



Chany Spira

Breakthrough

Unlocking the gates of autism

Nov. 2, 2010

Tuesday 7:30 a.m.

How can a torn heart tear again?

I ponder this question as Shloimy is preparing to move to yet another new home. He will once again have to grow accustomed to the reality of new walls. Will anyone notice the fear lurking behind his darting hazel eyes? I will not even hope for them to love him. My family warns me not to get my hopes up high; my sisters try to place him with a different family every Shabbos and they know how limited the choices are. It's hard for me to face how difficult it is for people to love him.

I dream of the day when my love will make him sprout the wings he never had and enable him to soar and thrive in my loving embrace. However, it is now six years since Shloimy's birth, and no wings are forthcoming. The doctor's diagnosis reverberates in my mind.

"I hate to dash your hopes, but your son is autistic."

I look at pictures depicting people languishing in prison cells. I think about the bars separating them from the rest of humanity and their dreams of breaking free. My sweet son is very much like that — and even worse. He has no hope, barring a miracle, of coming out of his prison, and he doesn't have anyone fighting for his release. His *neshamah* is locked behind an enormous cage and no amount of pleading or banging will get him out intact.

That's what autism does to a child.

If there is anything more difficult than living with a child afflicted with autism, it is giving up the child and not living with him. However, when you know that it is best for him and your other children, as well, you do it regardless of the difficulties. Our Rav guided us in this direction and we know that this is the correct thing to do.

It doesn't make it any easier, though, especially when three families, experienced in dealing with the special-

needs population, could not keep him. I know Shloimy has been brandished the toughest child in his school. I'm not in denial. It just hurts. The pain of my child's rejection hurts.

Today is his trial. The Frankels will be taking him for a few hours to get the feel of him. They will decide whether to discard him like rotten produce or to give him a try.

I got rave reports about them. The mother is a brilliant woman, a nutritionist who has done a lot of research about autism and its causes. She has a heart of gold, to boot. I'm trying not to get my hopes up too high; I know the pitfalls of dashed dreams by now. The only thing I can do is *daven* and wish for the best, because we all know that this is the last alternative before institutionalizing him.

I shudder at these words; my darling, searching child is one step away from being abandoned to the proverbial grey walls of an institution.

Mommy Stein

Nov. 2, 2010

Tuesday 7:30 p.m.

An institution, that's where the agency was about to put this innocent child.

All I got was a two-hour glimpse of my newest challenge, but I know what my answer to the agency will be. I'll admit it; I am totally enamored by Shloimy. I wouldn't call the emotion love, yet, but it is definitely something similar. My husband and children reacted in kind, and I believe it will be a wonderful growing experience for all involved.

I remember the phone call that started us on the ride to bringing Shloimy into our embrace. A service coordinator from a noted agency called me and asked if I would consider fostering a special-needs child. The description went something like this: severely autistic, non-verbal, not toilet trained, terribly hyperactive, stubborn, unmanageable, no family is willing to take him, etc.

They obviously didn't want to fool me, and I indeed was not fooled. I am not afraid of tough. After all the research and conventions regarding autism that I have attended, I was excited for the challenge.

However, the bark was a lot bigger than the bite. Shloimy walked into my house like an explorer. I noticed the fear lurking in his eyes as he gazed around my house. He was calm and somewhat responsive. We played with some toys on the floor, and then it was time for him to leave.

Believe me; I did nothing extraordinary with him. Maybe he knew what awaits him if he does not behave. Maybe his mother, wherever she is, was shedding tears, and the *Kel Rachamim* advocated on her behalf. Whatever it was, I see that it is a *shidduch*.

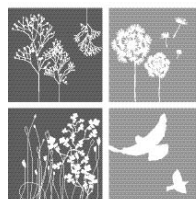
Mommy Frankel

Nov. 16, 2010

Tuesday 7:30 a.m.

I remember my exuberance as a girl when I was accepted into the seminary of my choice. Those feelings resurfaced now. My Shloimy, too, has been accepted! To the home of our choice! He is moving in with the Frankels today.

Frankly, I don't know why they accepted him. After all, with so many easier special-needs children in need of homes, what made them accept the toughest kid in the district? Thank You, Hashem, for



ready for a long rest. Shloimy is sleeping with a harness. It is safe, but I feel queasy strapping down a child. However, there was not much of a choice, since even with the restraint we needed seven members, many of them adults, to keep him in position.

Shloimy made his debut this afternoon with a bang, and I mean that literally. He kicked open the door with such vengeance that his four escorts (that was how many people this stubborn child needed) recoiled. Their eyes showed me that they had witnessed similar sights many times before.

Shloimy took his plate, piled high with junk food from a birthday party, and threw it in my face. He proceeded to trample on the wafer and before I knew it, he swung his shoes squarely at the freshly-painted wall, narrowly missing my daughter's face, jumped onto the table, and threw down everything that was on it. Before we had a chance to recover, he ran to the light switch and flicked the light on and off until we all felt dizzy.

That is Shloimy for you. No, the agency did not bark too loud. My mistake.

I am compiling a list of clues. In my work as a nutritionist, I have noticed that no change occurs without rhyme or reason. What made Shloimy behave so differently two weeks ago?

One clue I am certain of. Seven items of junk food piled on a plate, for a sensitive, special-needs child, is too much.

Clue number two: After making him swallow (six adults pinning him down) some herbal supplements, a significant change came over him.

Clue number three: He has more energy than a herd of deer.

I'll call the school tomorrow about limiting his sugar intake.

An Exhausted Mommy Frankel

Shloimy made his debut with a bang. He kicked open the door with such vengeance that his four escorts recoiled.

listening to my tears.

The agency first told me yesterday. They were afraid the Frankels would back out. But now it's pretty final. It takes the edge off the pain.

Mommy Stein

Nov. 16, 2010

Tuesday 7:30 p.m.

Shloimy is finally sleeping. I, too, am

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Shloimy has
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Just thinking of
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energy.*

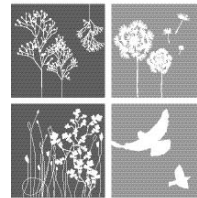
Nov. 30, 2010

Tuesday 5:00 p.m.

I received a progress report about Shloimy today and it included a note from his bus driver. He wrote about the change he has observed in Shloimy. I know that Shloimy used to give him a hard time; the daily struggles to get Shloimy on and off the bus were a strain on all of us. It took the combined efforts of the driver and the aides to heave him, struggling and kicking, off the bus every day.

All this held true until about one and a half weeks ago. Ever since then, Shloimy happily sprints onto the bus and takes his seat of honor (the third seat, left aisle, by the window) without much ado. It's difficult to believe he's talking about the same Shloimy Stein that used to be the most challenging child on the bus.

Mrs. Frankel certainly seems to have found the key to unlock him from that terrible prison cell that autism locked him into.



Mommy Stein

Dec. 14, 2010

Tuesday 5:00 p.m.

The affection that I first felt for Shloimy has evolved into full-fledged love. Just thinking of him gives me energy.

He's tough. No, scratch that. Very tough is more adequate, although still a gross understatement. But I love him nevertheless. I miss his boundless energy today, since he went to visit his mother after school. I wonder how the visit is going. I hope she notices all the positive changes that have occurred.

I know the Steins have been going through their own changes in order to aid my efforts. They have gotten rid of all the toxic elements most homes are exposed to. Since autism is caused by an imbalance in the neurological pathways, chemical toxins — like those found in laundry detergents — are detrimental to an autistic child's well-being.

I am a bit disappointed about the lack of cooperation I am receiving from his school. I pleaded with them to take him off sugar — as I've been doing at home — but they were uncomfortable with my natural approach.

I have become such an expert with my little charge that the way he opens the door every day tells me whether or not he has consumed candy.

I did get a call from one of the nurses in school. She wanted to know what I have been doing. My natural approach toward sensory and behavioral issues intrigued her. She offered to follow along the nutritional program if I would bring a letter from my doctor stating that the approach was medically sound.

I procured the letter within a day because I always work alongside a medical doctor, regardless of the case I am dealing with. So although the school administration is pretty apathetic to my efforts, having the

nurse on my side, giving him his nutritional supplements, provides me with a small measure of comfort.

There has been so much more progress with Shloimy, but I am afraid to talk about it. I think once those changes (think toilet training, fine motor skills, eye contact, concentration) become more permanent, I will share them.

For now, I am just amazed at the *niflaos haBorei* each of us has been molded with. Until you live with a child who has an imbalanced neurological pattern, you do not appreciate the neurological balance all others are blessed with. My goal is to realign Shloimy's neural pathways with strong nutritional supplements and a sensory diet, granting Shloimy a chance at life.

Mommy Frankel

Dec. 14, 2010

Tuesday 7:00 p.m.

Ever since Shloimy left, three hours ago, my face is molded with a permanent smile and wet eyes.

My *neshamah'le* has been returned to me.

Shloimy walked into my house in a daze. I hugged him, and he did not run away. He ran his fingers along the walls and went from room to room, sniffing in the air. No crying. None of my other children hid in fear. Shloimy is not recognizable. I do not know how to repay the Frankels.

And then, the visit reached a climax. Shloimy said "Mommy." He said "Mommy." He spoke.

Shloimy, who has spent hours in a chamber, has been to the most experienced of therapists, has gone to a kinestheologist to try to open his locked mind, SPOKE!

He never seemed to know my relationship to him, and now he called me Mommy! I was crying so hard that I made a mistake. I hugged him. I forgot how much he hates being hugged. However, he did not wriggle free or cry

as he used to. He squirmed until I let him go, and that was it.

Then, my Shloimy sat on the floor. As in sat. He never used to sit, and definitely never played. He avoided anything related to fine-motor skills like the plague. And today he played! He did a puzzle all by himself. It was a sight to watch my kids whispering, afraid of breaking the spell.

Mrs. Frankel did not tell me any of this. I owe her my child.

Mommy Stein

Jan. 11, 2011

Tuesday 6:00 p.m.

Party time! I feel like celebrating, and I will. Shloimy is toilet-trained! Hooray! I am not even celebrating the



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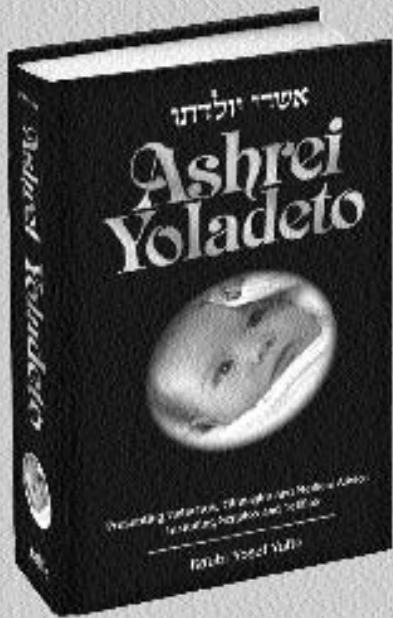
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actual accomplishment, since it did not take more than a month. I am celebrating a mystery solved. Make that two!

At first, Shloimy avoided my bathroom at all costs. The terror in his eyes when I tried sitting him down on the seat was enough to tell me that something about it scared him. Then it hit me. Shloimy must be suffering from hyper-sensitivity, translating into the seat being too cold for him. The local Wal-Mart was our next destination, to purchase a cushioned toilet seat. That was it! He toilet-trained himself afterwards. He even asks to go with some of his new words. To think how he suffered from all those failed attempts. For a regular individual, it is just as torturous as sitting straight in snow.

Which leads me to my second

To think of all those time-outs he suffered. A specialized pair of eyeglasses, and presto! A calm house.

accomplishment: eyeglasses.

Shloimy has been throwing things since he set foot over my threshold. He

Some children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder crave dairy and gluten and will not touch any other food or will not touch certain foods due to their sensory issues, which can lead to malnourishment. Malnourishment is a leading factor in focus, attention, and concentration issues. In addition, if a child craves dairy and gluten it may be that it has an addictive drug effect on the child. Some children do not digest the gluten and casein properly, which causes protein peptides to leak into the blood stream. These protein peptides can cause an opioid effect on the children, which causes their bizarre or withdrawn behavior. In fact, traces of opioid can be found in the urine of these children. To test if your child is affected by gluten or casein you can use the Genova Diagnostics Urinary Peptide test. This is an expensive test, however, and is not covered by insurance. If a child suffers from a gluten/casein addiction, you will see a change immediately if the child is taken off these foods. Therefore, it might be adequate to avoid the foods for a few weeks and see if the child's behavior improves.

Frequently, simple blood work can reveal if the child has any biological or nutritional issues. It sometimes astounds me how young children can have such distorted blood levels. Blood work may reveal: thyroid problems, digestion problems, allergies, auto-immune response, etc. Treating the underlying issue will usually resolve the problem. Sometimes, however, biological treatments need to be combined with therapy since the condition has caused the child to miss developmental stages.

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did not actually throw; he just put things down at a higher altitude than the destined surface. For example, he would take a laden soup bowl, and at about four inches above the table, drop the bowl, soup and all. It was annoying, nerve-wracking, and downright messy. All my exhortations and motivations did nothing. I was perplexed and more than a bit disappointed. I would not call him deaf to my words, because I saw the confusion every time I explained the concept to him.

So there I went again, compiling clues. The conclusion I arrived at was that something about his eyesight must be awry. Off we went to an ophthalmologist, who specializes in perceptive eyesight. His vision scored 20/20, but his perception was so impaired that his perceptive abilities rendered him legally blind. He was hyper-stimulated by shadows, and to him, surfaces appeared a lot higher than they actually were.

To think of all those time-outs and consequences he suffered for misdemeanors such as throwing toys or food. A specialized pair of eyeglasses, and presto! A calm house.

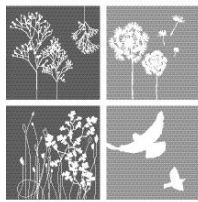
Autistic children are not slow, stupid, or bad. They are simply suffering souls, and with the right tools and knowledge, so much can be done. I cry for all those children, lost and alone, with caregivers willing to do anything for them. My dream is to help more of them.

Mommy Frankel

Feb. 1, 2011

Tuesday 4:00 a.m.

I was so nervous. Really, terribly anxious. My entire family was going to see Shloimy for the first time since his move, at my brother Bentzi's wedding. I hoped that he would show them all what a major change occurred. I wished he would not besmirch his



mother as the *nebach* of the family once again. I know how they all care for me, but their care sometimes makes me feel like the outcast.

I'll close my eyes and relive yesterday's scene all over again.

The smorgasbord is in full swing, glasses clinking, and hearty wishes being exchanged. I cannot eat; I am much too contrite to stomach sushi now. I am on an all-expenses-paid guilt trip for being nervous about my son's debut at the wedding. If I am his mother, where is my love toward him? I know that I love him so much, and therefore, my heart aches for him so. But guilt does not always confer with logic. I smooth my daughter's hair and throw some kisses into the air. My eyes, however, are at the entrance.

And then they are here. The entire Frankel clan, dressed in their best, with Shloimy leading the way. My breath catches, and my intestines are up in my throat. I do not go to him yet. His angelic features are showcased by an exquisite, cream-colored cap, matching his outfit. He walks with poise, his eyes perfectly focused. I see Mrs. Frankel whisper something into his ear, and he is advancing toward me.

I am not expecting a hug. I know he is not capable of giving one. However, he approaches me and extends his hand. He looks like the man of the hour as he carefully enunciates, "Mazel tov, Mommy."

I smother him with kisses and hug him once for every time I missed him. I do not care about my makeup smudging. I care only about Shloimy. He diplomatically wriggles free and I ferret out his Bobby. With a manly handshake, he repeats his stunt. She, too, smothers him with hugs.

He says, "Drink." I bring him a cup of seltzer. He tucks his napkin into his shirt-collar and slowly utters a *brachah*. I cry some more. Where is the child



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who throws everything in his vicinity into the air? In his place, I have a real child.

I go to Mrs. Frankel and hug her, too. I tell her how overwhelmed I am by the changes she has wrought in Shloimy. She tells me how many children she is busy helping, and about her dream of opening a rehab center for autistic children, combined with a reading center.

Meanwhile, Shloimy is impatient. "Kallah," he pouts. I take him to the lady of the hour, and he clearly verbalizes his *mazel tov* wishes.

"Oh, how cute," she gushes. "And what is your name?"

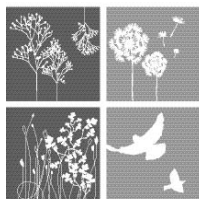
He stays quiet. She blames it on sudden shyness, and we go.

Shloimy leaves. I go to the mirror to fix my appearance and thank Hashem.

Mommy Stein

April 2011

All of Klal Yisrael is celebrating the Yom Tov of freedom — Pesach. We, too, are celebrating our personal miracle of freedom. The miracle called Shloimy. We remember his trapped eyes, and now we see them free of the fear and confusion that



used to cloud their hazel depths. I thank Hashem for granting me the opportunity of helping this darling boy, for enabling me to be the *shaliach* in saving his trapped *neshamah*.

As Shloimy practices the four questions with Tatty Frankel in preparation for the Seder he will spend with his family, I, too, ask my own requests from my Tatte in Himmel. I ask for future *siyatta diShmaya*. I beg Him to give me the tools to help more children, and finally, I ask Him to bring Moshiach and free us all from the various incarcerations we may find

*I tell Mrs. Frankel
how overwhelmed
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ourselves in.

Thank you, Shloimy, for taking me on this wonderful journey.

Mommy Frankel

April 2011

Sometimes the miracles in Egypt seem too great for our minds to comprehend. However, this year I believe I can grasp some of the magnitude of the wondrous liberation the Yidden experienced. To go from being slaves to becoming free in such a short span of time must have left them breathless. As breathless as I feel now after listening to Shloimy's recitation of the *Mah Nishtanah*. It is not even six months that Shloimy has been with the Frankels, and he has been freed from the shackles that have bound him for six years. I am in awe of Hashem and His wonderful messengers, and I *daven* that other mothers, too, will be *zocheh* to find such wonderful *shlichim*. May we all be *zocheh* to our personal salvations.

With love and gratitude,
Mommy Stein 

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