

OUR FIRST SHAVUOT

Elaine and Larry Komito

In the summer of 2004, in search of a Beginners Service, we came to Lincoln Square Synagogue. On our first Shabbat, we arrived a little before 9:15 am for the service, but no one was in the room. As we stood there reading the informational brochure and trying to decide whether we were in the right place or not, we were approached by a man with a *talit* (prayer shawl). He said, "Are you here for the Beginners Service?" We nodded and he said, "Welcome, I am Ephraim Buchwald. Come in and let's get to know each other."

Meeting Rabbi Buchwald changed our lives. At this time of Shavuot, the festival celebrating *Matan Torah*, the giving of the Torah, it is only appropriate that we recognize our *Rav*, our mentor, for all the Torah he has taught us and our beloved friends in the Beginners Service.

During the summer months, Jews study *Pirkei Avot*, Ethics of the Fathers, where it is written that Rav Yehoshua ben Perachia instructed: "*Aseh l'cha rav, oo-knei l'cha chaver, v'hevei dan et kol ha'adam l'chaf zechut*," Choose for yourself a mentor (a *rav*), and acquire for yourself a friend, and be certain to judge every person favorably (*Pirkei Avot* 1:6).

As a Beginner, finding a *rav* is a very important first step toward learning more about *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism). Without the proper Torah teacher as a guide, it is easy for Beginners to lose their way or give up on their journeys.

Our *Rav* doesn't just perform the typical rabbinic functions, although in truth he did officiate at our wedding. But, more importantly, our *Rav* is the sounding board for our concerns; he helps us navigate our lives on a daily basis. When we sought to marry, our *Rav* met with us to discuss how two people from divergent backgrounds (one, *frum* from birth, the other, *Baal T'shuvah*) could embark on a Torah life together. There is no doubt that without our *Rav*, we wouldn't be here today. Our *Rav* models *middot* and *mitzvot*, he doesn't just talk about them. This is what the *Mishnah* means when it says to choose a "mentor." Select someone who is *emesdik* (truthful/righteous) to be your mentor and your spiritual guide.

Every Shabbat and Yom Tov is another opportunity to engage Rav Buchwald in Torah study and witness his *hachmassat orchim* (hosting of guests). On most Shabbatot, our *Rav* and his wonderful *Rebbetzin* (rabbi's wife) Aidel and their family host a dozen guests or more at their Shabbat table. Some guests are invited ahead of time, but many are invited on the spot following the Beginners Service.

Celebrating our first Shavuot as a married couple, less than 3 months after our wedding, we decided to emulate our *Rav* and *Rebbetzin's* tremendous hospitality. In keeping with the advice from



Pirkei Avot, we decided that we needed to "acquire more friends." What better way to make friends and perform the mitzvah of *hachmassat orchim*, than to invite people over for *Yom Tov* meals! We invited many people from the Beginners Service, as well as friends from our professional associations or our workplace to join us. We had about 20 people for each meal.

Most of our guests were not *frum*, and we wanted to make their dining experience memorable. We set about to plan traditional Shavuot

meals replete with all sorts of *milchig* (dairy) and fish dishes, including homemade blintzes.

As we were planning the menu for the first night, Larry came up with the idea of serving mock shrimp cocktail. He tried in numerous ways to explain to me [his wife] what a shrimp cocktail is, but to no avail. Having never eaten one, I had no point of reference other than commercials on television. I left that project to him and worked on making the cheese and apple blintzes from scratch, as has been my custom every year since I was a teenager.

Since we live on the 21st floor, we arranged with the concierge to "assist" people with the elevator when they arrived. We encouraged our guests to come in time for candle lighting so they would have the experience of *Yom Tov* from the outset. We set up a separate table for the candles and gave out transliterated *brachot* to help everyone with the blessing.

The mock shrimp cocktail, complete with Larry's homemade cocktail sauce, was served as the appetizer to a chorus of ooo's and aaah's. People thought it tasted like the real thing! We also gave out doggie bags of blintzes for those who just needed a few to go. The best part of the night, however, was leaving our apartment at 11:30 pm and leading our guests on the long walk from midtown to Lincoln Square Synagogue to learn with Rav Buchwald.

When we arrived at shul with our posse in tow, Rav Buchwald asked us how we were doing. We told him the shrimp cocktail was a big hit! A strange look crossed over his face, but he quickly recovered his composure. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachia's *mishnaic* advice was truly fulfilled when our *Rav* judged each of us favorably and offered us cheese-cake before the learning began. We learned together until 2:30 am.

Now you know the story of our first Shavuot, and how we acquired our new friends, and became part of the Lincoln Square Synagogue community.

Elaine, an Immigration Attorney, and Larry, an I.T. Consultant, live in Midtown Manhattan.

CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV

ENGAGEMENTS

Sarah Rivkah Goodman and Zvi Gewirtz
Mazal Tov to parents
Barbara and Shlomo Dov Gewirtz
Ruti Haleva and Mark Heilman
Tsiri Kobre and
Yitzchak (Yitzie) Zuckerman
Mazal Tov to parents Miriam and Jeffrey Zuckerman
Tzippy Stern and Gedaliah Levy
Mazal Tov to parents
Naomi Hildebrand and Barry Stern



Ayelet Nakonechny and Yisrael Skolnik
Mazal Tov to parents Shelly and Daniel Nakonechny
Rachel Rosner and Eugene Kantorovich (oops 12/05!)

BIRTHS

Susan and Mark Esken, on the birth of a girl,
Elena Julia (Etta Edna)
Carrie Silberman and Omid Zareh, on the birth of a boy,
Eliyahu (Benjamin Ryan).

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Ilana Tamar Lidagoster
Mazal Tov to mother Dr. Lidia Lidagoster
Melanie Moore
Mazal Tov to parents Lynn and Eli Moore

SPEEDY RECOVERY

Yitzchak ben Chava

CONDOLENCES

Marc Berger, on the loss of his mother, Barbara Berger

CONGRATULATIONS

Charles Bernhaut, upon celebrating his 70th birthday
Ann Crane, for co-chairing the Annual LSS Dinner
Nina and Dr. Moshe Kawebum, for being honored at
the Scranton Community Kollel
Sharona and Steven Spivack, for receiving the Parents
of the Year Award from the Stein Yeshiva of Lincoln
Park

