloveitchik, the high school dean, to attend college, and, feeling conflicted about it, she once again wrote to the Rebbe.

***He didn't tell me not to go, but he did share a very important principle: When you graduate high school, he said, if you're going to college, it's very important to first have a yardstick to measure what's acceptable and what's not, from a Jewish perspective.***

Clearly the Rebbe felt that an additional year of solid Jewish education was advisable.

Based on this recommendation, Morah Yehudis made the decision to attend Bais Yaakov's advanced teachers' seminary program in Williamsburg.

By this point, her relationship with the Rebbe had taken on a more personal nature akin to that of a father and daughter, with the Rebbe making himself available to hear out her various questions and concerns, whether it be a matter of whom she should date or some other topic. On one such occasion, Morah Yehudis felt torn about a young man she was seeing at the time. The Rebbe inquired point-blank as to her feelings for the man, and she responded honestly, saying that she felt "basic *ahavas Yisroel* for him." The Rebbe smiled broadly at her words and responded that "for a husband, you should have more than regular *stam ahavas Yisroel!*"

***I had no family to talk to about my inner feelings on things, so I appreciated the advice so much. I said, "Thank you Hashem for giving me this person who can give me such wonderful counseling, just like a father would."***

Morah Yehudis got engaged to Rabbi Chaim Fishman, and when she came to the Rebbe for a *brachah*, he asked her if she'd informed Rabbi Soloveitchik about her engagement.

***I answered kind of flippantly at that young age. I said no, I don't even know him actually, I met him only one time!***

The Rebbe smiled at this and informed her that she had given Rabbi Soloveitchik “*agmas nefesh* when you listened to me instead of him, so reach out and give him a little *nachas* now.”

Later on in life, as a fully practicing teacher, and newly divorced, Morah Yehudis experienced feelings of loneliness, and she wrote in to the Rebbe seeking his guidance. The Rebbe told her that being a teacher would help her overcome her loneliness. Furthermore, teaching was a way of bonding and giving that would help her in her life, as well as helping her students, who would pass on what they had learned.

*And the Rebbe was right. I remember attending the wedding of a girl who had been my student years earlier. She was so happy to see me, and she said to me, “You know, Morah Yehudis, any time I open a siddur to pray, I still remember all the songs you taught our class, when you gave us such joy in praying to G-d.”*

The next story involves a private *yechidus* with the Rebbe that Morah Yehudis considers to be her own *chassidische* birthday.

*I was a young woman at the time, and I had some personal questions to ask the Rebbe. I was awaiting my turn outside the Rebbe’s office, it was already 2:00 in the morning, and I was half asleep by then. I had written down some theological points on a little scrap of paper, but I forgot all about it by the time I went inside. After some time, after I had finished addressing all my personal questions to the Rebbe, he asked me, “Don’t you have any other questions?” It was then that I remembered the scrap of paper. There were five questions in total, although I only remember four. One was on how we know that the Torah is truth since there are other religions that also claim to be Divine. The Rebbe answered me, saying that Judaism is the only religion where you have 600,000 people all testifying to have heard the exact same thing. The Rebbe knew me well; he even knew what I had been reading. So he continued: “Take, for instance, Merlin the magician. He’s written about so much, but no one knows if he was real, when he lived, how he lived, or anything else about the circumstances surrounding his life.” In this way, the Rebbe aptly contrasted the Torah’s*

**When it came time for me to pass by the Rebbe, I made no mention of the float, but the Rebbe looked right at me and said, “You see, you can do whatever you want to do.”**

*own unbroken chain of eyewitness testimony, clarifying things in a way that I could fully grasp and appreciate.*

Among Morah Yehudis’s many encounters with the Rebbe, there was also a time when she had the unique *zchus* to make him smile! In the 1980s, there was a yearly custom for women to go past the Rebbe at the annual N’shei Chabad convention and share some good news and/or ask for blessings. At this particular women’s convention, shortly before all the ladies passed by, the Rebbe had been speaking about a verse from the book of Iyov, “*Adam l’amal yulad*,” a person is born to toil.

*I’d been learning about the word l’amal and how it is roshei teivos for the words lilmod al menas lelamaid, learning for the sake of teaching. I was so excited about this that by the time it was my turn, instead of asking for a blessing or sharing some good news with the Rebbe, I simply said, “Does the Rebbe know that the word l’amal stands for the abbreviation of learning for the sake of teaching?”*

The Rebbe confirmed that he did indeed know about that commentary but maintained that the literal meaning of the word was also true. After she passed by, the person who’d been standing in line behind Morah Yehudis informed her that the Rebbe had smiled broadly, maybe even laughed, after she passed.

One year, prior to Lag B’Omer, Morah Yehudis enlisted her teenage students to help her build a Lag B’Omer float featuring some of the holiest places in Israel.

### EXCERPT FROM GARDEN OF TIME:

Thirty-six is a number with a direct link to Chanukah—it is the total number of candles that we light throughout the eight days. Thirty-six is also twice 18, and 18 is the value of *chai*, life. This reflects the principle that *me'at ohr docheh harbei choshech*.

The story of the eight days is an explicit meditation on Divine Providence. The Maccabees found a single uncontaminated cruse of oil; although there was only enough for one day, somehow it lasted eight days. But how, specifically, did this miracle happen? Did the container keep refilling? Did the oil burn miraculously slowly? Did the Maccabees have to pour only an eighth of the oil each night?

And if there was enough oil to burn naturally for one day, shouldn't the holiday be just seven days instead of eight? Thus the sages stress that finding the oil was the real victory—an expression of the *nitzachon* of light over darkness.

For this year, may you be blessed to notice and appreciate the miraculous. May you see the Hand of God in the seemingly random “coincidences” of everyday life.



New book by Morah Yehudis Fishman.

as it is today, and it was this response in particular that helped to give Morah Yehudis a sense of direction and fortification for the path that she was trying to pursue, the path of learning Chassidus in-depth and teaching it to women and girls.

Morah Yehudis once came to the Rebbe and shared with him that she was struggling to overcome a deep inner sadness. The Rebbe asked her, “What makes you happy?” to which she responded, “Writing.” “So, if what makes you happy is writing, you should write,” said the Rebbe. Now 80 years old, *zol gezunt zein*, Morah Yehudis affirms that this message is one that still keeps her going today, especially now when she’s less independent and mobile than she once was.

When it comes to others having trouble with their relationship with Hashem and Torah, Morah Yehudis, now a seasoned educator of Torah and Chassidus and comfortably settled in Boulder, CO, advises them to think deeply about instances of Divine

Providence in their own lives, all the things that some might deem as mere “coincidences,” and to try to recognize all the blessings that surround them. It is this very principle that Morah Yehudis’s recently published book, *Garden of Time*, is based upon.

*Several years ago, I met a Jewish young man who also happens to be the brother of the governor of Colorado. At the time, he was in the process of becoming religious and wanted to start his own publishing company. Knowing that I was a writer, he asked me what sort of books I wanted to write, and I told him about a bunch of ideas that I had. He latched onto one idea out of all the others, actually based upon the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s emphasis on celebrating birthdays and all the blessings that come along with each new number. It was during that conversation that the initial seeds for the book Garden of Time were first planted. Currently available in various Jewish bookstores across the*

*Id been up for 48 hours with the girls, to finish building this float. When it came time for me to pass by the Rebbe, I made no mention of the float, but the Rebbe looked right at me and said, “You see, you can do whatever you want to do.” To which I somewhat cheekily replied, “I never said I couldn’t!” I still regret that instead of internalizing that blessing for what it was, I deflected it. Now, every time I tell this story, I create more of an opening to be able to take it in!*

There was another time when Morah Yehudis questioned the Rebbe about the concept of women being allowed to learn the same Chassidic and mystical teachings as men. “These teachings are meant to convey relationships between people and Hashem, and an understanding of the soul,” replied the Rebbe. “All those ideas are equally as important for women as they are for men.”

At the time, the education of women in both the Jewish and secular world was not nearly as supported and encouraged



On August 21, 2017, Morah Yehudis watched a rare total solar eclipse in the company of a few goats from the goat farm on the grounds of the Boulder Jewish Community Center, where Morah Yehudis gave an author's talk to introduce her new book, *Garden of Time*.

globe, ranging from Brooklyn to Melbourne and adorned throughout with stunning original artwork, the book takes its readers on a meditative walk through a garden of years, featuring 100 reflective essays, one for each of the first hundred years of a person's life.

*People ask me why I didn't extend the chapters to 120. I tell them that if they read all the way to chapter 100 of my book, they can figure out their own blessings already!*

*Out of all my learning from the Rebbe and empowering correspondences with the Rebbe, what made the biggest impact on me was that somebody once asked the Rebbe if he was happy. The Rebbe said, "I'm always happy, but I'm never satisfied." And that's such a great motto to have. We should of course feel and know that whatever we're doing is important and significant and makes an impact on this world and beyond, but at the same time, we should never feel complacent and must always push forward with all our efforts to do even more!* ❧



MORAH YEHUDIS FISHMAN has been teaching Torah and Chassidus for the past 60 years to students of all ages and backgrounds, both on the East Coast and the Midwest. She has been a director of several Jewish organizations in Santa Fe and Colorado. Her articles and poetry on a wide variety of Jewish topics have been printed in many publications and are also available

online. *Garden of Time*, a publication of Deuteronomy Press, is now available for purchase at [deuteronomy.com](http://deuteronomy.com).

Most of the information in this article was taken from a video interview of Morah Yehudis Fishman by Mrs. Chana Weisberg of Chabad.org, transcribed by Etti Futerfas.

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