

## Ezer Mizion: A Hand in the Dark

# Closing the Circle

It was devastating. It meant the end of normal life for the young pre-teen. No longer would she feel the support of a loving mother as she grew to adulthood. At age twelve, Suri\* had become an orphan. Frightened and alone, her young heart groped for an anchor. Something to hold on to. A goal.

Like any normal girl, her hair was precious to her. It was her hair that became her connection to her mother whom she could no longer see. She vowed not to cut her hair, but to allow it to grow until it was long enough to donate to another who was suffering from the disease that stole her mother away. She would donate it to Ezer Mizion, which does so much to ease the struggles of cancer patients and their families.

The family trauma took place four years ago, when Rivka\* was in advanced pregnancy with Itzy,\* Rivka's husband, Yaakov\* recalls. "She complained all the time about back pains, but we both thought – and the doctors told us, too – that this was a very common complaint and there was nothing to worry about."

Towards the middle of the fifth month, Rivka called him and said that she couldn't feel her back at all.

"I was in the middle of shopping and I said to her: 'Rivka, something doesn't seem right to me. Let's go to the hospital and check out what's going on once and for all.'"

As soon as the first blood tests came back, they could see that something was not as it should be. An ultrasound enabled the doctor to locate the lump right under the fetus. "At this point, we already understood the situation more or less," Yaakov says.

After another round of tests, which diagnosed the lump as sarcoma-type cancer, Rivka was transferred to Ichilov Hospital. There, the doctors decided to continue with a type of chemotherapy treatment that would not affect the fetus. After a month and a half, they realized that the fetus was

not growing. The doctors induced labor and Itzy was born at a weight of two kilos. Shortly afterwards, Rivka's condition deteriorated until her passing.

Yaakov relates that the first year after her passing was the hardest. About a month after her *petirah*, he took his three children to the highest mountain in Switzerland, where he parted one final time from the mother of his children. "I wanted to feel that I was as close to her as you can get," he says. "Yes, I knew that a mountain was not really any closer, but we're only human and it made us feel closer."

It was not only Suri's hair that had to grow, but her security, her acceptance of the new reality of orphanhood. Her hair represented her connection. Cutting it would mean making peace with life as it is. It took four years until she was ready. For the last few months, 16-year-old Suri has been preoccupied with thoughts about the cycle she would soon be closing with her mother, four long years after seeing her for the last time.

A week ago, she understood that the time had come. She was ready to cut the long braid she had grown and cared for ever since her mother passed away and to donate the hair to female cancer patients who had lost their hair as a result of chemo.

"It's a glorious feeling, a feeling of closure. For four years, I've been thinking about it, growing my hair longer and longer. Today, a stone rolled off of my heart," she says.

For years, both before and after the passing of Rivka, Suri and her family had been the recipients of many Ezer Mizion programs to help them deal with the nightmare that had entered their lives. Now, Suri walked into the Ezer Mizion building as a giver, donating her braid to produce a wig for women with cancer. The circle was closed.

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For further info, call 718. 853.8400 or visit [www.ezermizion.org](http://www.ezermizion.org).



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# Rav Mordechai Simcha ז"ל

## An Appreciation of A Talmid On His Shloshim



— BY ARYEH MARKOVICH —

My relationship with *Rebbi* began in 1974. I was a 15-year-old student in Rabbi Simcha Wasserman's *yeshiva* in Los Angeles. I had limited background in Torah learning, so *Rebbi* would wake up early in the morning, before *yeshiva* started, and teach me *Gemara*. He advised me and helped me learn one *blatt* by heart. That initial learning inspired me to continue growing. I remained in the *yeshiva* for close to half a semester and then returned home to San Francisco. Although it was a relatively short period of time, it was the beginning of a relationship that lasted for a span of over 40 years. *Rebbi* kindled a flame inside me and taught me numerous life lessons. Without pressure, *Rebbi* helped me develop and evolve. I was but one among many of his *talmidim* throughout the years.

Years later, I was able to discuss personal matters with *Rebbi* knowing that he would understand. There was no part of my life that was not affected by his wisdom. He taught me how to reframe any challenging situation and even made it look easy. He was like a father to me. *Rebbi* knew my children and came to participate in their *simchos*. He rarely complained, even in times of pain. He would say, "I am not complaining, I am explaining." In fact, when I asked him what is most important in life, he said, "*Simcha*." *Rebbi's* last name was Simcha. He would often say, "If you want *simcha*, call Simcha." He wrote a partial biography of himself in Hebrew called *Lema'an Tesaper*, which his grandson, Didi Levitan, had translated and printed. *Rebbi* translated the *Sefas Emes* of *Bereishis* using an easier form of Hebrew and wrote *Kochvei Boker*. He also wrote a kuntress, *Tosfos Hakesubah*, about *shalom bayis* which I had translated and printed in Eng-

lish. *Rebbi* started many projects such as Simchas Hatorah, Tehilim Balev, Rashi Lechatchilla, and more. He loved words and he wrote a lot of sayings. Some examples are, "Don't let the past pester you," "Don't look for problems; they will find you," "The best giving is giving in and forgiving," "People have a right to be wrong," "Silence is the best talk," "The greatest present is the present," and, "Mistakes are made so we can correct them." He had a sharp wit. When I told him that I was learning the *sefer Chofetz Chaim*, he replied with a smile, "Good, at least during that time you won't be speaking *loshon hora*."

Another thing *Rebbi* would commonly say was, "It's not the question; it's the answer." One question *Rebbi* asked was, "Why do we say *modeh ani* and not *ani modeh*, if *ani modeh* is grammatically correct?" He would answer that we should not begin our day with the word "I" and speak about ourselves. Rather, we should begin our day being thankful to Hashem. I am extremely grateful to Hashem for allowing me to have *Rebbi* in my life.

During the last ten years of *Rebbi's* life, I called him almost every day and visited him often. I had the *zechus* to take him to the last *Siyum Hashas* in New Jersey. He touched my *neshomah* as well as those of my wife and children. His whole life was dedicated to bringing people closer to Torah.

Rav Simcha was *niftar* on the 29th of *Cheshvan*, November 10, 2015. He is survived by his sons, Rav Akiva Simcha and Rav Dovid Simcha, and his daughters, Sarah Richard, Chanah Schwartz and Rachel Levitan, as well as many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren.

If you or someone you know has something to share about Rav Mordechai Simcha or would like to learn about his projects, feel free to email me at [info@fivetownspring.com](mailto:info@fivetownspring.com).

## Project Inspire Brings Rabbi Yosef Wallis To Flatbush

Rabbi Yosef Wallis, CEO of Arachim, inspired close to a thousand people with his roller coaster ride of a story. "Although I never heard of him, I know Project Inspire would not disappoint," said one Flatbush woman who attended his speech. "This was truly awesome!"

Rav Moshe Tuvia Lieff, *rov* of Agudas Yisroel Beis Binyomin, where the program was hosted, delivered the opening remarks.

Rabbi Wallis told the story of *hashgachah protis* of how he went from the streets of the Bronx to serving as a helicopter pilot in the US and Israeli armies. As Rabbi Wallis put it, had he believed in G-d, he would have said, "G-d, please leave me alone; I am fine." But G-d didn't leave him alone. When standing in

line to buy non-kosher meat, he recalled his grandfather, who was killed in the camps and risked his life to not eat the same non-kosher meat he was about to buy. That thought was the turning point in Rabbi Wallis' life, starting a chain reaction that eventually turned him into a prominent *frum* community member with children and grandchildren learning in *yeshiva*. Rabbi Wallis took it to the next by

level by becoming the CEO of Arachim, spreading Torah to hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

"We decided to bring Rabbi Wallis

because his story strengthens *emunah* and the power of our people," said Rabbi Yossie Friedman, managing director of Project Inspire. "Project Inspire's goal is to do just that: inspire the *frum kehillas* to reach out and make a difference. We hope to see many of these same people at our Project Inspire Convention in February." The convention, which will be hosted in Stamford, CT, will be the *Shabbos* of February 26-28. For questions, email [convention@projectinspire.com](mailto:convention@projectinspire.com) or call (718) 874-8875.

