

# IF I FORGET THEE O JERUSALEM

A heartwarming story of two *shluchos* who met at the Kinus Hashluchos in Shvat 5784 (2024), and at the Kinus one year later, they both spoke, describing how their first encounter impacted them and their communities.

## NECHAMI TURKOFF:

Exactly one year ago, I was sitting right here in this room at the Kinus Hashluchos *melaveh malkah*. It was a calm and beautiful evening. Yet my mind and heart were still back at home in Cholon, Israel.

Although I wasn't actually in Israel, I was consumed with the raw and deep anguish of the war, worried about my family getting to the bomb shelter in time, wondering if our children have school and thinking about my elderly father who lived far away in Lod.

It wasn't exclusively my pain; I was carrying the feelings of so many families whom we lived and worked with. Young mothers who have lost their husbands and are in deep grief, families who have loved ones languishing as captives in Gaza tunnels, as well as mothers and children trying to survive while their husbands and fathers are at war.

Every night I fell asleep with my mind racing, and every morning I woke up and reminded myself that I have a *shlichus* and must find a way to continue bringing light to my family and to everyone around me.

At the *melaveh malkah*, to my left sat an American *shlucha* whom I had never met before. We said a polite hello, and I told her, in my broken English, that my name

Nechami Turkoff (L) and  
Shayna Freeman at the  
Kinus Hashluchos 2025.







Nechami Turkoff (R) and Shayna Freeman at the Kinus Hashluchos 2025.

is Nechami Turkoff from Cholon, Israel. She introduced herself as Shayna Freeman, *shlucha* in Sudbury, MA. Over the course of the evening, we began to chat.

Suddenly all my buried emotions and pain came to the surface. Being (temporarily) physically removed from Eretz Yisroel, having someone asking me how I am feeling with genuine caring, enabled me to begin processing this unbelievable nightmare. The feeling I felt when a *shlucha* from the other side of the world understood me was something I can't even put into words.

When the evening was over, Shayna and I exchanged phone numbers. Within a few days, Shayna's husband, Rabbi Yisroel Freeman, reached out and asked for specific details about what I was involved in. I described a woman I had recently met named Karin, who told me she wasn't involved with Chabad before October 7th. Her husband had been brutally murdered at the Nova music festival. Karin walked into the Chabad of Cholon Shul alone, only a few weeks after giving birth to her baby girl. Her parents were sick, and she had just delivered her first baby alone, after spending weeks in the hospital without a husband or parent at her side.

We began helping Karin with rent assistance for herself and her newborn baby, plus emotional support. Within a matter

of days, my husband, Rabbi Meir Tzvi Turkoff, and I began receiving significant donations from the Freemans' community to help Karin, as well as beautiful hand-knitted blankets and other useful gifts along with heartfelt notes, which were all delivered to her.

Agam Berger from Cholon was a hostage in Gaza (now released, *baruch Hashem*). At this time last year, Agam's brother Elay was soon to have his bar mitzvah, but it was too overwhelming for the family to organize, and we wanted to help. The Freemans' community sent them a very generous gift to help sponsor the bar mitzvah at the Chabad of Cholon Shul.

Last summer, Rabbi Yisroel Freeman came with his son to visit Eretz Yisroel, and together we went to visit the Berger family. It was a very moving and beautiful two hours. It meant so much to them to know that a community on the other side of the world sincerely cares about them. The Bergers told me that the visit to their home and the support that they had received was the oxygen that they needed to survive.

I also want to mention with gratitude Rabbi Moti and Mrs. Chaya Chazan, *shluchim* in Cholon, who have been active in helping and supporting the Berger family throughout the long and difficult 16 months that Agam was a hostage.

*Baruch Hashem*, we all witnessed the tremendous miracle of Agam Berger returning to her family. Agam will go down in history as an example of what Jewish strength, character, and *emunah* are all about—refusing to cook on Shabbos, refusing to eat non-kosher meat, refusing to eat *chametz* on Pesach, fasting on Tishah B'Av and Yom Kippur, refusing the *Koran*, and telling her Hamas captors that she needs a *Siddur*... which, miraculously, they gave her.

Right after Agam returned home, Shayna and the members of her community sent another significant gift, for Agam and her siblings to buy clothing. This gesture was just one more warm hug to Agam and her family.

We were also able to connect the Freemans and members of their Chabad House with other Jews in painful situations, including Avi, the father of the hostage Yosef Chaim Ohana (ben Miriam), may he have a *yeshuah* very soon. They have become close with Avi who has since come to the U.S. and spoken in their community. They still keep in touch with him on a regular basis.

#### SHAYNA FREEMAN

Nechami, you have been an unbelievable inspiration to me. You literally don't stop until your family, all the women and children of your Shifra and Puah organization, and all

the many people you know about, are ALL taken care of.

Every time I text you, you don't hesitate to write back. Even late at night, you respond. It's remarkable. When do you sleep?

To my sisters, my fellow *shluchos*, I want to say:

We each have our own individual package of emotions, work responsibilities, home responsibilities, and, *baruch Hashem*, children. For me, my package looks like a suburban Chabad House and community nestled in a quiet, wooded town about 45 minutes west of Boston in Sudbury, MA. I do my best to balance it all, but it can be lonely.

Then there is the Kinus each year. I am excited about coming, but I am nervous at the same time. I'm sure many of us may feel the same way. Who will I talk to? What will I wear? Where will I stay? With whom will I sit? It can be overwhelming!

Last year it was extra challenging because we all came with broken hearts. Our hearts are still shattered. As the Kinus got closer last year, I realized that there would probably be Israeli *shluchos* there with hearts that are raw, open, and bleeding after what they have experienced and what they continue to experience. How will I look them in the eye? Will I just pass them by?

I decided that I will say a friendly hello, give a hug, and



Agam Berger's father Shlomi hugging his son Elay at his bar mitzvah at the Kotel.



The Berger family at the Kotel (L-R): Liyam (Agam's twin sister), their father Shlomi, Elay, their mother Meirav, and Bar.

maybe even cry with them. It's hard with the language barrier since I don't speak Hebrew fluently. Also, it's hard to start up a random conversation. But it is easy to show I care, because I genuinely do care.

I can picture it right now, when Nechami and I met here at the Kinus a year ago. We were sitting somewhere in the middle... over there. I was nervous and even sweating a little. But within a few minutes, we were talking and soon we both became emotional. Nechami, you told me about people you knew well and their stories, stories that had not yet ended well. From that conversation, it snowballed into many more ideas. We shared thoughts with lively interaction, planning to collaborate and coordinate projects and initiatives together.

There were times throughout this year that we wondered if encouraging our community to support struggling Jews in Israel was taking away from our fundraising for our own *shlichus*. No, we discovered that it was the opposite!

## THE ALTER REBBE SPEAKS IN TANYA ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERY JEW, ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, HELPING THE JEWS WHO LIVE IN ERETZ YISROEL.

People stepped up in ways we have never seen before, both to support our *shlichus* locally, and to support our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel. These projects and initiatives created a tangible way for them to channel their deep need and desire to help, connect, and contribute to the healing for the Jews of Eretz Yisroel who are living in turmoil.

Nechami, none of this would have happened without you! All of the ideas and good intentions would have just flown away. However, knowing that you are waiting there, understanding the many causes that need to be met, knowing the actual people involved, has greatly motivated us. A year ago, this all seemed so out of reach. Now we have our friendship, and I feel much more strongly connected to my brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel.

### NECHAMI:

The way the Freemans took on fundraising to help struggling Yidden in Eretz Yisroel is amazing to me. I am overwhelmed to see such *chassidim*; what inspires and guides them is only the Rebbe; they do not make *cheshbonos* and they have no ego. There is so much to learn from them. It is a real *zechus* to be their friend. I literally was at a loss for a way to show my appreciation; I finally decided to give them two dimes I had from the Rebbe. What else would be valuable to such people?

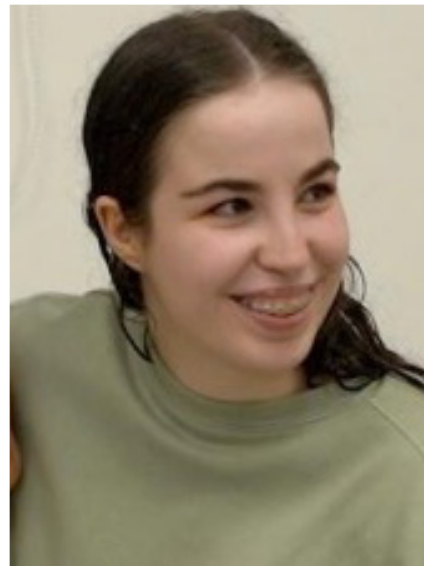
This connection has given us in Cholon tremendous *chizuk* and encouragement! Thank You, Hashem, for this tremendous *hashgachah pratis*. It reminds me that *chassidim zainen ein*

*mishpachah* no matter which side of the world we are on.

May we merit to see the *Geulah* and an end to all the challenges of *galus*, speedily in our day!

The Alter Rebbe speaks in *Tanya* about the importance of every Jew, anywhere in the world, helping the Jews who live in Eretz Yisroel. The Alter Rebbe was imprisoned for sending money to the Holy Land! We all must find ways to send love and care and real help to our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel, especially now. No matter where in Eretz Yisroel you live, even if you were fortunate to be able to stay in your own home, you are probably running to shelters a few times a day, with your babies and your elderly. Life is difficult and as time passes, people forget. But the hardship does not lessen with time; in fact, if you are missing family members, the hardship grows with time.

Because time has passed, everything that is done now to help the people of Israel means so much more. It shows you did not forget us. Thank you. 🌸



Agam  
Berger



Liyam Berger, twin  
sister of Agam, holding  
a package sent by the  
Freemans and their  
community before  
Elay's bar mitzvah.