
LIVING WITH A



TICKING CLOCK

Dina Hurwitz

BEFORE MY HUSBAND YITZI got sick, our lives were simple yet challenging. Temecula, California, is a bit off the beaten path. It's where many good hard-working people live, and it was hit very hard in the housing crash. Like most Shluchim, money was tight for us, and to pay for our children's *chinuch*, Yitzi worked three jobs. We didn't get to see him much during the week, but Shabbos was our special time together. Our four older children (then ages 10-15) lived in Los Angeles during the week and came home for Shabbos. The three younger ones were in school in San Diego, an hour's drive away. We struggled to make ends meet, yet we loved our Shlichus. The community eventually grew out of our living room and into a nice storefront, and not a day went by that we didn't discuss our dream of buying a larger and more permanent home for Chabad of Temecula.

One Shabbos afternoon, Yitzi told me that something weird was going on with his tongue. He was trying to speak and the words were sounding slurred. I assumed it was the all-nighters he was pulling and told him that perhaps this was his body's way of telling him that he needed to sleep like normal people do. He rearranged his schedule so he would be home at night and at first that seemed to work, until it didn't. We went to the doctor, who took some tests and told us that Yitzi had a severe sinus infection. After we completed one round of antibiotics and nothing changed, they took a CAT scan and said they needed to be more aggressive with the medication because the infection was still there. This was between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. By Succos we knew there was a bigger problem. The neurologist said it could be one of four things. This list included ALS, short for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, a progressive neuromuscular disease.

He explained that ALS is a unique disease. There is no test to determine if that is what you have. If the symptoms meet the criteria, and you have ruled out all other possibilities, then that is what you have. It took another month to determine that it's not the other three. From there we went to a neuro-muscular specialist. It took a month just to get an appointment and another two for them to officially diagnose Yitzi. From the first doctor's visit until the diagnosis was six months. By that time, his speech was so much worse, people sometimes thought he was drunk. His left side was beginning to show muscle degeneration, but to the untrained eye, he was still perfect and beautiful. It was impossible to detect the storm raging inside.

I was a wreck. I couldn't eat or sleep or think about anything else. I was frozen. Yitzi, always the optimist, assured me, "Hashem is good and He will take good care of us."

Yitzi's father had just had a very serious heart attack and we were afraid to tell him. Every day there was someone else's heart to break.

In the beginning, I didn't understand people's intense reactions. He is my husband, it is *my* pain! Why are *you* crying? After my sister-in-law told me about my brother's reaction, I realized that we all love Yitzi, and we are all devastated by this.

The evening of the diagnosis, we had planned a birthday *farbrengen* for Yitzi, that we were hoping would be a *seudas hoda'ah*. It ended up being a most beautiful show of love and brotherhood. Over 200 Shluchim came from quite far away, and this is when the Hurwitzfamilyfund was born. Yitzi walked out for a few minutes and Rabbi Simcha Backman told everyone to put his number into their phones and right now text him what they would give monthly. I know I don't need to remind you that Shluchim do not have a lot of extra and everyone gave and continues to give with an open hand.

My second biggest fear was rapidly approaching. It was time to tell the children. That is probably one of the hardest things for a parent to do. The kids were shocked; their father is superman. He never even gets a cold, and there is nothing he cannot do. The first few days were like a bad dream. Kind of blurry with a lot of group crying sessions.

WRITINGS OF RABBI YITZI HURWITZ FROM HIS BLOG, YITZIHURWITZ.BLOGSPOT.COM

Thursday, September 17, 2015
With Togetherness

In this week's *parshah, Vayelech,* we have the *mitzvah* of *hakhel.* "Assemble the nation, the men, the women, the children... In order that they hear and in order that they learn and fear Hashem..., and will be careful to do all the words of this Torah."

All the Jewish people would assemble. The king, standing on a podium built for the occasion, would read selections from *sefer Devarim,* including the *Shema,* for all to hear.

While most *mitzvos* are given without the reason, here the Torah lists the reasons: in order that they hear, learn, fear Hashem and keep the Torah.

...How is the *mitzvah* of *hakhel* done today? Any time this year, gather your family or friends or community. The goal is to strengthen our feelings towards Hashem and the Torah.

The prerequisite is that you are "assembled," meaning all of you are in a state of togetherness, with brotherly love. "Togetherness" sets the mood and opens the heart to hear words of meaning and encouragement, "in order that they hear..."

Words are powerful; when used correctly they can lift up a spirit, but when abused, they can destroy.

Our children and spouses ache for our recognition and love. With so much to do, *mitzvos, davening,* cooking, cleaning, etc., they could be ignored or, worse, mistreated, in our need to have things perfect.

When I started to lose my ability to speak, it made me aware of the power of speech. I had to decide what is truly worth saying. Now, unable to speak, I dream of what I

Over the next year, Yitzi gradually lost his ability to walk, talk, eat, drive, play with the kids, sing, dance, and play guitar. It seemed like it was slow but all of sudden he was in the wheelchair 24 hours a day. All of the things related to the mouth went first. By mid-2013 I was the only one who could understand him. It took so much concentration to understand every word. My brain was so tired and I had a constant headache. When I could no longer understand him I felt like a failure as a wife. How is it possible that I have no idea what is going on in his head?

I am very grateful for technology. After losing his speech, my husband used his iPhone to communicate. Every month was worse than the one before. It was a year of constant loss and readjustment. Anyone dealing with a degenerative disease knows exactly what I mean. I felt guilty every time it got worse for not appreciating the week before when it was a little better. I was fearful all the time, with each adjustment wondering if I would have the strength to always make sure my husband's dignity is preserved no matter how undignified the situation gets.

I never recall Yitzi complaining about the steady stream of losses. He just always did what he could with a smile.

The first Chanukah after the diagnosis, in December of 2013, I wrote this on my blog (thecaffeinatedthinker.blogspot.com):

We all prepared the menorahs with so much joy and excitement. We love Chanukah. I watched Yitzi prepare his menorah, shine it, set it up, and light the shamash. Suddenly his joy turned to confusion, now what? He could no longer speak, and no longer sing the brachos. I quickly turned to our oldest son and said, "Please make the brachah with Tatty." A moment of surprise, followed by a moment of grief, then a beautiful smile and with his head held high, he made the



Photo Credit JEM/The Living Archive ID 66826

would tell them, if I could.

You first need to see them as most important. Don't be so religious that your family will suffer. Don't ram Yiddishkeit down their throats. Rather, bring them close with love and kindness.

They value your words and remember them. Your actions are equally (if not more) important. Create a loving atmosphere, focus your attention on them. Listen to what they have to share with you. They want you to know them, and to be proud of them.

When you have set a loving atmosphere, then you can tell them about how Hashem has chosen us to be His. Their ears and their hearts will be open to hear and to learn, to fear Hashem and to keep His Torah.

If I could talk, I would tell my kids how much I love them and how proud I am of them. How lucky we are to be Hashem's children, and the Rebbe's soldiers.

I would tell them to be kind and to use their talents and gifts to serve Hashem and to lift others up.

I would tell them to smile a lot and be positive. There is nothing better than helping or making another Jew happy, even if it means taking a loss.

I would tell my daughters how pretty they look in their Yom Tov outfits. I would tell my boys to tuck their shirts in.

What would I tell my wife? Now, that is none of your business.

Consider making a *hakhel* get-together with your family and friends. Create an atmosphere of togetherness, speak to their hearts with love and kindness. Most important, make your spouse and children feel most important of all.

Thursday, August 7, 2014
Marriage Tips for Men, Part I

Here are a few small and easy things that will make your life better.

1) When she does or says something hurtful, which *will* happen, just forget what she said or did. Women get emotional and sometimes irrational. But be careful; she will never forget anything you do "wrong."

2) Before you criticize her, ask yourself if it really matters in the long run, or perhaps you are better off letting this one slide.

3) Be ready and happy to go to



counseling. Even and especially in the first year. Better deal with a small issue now and learn to get along, than a huge unfixable problem later. Simply put, what makes sense to you may sound silly to her and vice versa, because women think in a totally different way. Counseling can help.

4) Find ways to make her laugh every day. Women think too much and they need a rest from their brain chatter. Laughter gives them rest from it. She will appreciate it.

5) Never raise your voice. It affects women with an instinct to be afraid, flee and protect themselves and the children. You will have a hard time getting back to normalcy. You might not realize that among men we raise our voice a lot. It's hard to change gears. We yell to make a point. Women only yell if they are angry. When your voice goes up they register "he is angry at me."

6) Compliment her every day. Find things to honestly compliment. It could be something she did. Something she is wearing. Let her know that you notice and value her.

7) Buy her flowers. Sending flowers says a lot. It says I like you. It says I am thinking of you. It says I appreciate you. It says you are beautiful to me. It says you are a princess who deserves pretty things. It says, "Although I'm a guy and flowers that will die in a week are the biggest waste of money and make absolutely no sense, you are still more than worth it to me." If you are low on cash buy one flower or, even better, pick some wild flowers.

8) Ignore statements such as, "You don't have to buy me a gift for my birthday." Buy her a gift.

9) Treat her with respect. Do chivalrous things. Open the door for her. Take her coat. Make sure she has a seat. Bring her tea in a pretty cup and sit with her and listen. Let her feel taken care of. Make her feel like a princess. Every woman wants to feel like a princess. Of course you won't be able to do it all the time, but do it often enough that she knows.

10) When she gets dressed nicely, take a moment and notice and tell her how pretty she looks. She spent a lot of time and energy getting dressed. Let her know that you appreciate her. Learn these words...

Pretty, Elegant, Classy,



Please daven for a refuah sheleimah for Yosef Yitzchak ben Bracha. Rabbi Hurwitz asks readers, in the zchus that he should have a refuah sheleimah, to please try to overcome arguments and to show love to one another, especially to your family.

To contribute financially to the family, visit hurwitzfamilyfund.com. To read Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz's weekly divrei Torah, visit yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. One reader, Esther, left this comment on Rabbi Hurwitz's blog: I always feel hopeful rather than sad when I read your blog. You are a leader despite your extreme physical limits. Obviously you lead in your family, I can hear it in Dina's words. And you lead in our Lubavitch community by showing us how to behave and how to think when serious hardship strikes. I don't often comment on your writings but I try to internalize your message. I want you to know how helpful you are to people you have never met: I work in a Jewish neighborhood, close to many hospitals. I hear about others' trials and worries daily. Sometimes I have no words to say, I am silenced by the enormity of what my fellow Yid is facing. That's when I "whip out Yitzi." I share a video of you speaking Yud Shvat where you say "don't be afraid, Hashem is with you." Or I simply share that you are in the *matzav* that you are, and yet you believe and you trust and you continue to *daven* to Hashem. That is inspiration enough. If Yitzi can continue to put his love and his trust in Hashem, devote his *koach* to learning and spreading Torah, how must we behave? And as you say in your posts, Hashem is unlimited and in YOUR *zchus*, may He fulfill his promise to us and bring Moshiach Now!

brachah with (for) his father. Almost the same voice, the same tune, and the same smile. At the first opportunity, I ran to my room to fall apart. All I could think of was how much we had lost. I cried half of Chanukah (at least), until I finally caught myself. I refocused on all we still have and all we have gained. It was a monster of an effort, but it worked.

A year later, Chanukah again. Comparing this year to last, wondering why I didn't appreciate what we had. I had a husband who could walk, and dance, and light the menorah. We were not bed-bound, he could communicate with his phone. Is there a way to skip the first part, where I cry for days, and just focus on the amazing blessings we still have?

The day after Rosh Hashanah of 2014, Yitzi was rushed to the hospital with pneumonia. While he was there, he had a tracheotomy done. We knew it was coming but didn't know how soon. At that time, he lost the use of his right hand which was how he communicated and how he controlled his wheelchair. He was now confined to bed with a feeding tube, a nurse 24 hours a day, and no way to communicate. Rabbi Yonasan and Natanya Abrams took over Chabad of Temecula. Yitzi and I are grateful to them for their hard work, and we take pride in their success and growth.

Again, thank G-d for technology. This is when Yitzi learned to use the Tobii, the eye gaze computer. It was a very hard time. Since then, he has mastered the communicating, writes regularly on his blog, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com, and spends hours a day with visitors. His body has not changed in the last year.

We have a tremendous support group, and I have Yitzi. When Yitzi got sick, I thought we had left a maximum of two years together. One particularly hard day, it occurred to me that I can choose how we spend whatever time we have left. I can cry daily and yell at G-d or I can live like Yitzi wants me to: enjoy every second we have and make Yitzi proud. I cannot honestly say I have succeeded fully, but I try daily, and every day is a new chance. In the process I have found out that being happy is a choice and when you do choose happiness, nobody loses out.

Yitzi, on the other hand, does not struggle like I do. He has an

Amazing , Gorgeous , Exquisite , Stunning, Breathtaking.

Try to use the right one at the right time.

This is by no means finished. I hope to continue with more. Hope it brings a positive change to your marriage.

Monday, February 9, 2015

Marriage Tips for Men, Part II: How to Listen

One of the biggest complaints women have about their husbands is: "He doesn't listen."

The problem is that men have no idea what women mean when they say that.

The first thing you need to know is that women have a natural need to be understood. When they feel understood they feel loved. They will even tell their best friend, "I really feel like he understands me." Translation: "I feel loved."

This is difficult for men to understand because men don't have a natural need to be understood. Becoming a good listener takes a lot of patience and effort and the reward is tremendous.

The next thing to understand is that, being natural listeners, women get extremely frustrated when you don't listen. That makes for an unhappy wife, and you don't want to go there.

The reward for becoming a good listener is a happy wife and a deep, close and meaningful relationship. She will become your strongest advocate and stay by your side through thick and thin.

Listening is understanding her from her perspective. To do this, first you need to put aside your way of thinking and experience her feelings from her perspective. This way you really get to know her, not your understanding of her, but her understanding of her.

Listening is more than hearing words. Women say a lot without talking. They use facial expressions, body language, clothing and self-care to express themselves and they expect you to notice.

Women are detail oriented. They especially notice things that are wrong or out of place. For example, she could be all made up and dressed to the nines. You see an amazing, flawless sight. All she sees is a small pimple that appeared on her chin.

Men see the big picture but miss the





L-R: Childhood photo of the brothers Shalom, Dovid, and Yitzi Hurwitz

unshakable belief in Hashem and a strong connection to the Rebbe. It has always been his dream to be the Rebbe's soldier, and he is still able to be that. I don't know why people react to pain the way they do, but I do know that Yitzi has always been my whole world and he still is. He was always so good at showing me how much he cares for me and respects me and now I get to show him.

One of the biggest blessings we have is living next door to Yeshiva Ohr Elchanan Chabad. As Yitzi lost his ability to speak, Friday night became a bit depressing for me. So I asked Rabbi Avremi Schochet if he could send us three *bachurim* on Friday nights to sing *Shalom Aleichem* and *Eishes Chayil*. For the rest of that year those three came every Friday night. They brought such joy to our home.

Slowly, the group of three grew into a group of ten to 20 sitting around Yitzi's bed, singing and bringing boundless joy into the house. Eventually, they borrowed a *sefer Torah* from a nearby *sofer* and bought us a small *aron kodesh*. They *lein* for Yitzi every Shabbos and whenever *leining* is called for. They also come an hour before the end of Shabbos and enjoy *seder niggunim, farbrengens*, and stories. They come on their breaks and learn with Yitzi; they learn with our children and take them on outings; they have become family to us. One learned how to settle Yitzi in the wheelchair and another learned how to suction him in case a nurse comes late. We have a *Gemara* class in Yitzi's room two or three times a week. My son and his friends do *Chitas* with Yitzi a few times a week as well. We are surrounded with love all of the time. The ones who left after the schoolyear ended stay in touch with Yitzi still. As Yitzi wrote:

Over the past two years I've been watching my abilities, talents

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details.

Listening requires noticing details and putting the clues together to form a conclusion. At minimum you should notice that something is wrong or that something is different. Then you will be able to ask what is wrong or what is different. Don't be clueless.

Here are some tips for good listening.

1) Set times for listening.

Make it a habit that the first five minutes after you come home is a time for listening. Ask your wife how her day was. Imagine how good she will feel, knowing that she is first on your mind when you come home.

A good time for listening is after the children are asleep but if she is too tired at that time, do it earlier. It is okay for the kids to see you together talking, it will be a valuable lesson and will give them a sense of stability.

The main thing is that you set times that work for the two of you, and that you keep them. Your wife will look forward to being with you at that time.

"I don't have the time" and "I'm too busy" are not acceptable excuses–make the time.

2) All she wants is for you to listen and understand, that's it. Refrain from sharing your suggestions, opinions, or advice, they are not relevant to her feelings. Just listen and understand.

3) Women change every day, so every day there is more to tell. There are also deeper parts of herself to share.

What you heard yesterday is not enough today. There are new facets discovered today that need to be shared. There are also new things going on in her life.

4) When you are listening, look at her. Notice her expressions and body language. Every so often, give her a subtle hint to let her know that you understand. It could be a nod or a soft sound. This will let her know that you are paying attention. If you don't, she will assume you didn't understand and feel she has to repeat herself. She will get aggravated and complain, "He doesn't listen."

5) You are not required to be listening all the time but when you are supposed to be listening, do it correctly.

Be focused and pay attention. Remove distractions, put away your cell phone and teach the children not to disturb you at this time. Let her feel like you are totally there for her, you are interested in knowing her.

It is my hope that you put these tips to the test, and that that this contributes to your wife's happiness. Her happiness

and gifts slip away, wondering: What is the purpose of living if I am not able to do these things? The answer became clear as people started to visit. With nothing to give of my talents, I was left with raw love and joy towards the visitors, and that apparently came through more powerfully than all the talents.

Honestly, none of us knows how much time we have in the world. My family just has a clock ticking near us louder. It makes us value the time we have and the things we do, the things that are important. We try to make whatever time we have left as joyful as possible. Sometimes, when you see somebody in a situation like ours, it reminds you to do the same in your life.

Why do some people fall apart and others seem to handle whatever Hashem gives them? I think the answer is love. When someone is loved and feels intense love for another, there is nothing they cannot do. When one is lonely, even the smallest obstacle can be too much to handle.

I am the one who gets queasy when I see a loose tooth, and I have had to do all sorts of medical things. There is nothing I won't do for Yitzi. What would be too hard would be living without the person I love. The greatest gift Hashem can give us is to love someone. It changes you into the best possible version of you.

One day I will write a book. It will be called A. L. S. - A Love Story.■





Yitzi with his parents at his wedding to Dina Berkowitz (L-R): Mrs. Bracha Hurwitz, Yitzi, Reb Shmuel Hurwitz.

will surely contribute to your happiness. Happy wife, happy life.

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Sunday, September 13, 2015

Dear Dina, my heart of gold,

This year has been difficult. Your tears didn't go unnoticed. I'm sure the tears I saw were only the tip of the iceberg. How many were shared with your pillow, how many were shed while writing in your blog and how many have you held back?

Who can understand the heart of a Jewish mother? It is like a sixth sense, only Jewish women have it. It is a closeness to Hashem, as if you can sense His sadness as well. Sometimes you sense His joy.

This is talked about in the last *mishnah* in *Sanhedrin*. That on Yom Kippur, the girls would go dancing in the vineyards, just like Tu B'Av. What was special about those times? They are times of forgiveness of sins, and the girls could sense Hashem's joy, which caused them to feel joy, which caused them to go out and dance.

Now, if women can sense Hashem's joy, it would follow that they sense His sadness as well. And so you cry even more.

I think the deepest crying is for the children. I think this is why you identify so strongly with the *haftorah* of the second day of Rosh Hashanah. Rochel is crying for her children and there is nothing to console her. It just seems endless, with no reprieve in sight. So much work, so much selfless giving and giving, with no gain, no reward.

The *haftorah* continues. Hashem says, you can stop crying, there is reward for your work. There is hope, the children will return to their borders, Moshiach is coming and it's your work, your tears, your love and your joy that brought him.

Your suffering is not in vain. You will see the fruits of your hard work and you will be honored.

I don't know why Hashem chose us, but He did. We, like Rochel, won't give up and we won't let Him down.

In this week's *parshah* we read the words from Moshe to Yehoshua, "Chazak v'ematz!" Be strong and courageous. Perhaps it is our *bitachon*, *simchah* and *emunah* that will bring an end to this dark *galus*.

I am with you,

Your Yosef Yitzchak