

THE MISSION BEYOND THE WORDS  
The Story of a Boy Who Overcame Dyslexia



Michael Zarchin



*The Mission Beyond  
the Words*

THE STORY OF A BOY  
WHO OVERCAME DYSLEXIA



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Michael Zarchin

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Author's website: [www.zarchin.org](http://www.zarchin.org).

Dedicated to the memory of my parents,  
Emmy and Yosef Zarchin

*Rabbi Yitzhak said: "If a person tells you:  
'I toiled but did not succeed' – Do not believe him;  
'I did not toil yet succeeded' – Do not believe him;  
'I toiled and succeeded' – Believe him!"*

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 6b



# *Acknowledgments*

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**Rabbi Israel Meir Lau**  
**Chief Rabbi of Israel**  
**President of the Great Rabbinical Court**

6 Cheshvan 5762

October 23, 2001

Dear Mr. Zarchin,

I read several pages of your book, *The Mission Beyond the Words*, which opens a window to and sheds light on the world of dyslexia.

In leafing through its pages, I discovered a fascinating autobiography, a story paved with difficulties yet crowned with success. The book is written with eloquent professionalism interwoven with an unswerving faith in the Creator, emphasizing the personal capabilities and willpower that God grants each individual. This singular combination leads to a deep understanding, optimism, and potential for success in contending with this difficulty.

Your wealth of experience finds apt expression in the book. What impressed me most was the professional treatment method that you implemented.

I have no doubt that your book will greatly contribute to deepening the awareness of and openness to this issue amongst the Israeli public in general, and amongst the religious and ultra-Orthodox sectors, in particular.

May you merit great success in your important endeavor. "May the pleasantness of God be upon you, and may He establish the work of your hands."

With deep respect,  
Israel Meir Lau  
Chief Rabbi of Israel



## Letter of Approbation from Rabbi Adin Even Israel Steinsaltz

1 Kislev, 5775  
November 23, 2014

This book is an autobiography of Michael Zarchin, with whom I have been acquainted for many years. Yet it is not merely the story of his life; it is a quasi-heroic journey of a man born with a severe cognitive impediment, who succeeded – with the help of some very special individuals, coupled with tremendous efforts on his own part – in overcoming it. The book is written simply, without embellishment, thus lending it great credibility. Its great value lies not in the description of the events that took place, but in its ability to offer hope to the many people who are suffering from similar conditions that they, too, can ultimately prevail. In essence, it is a book of heroism and hope.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz  
Jerusalem, Israel



# *Introduction*

As long as I can remember, I have been intrigued by and preoccupied with dyslexia, a condition I suffered from for years, and which, after a long period of denial and repression I finally acknowledged and overcame. I will never forget the day a teenage girl stopped me on the street and asked me if I'd care to make a donation to Nitzan – an organization that aids children suffering from dyslexia. She explained that since the disability is incurable, we have an obligation to help these children accept themselves and learn to live with their impairment. Obviously, I didn't tell her that my mother was the founder of Nitzan. Yet her words touched a deep chord within me. I looked at her young face and asked myself: How much longer can you go on like this? Aren't you duty-bound to do something?

Even Dr. Abelman, the renowned American expert on learning disabilities, who treated me with remarkable dedication, would often ask me why I did not choose to work with dyslexic children. To my mind, though, the fact that I myself had been dyslexic until adolescence did not necessarily testify to my knowledge or ability to help others. But Dr. Abelman disagreed. The necessary insights were latent within me, he claimed, and the day would eventually come when I would recognize them and put them to good use.

Over the years I grew closer to the practice of Judaism, the religion of my birth, and during the 1980s I was fortunate to have cultivated a close bond to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, and to the teachings of Chabad. I forged a deep soul-connection with him, and we corresponded on several topics central to my life. Among other things I revealed to him my painful youth, when I was diagnosed with a learning disability.

In one of his letters, the Rebbe wrote me that I should commit my story to writing, even granting me his blessing to do so. Yet regrettably, I took no action on the matter at the time.

My attitude changed when, quite by chance, I met an artist and gifted performer named Ushi, who told me of his own struggle with dyslexia. When our relationship deepened, I told him that I could help him. Laughing, Ushi said: “In what way are you any better than all the experts who tried to help me, and failed?” I hesitated for a moment. Perhaps Ushi was right; perhaps I was just wasting my time. Should I divulge to him the secret that I had managed to hide for decades? But I answered him: “It doesn’t matter to me who tried to help you, or how. I know that *I* can help you. Give me a try!” Ushi took me up on my offer and, after a period of working together, was indeed able to free himself from his condition.

That was the first time I had ever treated anyone beside myself. I had always felt with every fiber of my being that all the experiences of my youth, coupled with Dr. Abelman’s expertise that had so helped me, would one day merge to become a deeply moving and gratifying occupation. Slowly, cautiously, I began to help another young man and yet another, until I found myself in the thick of the work.

Years passed, but I never forgot that sidewalk encounter with the young Nitzan volunteer, nor could I ever forget the



## INTRODUCTION

blessing from the Lubavitcher Rebbe. It is for these reasons that I have decided to tell the story of my life. If even one of my readers finds relief and encouragement in my words – if only from one detail of the story – then my efforts will have been justified. For then I will have fulfilled the mission beyond the words.



# PART I



# *What Is Dyslexia?*

The term “learning disability” refers to “a heterogeneous group of cognitive disorders that find expression in significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of the powers of speech, listening, reading, writing, and arithmetic.”<sup>1</sup> **Dyslexia** is a specific type of learning disability primarily associated with reading, writing, and spelling difficulties, although some researchers have extended the definition to include difficulties in learning-skills acquisition and mathematics.

According to studies conducted abroad, as well as to the testimony of Israeli students, the difficulties faced by dyslexic students fall into five main categories. These difficulties are often present at an even earlier age:

1. **LINGUISTIC DIFFICULTIES:** weak vocabulary; difficulty in grasping things that are said quickly; difficulty in listening to lectures and taking notes simultaneously; difficulties in organizing a plot-line or sequence of ideas; errors in syntax and incorrect use of conjunctions; difficulties in word recall, in pronouncing multi-syllabic words, and in learn-

1. In this short introduction, I availed myself of the noteworthy work of Amela Einat, *The Key to a Locked Door* (Hebrew) (*Hakibbutz Hameuchad*, 2000), pp. 16–22. Einat is an expert in the identification and treatment of learning disabilities.

- ing a foreign language; a significant gap between oral and written expression, with greater competence in the former.
2. **READING DIFFICULTIES:** technical difficulties in reading large quantities of material; difficulties in reading comprehension, despite adequate mechanical decoding; extremely slow reading; difficulties in distinguishing between primary and secondary issues of a text.
  3. **WRITING DIFFICULTIES:** illegible handwriting; poor spelling; difficulty in structuring sentences and in initial organization of writing tasks; problems in formulating a sequence.
  4. **MATHEMATICS DIFFICULTIES:** difficulty in understanding mathematical language; partial mastery of basic automatic operations; difficulties in remembering formulas or sequences of mathematical operations; transposition of figures and symbols; problems in identifying coordinates; difficulty in copying and reading mathematical problems.
  5. **GENERAL LEARNING-SKILL DIFFICULTIES:** difficulties in organizing time; in persevering at tasks; in synthesizing information derived from multiple sources; in recall and repetition of material; in using printed or electronic databases; difficulty in passing exams, despite familiarity with the material.<sup>2</sup>

Based upon a number of studies on the topic, we can identify several main approaches to understanding the primary cause of dyslexia. A number of researchers claim that dyslexia is a result of a neuro-psychological disturbance. Others point to damage to or a defect in brain structure, which creates functional impairment that is responsible for the disorder in certain

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

neural centers. Still other researchers point to a linguistic-cognitive impairment as the main cause of dyslexia. In any event, a satisfactory, definitive explanation for this learning disability, in all its aspects, has yet to be found.

For many years the Israeli educational system was lacking in effective means of treating dyslexia, and in particular, of defining its characteristics and establishing principles of treatment. On the other hand, Western educational systems, especially that of the United States since the 1960s, dealt with this issue systematically, including the passing of a bill in 1975 that guaranteed free and appropriate educational opportunities to all children. In parallel, the West provided more and better-quality academic research on the nature, causes, and symptoms of dyslexia.

In light of both the American legislation and of ongoing research that focused on the nature of learning disabilities in general and of dyslexia in particular, the Israeli educational system has constantly been updating its periodical reports on the issue. However, as Amela Einat points out, "More than it offered solutions, the latest report<sup>3</sup> only served to generate greater confusion, hesitancy, and lack of clarity regarding this disability. Its main sections were devoted, on the theoretical level, to the formal need for differential diagnosis, and on the practical level, to restrictions placed on requests for, and formal approval of, adjustments on standardized tests."<sup>4</sup>

At the end of 1997, pressure that had been brought to bear by parental groups, Knesset members, professionals, and the media resulted in the establishment of the first Israeli academic committee devoted to examining the issue. The committee's

3. "Special Report 4," September 1996.

4. Amela Einat, *Ibid.*, p. 18.

findings determined that “A systematic inquiry should be made of this phenomenon in general, and more specifically, on the world of academia. Educators must be trained to deal with the problem, to establish criteria for its diagnosis, and to allocate funds for all the above.”<sup>5</sup>

Regrettably, however, the treatment of dyslexia in Israel falls far short of satisfactory. Even worse is that many professionals hold the opinion that we should resign ourselves to the disability, being that its attendant problems neither fade nor disappear nor improve over time.

None of the above is compatible with my own approach, nor with my own personal experience – I suffered profoundly from dyslexia as a child, to eventually overcome it – nor with the extensive experience I have acquired in treating others suffering from this disability. Rather, these have led me to the conclusion that effective and appropriate remediation for dyslexia can indeed be provided to those suffering from this disability.

I draw support for my approach from the writings of Dr. Gerald Getman<sup>6</sup> and from those of his successor, Dr. Stanley Abelman, both of whom invested extensive time and effort in helping their dyslexic patients, myself among them. Dr. Getman developed the “Sight and Vision” theory, which focuses on the primacy of vision in a child’s cognitive development. Based on this theory, he developed, in the 1960s, an innovative approach to the diagnosis and treatment of learning disabilities in general, and of dyslexia in particular. Dr. Abelman,

5. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

6. See Gerald Getman, *How to Develop Your Child’s Intelligence: More Successful Adulthood by Providing More Accurate Childhood* (Luverne, Minn: G. Getman, 1962); idem, *Smart in Everything – Except School* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision Extension, 1992).



who at the beginning of his career worked together with Dr. Getman, was subsequently able to put into practice the multi-faceted treatment methods of his mentor.

Professor Reuven Feuerstein's writings also support my belief in the excellent chances of overcoming dyslexia. His "Theory of Mediated Learning Experience" (MLE) is based on the belief that the very cognitive-structural capacity of the human being can be transformed. In his book *The Human Being as a Changing Entity*<sup>7</sup> Prof. Feuerstein declares that "A human being is not only capable of acquiring quantities of information or skills, but also *entirely new cognitive structures*, and through them access areas that were previously missing from his reservoir of knowledge and abilities . . . . This unique ability of a person to change himself exists as an option . . . actualizing it requires an investment of effort and resources . . . still, the option exists for every person, even when blocked by numerous obstacles that impede its realization" (pp. 13–14).

Prof. Feuerstein further explains that "mediated learning takes place when a knowledgeable, experienced, and focused individual mediates between the student and the world, making the world more understandable to him and imbuing it with meaning" (p. 29). Through the skillful intervention of a human mediator, posits Prof. Feuerstein, a profound transformation can occur: "A person who was considered incapable of learning, who was previously unable to speak, read, recognize objects, or use his intellect, acquires these skills step by step, gradually becoming competent" (p. 80).

Following these words of encouragement and inspiration, I now begin my story.

7. The Publishing House of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, 1998.

# *Leaving School and Returning Home*

It was only after three years of struggle and indecision on the part of the principal of the Kibbutz Givat Chaim school for children with special needs that he finally decided to summon my mother to share with her his concerns.

It was a bright summer's day. The sun scorched the edges of the lawns, marring their lush verdancy. Its bright rays bleached everything on the kibbutz into pallid hues, locking people in their houses and imposing an afternoon siesta upon one and all.

But I, a schoolboy of nine, was about to be scorched by a very different type of heat. So too my mother, whose large car pulled up into the pastoral expanse in front of the school building. She knew full well what awaited her there, in the principal's office.

My mother knew that I was suffering, and that the school was the wrong place for me. She was also aware that the difficulties I was having in reading and writing were not being dealt with at all.

Actually, my mother had been preparing herself for this meeting for quite some time. The fact that I attended this school alongside children whose disabilities were completely

different from mine only exacerbated the situation. However, as had been the case with the other institutions from which I had been expelled, there was always the faint hope that this time, perhaps this time, things would be different . . .

The principal had done everything in his power to make my stay there as pleasant and as extended as possible. I became his personal pet. He saw to my every need and favored me over the other pupils. On numerous occasions he would invite me to his office for pep talks – not that they helped much. At least, though, I felt that there, in the principal’s office, someone was paying attention to me and taking my desires and aspirations seriously. However, my real wish in those days was to be a child just like any other: not different, not privileged, and not cut off from the other children in my neighborhood.

Despite all the help I received from the principal, he could formulate no effective solution to my problems, and my mother was all too aware of this. My father, on the other hand, didn’t keep close tabs on my problems at school. As long as I was safely ensconced in an educational framework, he was content; I didn’t dare reveal to him how much I was struggling with my studies.

“Mrs. Zarchin, your son Michael is an adorable youngster,” the principal began. “However, unfortunately, as principal of the school, it is my obligation to tell you the plain truth and to not have you cultivate false hopes.”

To my mother, his words were as clear as daylight; there was no need for the veteran principal of the Givat Chaim school to finish his sentence and pronounce his verdict. Were it not for my mother’s European upbringing, she would have risen from her chair and cut him short. His words struck her like a hammer and made her ill.

“As you know, Mrs. Zarchin,” he continued, “I have many

years of experience as an educator and principal. Therefore, allow me to describe the situation as it is.” He kept his eyes on her, his gaze lingering on her face as he took a deep breath. “I am sorry to tell you that your son Michael will never – *never!* – know how to read and write.”

Although my mother had heard these words before from others, she nevertheless felt a sharp pain. Her face broke out into a cold sweat, yet she did not lose her composure.

“You may be a renowned educator,” she whispered, as if to herself, her noble face all the while maintaining its composure, “but your conclusion is overly grim. I think it would be better not to make such premature predictions at this stage. Michael is only nine years old. Let’s wait until he’s at least seventeen!”

The principal was far from pleased by Mother’s reproof, but her words made him sink deep into his chair. Mother stood up, bade him farewell, and quickly left the room, taking me by the hand.

We got into the car. Roni, our faithful chauffeur, didn’t ask too many questions. Mother’s expression clearly revealed the storm raging within her. He knew that the cards had been dealt: Michael is returning home.

“We’re going home,” Mother ordered, as Roni turned the car in the direction of our home, in a quiet suburb of North Tel Aviv.

Roni was like one of the family, and as such participated in all our discussions. He was very close to us, and there was nary a decision made in our textile factory or at home that he was not soon privy to. Now he knew that my three years at the Givat Chaim educational institution had come to an end, years in which my parents had tried unsuccessfully to integrate me with children who suffered from behavioral problems, in an attempt to remedy my own learning disability.

My mother naïvely thought that the decision to leave

Givat Chaim – the moment of truth – had been hers alone. The truth was, I had long known that I had to leave the place. However, I was incapable of standing up to my father and expressing my opinion. Fortunately, my mother and I were now of one mind.

The principal's definitive pronouncement – that as a dyslexic child I would never learn to read or write – aggravated my situation at the school, enabling my mother to convince my father that it was not the place for me. The principal's declaration was typical of the prevailing attitude in those bygone days of the late fifties and early sixties.

At that time, the term “dyslexia” was known only to a small group of educational psychologists around the world; the syndrome was considered incurable, with no effective treatment. A dyslexic child was therefore condemned to a life of illiteracy and ignorance.

In Israel, dyslexic children were classified as “abnormal,” the solution being to remove them from regular educational institutions and integrate them into special schools for children with adjustment problems. In these schools, dyslexic children underwent no professional diagnosis and, it goes without saying, received no appropriate treatment whatsoever. Many of the dyslexic children I knew did not even receive the warmth, empathy, and emotional support so vital to their thriving. Even if some of them did attain some degree of scholastic achievement, they never got a pat on the back or a congenial smile, thus quickly sinking back into the “non-existence” that enveloped them.

Only decades later did the situation change, when the government of Israel finally recognized dyslexia as a learning disability deserving of special treatment. For me, however, much water would pass under the bridge before that moment would arrive.

# *Influential Figures in My Life*

## *In the beginning...*

### MY MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS

I was born in September 1954 on the day before Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, into a warm, secular-Zionist family, the “salt of the earth.” My family was among the founders of the seaside city of Herzliya, and among the forerunners of the Israeli textile industry.

My parents named me Michael Avraham: Avraham, after my uncle, my father’s brother, a model intellectual and influential member of the Tz’eiri Agudat Yisrael youth movement<sup>1</sup> in Riga, Latvia, who was murdered in the Kovno ghetto in 1941; as for Michael, my mother had always loved the name and had been reserving it for one of her sons.

My maternal grandfather, Hans Perutz, son of Baruch Benedict, was born in Czechoslovakia. He was a highly educated Jew, a Zionist, and one of the leaders of the Betar movement.<sup>2</sup> He was both a visionary and also a man of action, who was

1. An ultra-Orthodox, non-Zionist youth movement that had been operating in Poland since 1912.

2. An acronym for *Brit Yosef Trumpeldor*, a revisionist Zionist youth movement founded in 1923 in Riga, Latvia, by Ze’ev Jabotinsky.

graced with a sharp intellect. When the family's cotton mill burned down one night, leaving them destitute, he was forced to move to Vienna, where his family took up employ in the cotton trade.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, my grandfather was sent to study in Liverpool, England, the hub of the international cotton trade. There he met and married my grandmother, Annie Sarevsky, whose family had emigrated from Russia to England in the 1880s and who had met with great success in the carpet business.

My grandmother was an aristocratic, graceful, modest, and intelligent woman, as well as an engaging conversationist. Menachem Begin, head of the Betar movement and future prime minister of Israel, nicknamed her "The Lady" on account of her noble character and bearing. She had studied literature and French at the Sorbonne, and was the first woman to have earned two Master's degrees from that university. She was also an accomplished pianist who performed publicly. I still recall her visits to our home, at the age of ninety, when she would play the piano in my sister Sarit's room. She never missed a philharmonic concert or other cultural event.

My grandmother passed away at a ripe old age, twenty years after my grandfather, in her home in Herzliya.

While living in Vienna my grandfather made the acquaintance of the founder of the Betar movement, Ze'ev Jabotinsky – "Zhabo," as he was called by his followers – and his life changed overnight. Their extraordinary friendship led him to consider moving to the Land of Israel, then known as Palestine, to participate in the redemption of the land, to take part in the building of the Jewish state, and of offering its Arab residents the opportunity to move elsewhere.

My grandfather was a modest and unpretentious man. Yet

the heads of Betar, such as Menachem Begin, Ya'akov Meridor, and Dr. Yochanan Bader would often come over to enjoy his wisdom, benefit from his advice, and opinions. At times, they even asked for his help and assistance for their own movement, for unaffiliated organizations, or even for ordinary friends in financial need. My grandfather's many connections always proved helpful. He even generously financed the *Af-Al-Pi*, one of the many ships that illegally transported Jewish immigrants to Palestine after 1937.

My grandfather visited Israel in 1925 and purchased parcels of land in Migdal, a settlement near Tiberias, adjacent to the property of Lord Melchett.<sup>3</sup> When the Fascist party rose to power in Vienna in 1933, my grandfather brought his entire family to Palestine via Rotterdam, Holland, taking up residence in Tel Aviv.

Grandfather never ceased making plans. When in Haifa, he met his friend Hans Muller, founder of the Ata textile factory,<sup>4</sup> and promised him that he would open a wool mill and not a cotton mill, so as not to compete with him. It was thus that the Kishor factory and the Aderet<sup>5</sup> concern were established.

My grandfather was imbued with the spirit of Revisionist Zionism, supporting the Beitar movement and its members in any and every way possible. Many members of Betar, Etsel, and Lehi<sup>6</sup> found employment at the Kishor and Aderet fac-

3. Alfred Moritz Mond, the 1st Baron Melchett, (1868–1930). He was British industrialist, financier and politician, as well as an ardent Zionist.

4. One of the earliest and most famous textile factories in Israel, still in existence today.

5. Literally, “spindle” and “mantle.”

6. *Irgun Z'va'i Leumi* – “National Military Organization” (the Irgun, for short), and *Lochamei Cheirut Yisrael* – “Israel's Freedom Fighters” (nicknamed “the Stern Gang” by the British) were two right-wing resistance groups in Palestine that rejected the more moderate policy of the mainstream Jewish underground, the Haganah.



tories. Grandfather's outspoken and active support for these underground groups during the British Mandate eventually landed him in the infamous Acre prison. However, rather than being deterred by his incarceration, he viewed it with pride – as a symbol of Jewish activism and uncompromising determination. In prison, his lofty character became an object of admiration and earned him great respect on the part of his fellow prisoners. He was the epitome of a prominent Jew who had relinquished the pleasures of the good life for the sake of his country and homeland. Over the course of time, amazing stories began to circulate about his noble comportment towards the prison authorities.

Upon his release from internment, he returned in full force to his business and other activities.

#### MY FATHER

My father, Yosef Zarchin, was born in Moscow in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution. Fear of the Communists drove his parents to immigrate to Kovno, capital of Lithuania, where his father, who had close bonds to the Chabad Chasidic community, became a very successful dealer in textiles and raw materials.

Father received his primary education in Kovno, a city steeped in the influence of the persona of the Ga'on of Vilna.<sup>7</sup> While living at home, he would attend synagogue each Shabbat with his father, and his older brother, Avraham, celebrated his bar mitzvah in the city. Their synagogue was adjacent to the Slobodka neighborhood, famous for its *mussar*<sup>8</sup> yeshiva

7. Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (1720–1797), one of the greatest European Torah scholars of the 18th century.

8. An approach to ethical refinement developed by Rabbi Israel of Salant (1810–1883).

whose style of Talmudic debate became a foundation of the Lithuanian Torah approach.

In 1929 the family moved to Riga, Latvia, where my father joined Hatzofim, the Zionist scout movement. After the split in the Revisionist movement, he joined the Brit Hakana'im,<sup>9</sup> becoming one of its chief activists. In 1936, he graduated high school and enlisted as a volunteer in the Latvian army.

Thanks to business connections he had forged with some Belgian enterprises, he succeeded in receiving a travel visa to Belgium via Berlin. From there he made his way, via the Brenner Pass, to Trieste, Italy. Three years later, in 1939, he set sail for Haifa.

The sight of the Carmel Mountain range, coupled with the moments of the ship's dropping anchor in Haifa port, evoked deep, unfamiliar emotions in my father: his dream of personal self-fulfillment – of making *aliyah* to the Land of Israel – had finally been realized.

Wasting no time, my father joined the Haganah.<sup>10</sup> In parallel, he enrolled at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he studied general history, Land of Israel studies, Bible, English language, and archeology, graduating with honors. Upon completion of his studies he volunteered for the British army and was dispatched to a transport-officers' training course in Egypt. He was later stationed in Italy, returning to Israel in 1946.

It was clear to Father that he had reached a major juncture in life and that he would have to decide where his life was headed. He chose to enter the industrial sector and thus take part in the rebuilding of the Holy Land. A friend who worked

9. A Revisionist Zionist youth organization.

10. A Jewish paramilitary organization operating in Palestine from 1920 to 1948.

in the cement trade referred him to a large Italian concern, and he examined the possibility of accepting the position of manager of their branch in Israel.

It was precisely at this time that my father met my mother. She had two suitors at the time, and most likely her father had advised her to choose the one with whom she felt the greatest affinity. After some indecision, she decided on . . . my father! Truth to tell, the choice wasn't all that difficult, for Grandfather Perutz "helped" her. "Emmy," he told her unequivocally, "I want this young man for my son-in-law, and I would be very pleased if you thought so as well." So, it seems that Mother didn't really have much of a choice at all!

Incidentally, my father would later relate in his memoirs<sup>11</sup> that he sensed Grandfather Perutz's fondness for him on their very first meeting, despite the fact that he was still a military officer – not the most appropriate son-in-law for a leading Israeli industrialist.

"Young man, what do you plan on doing with your life?" my grandfather asked in his booming voice. My father didn't mince words. "I believe that industry is the very backbone of our lives here," he said, proceeding to set forth his surprisingly mature vision. "Industry roots us firmly in the Land, and I plan on devoting my life to it; it is the scythe, and together with the sword we will manage to create a State here!"

My grandfather was absolutely delighted with this answer and gave my father his blessings. After the wedding, he offered my father a position in the family business.

Grandfather's factories were the leaders in Israel in their field: the Kishor factory in Ramat Gan spun combed cotton and wool, and the Aderet factory in Herzliya eventually grew

11. *B'Ma'aseh She'hu Ha'Ikkar* (Lod: Ir v'Techelet, 2000) [Hebrew].

into the Aderet conglomerate, the founding concern of the entire Israeli textile industry. In 1950 my father joined the Israel Manufacturers' Association out of a desire to contribute to the country's development.

Father devoted himself to this task energetically. During his term as head of the Manufacturer's Association he expanded and solidified its diverse branches, strengthened its standing both locally and internationally as the heart of the Israeli economy, and transformed the Association into a key factor in the stabilization of the Israeli economy and market.

Over the years he traveled countless times around the world, with economic and commercial delegations. Wherever he went, his speeches and appearances left a profound and lasting impression. At the same time, his own businesses prospered and flourished, propelling him to renown as one of Israel's leading manufacturers.

#### MY MOTHER

I owe everything to my mother and father – my whole life, everything.

“A mother's heart is never wrong,” goes the saying. When I was only four years old my mother already sensed that I had a problem. She was the one who noticed my inability to focus on pictures, shapes, and colors, and so she inundated me with challenges.

She was truly a woman of steel. She acknowledged my difficulties, yet at the same time believed in me completely, thus paving the way for my eventual success. I always think of her as a combination of the biblical figures of Rachel – refined, with deep, caring wisdom – and of Rebecca, who fought fiercely on behalf of her son, creative, daring, and always open to unique means of achieving her goals. She knew that this was her God-given mission.

I realize now that she spared no effort in confronting my difficulties; there was no obstacle, physical or emotional, that could stand in her way. She fought for me mightily, yet always at my own pace, until I managed to successfully integrate into the competitive society around me. She always knew how to harmoniously blend her rationalistic inclinations with her deep sensitivity. The patience she exhibited until she discovered the proper method and the right teacher to handle my situation as a dyslexic boy was phenomenal.

She was unaffected by external influences; meddlers and gossips revolted her. She did whatever she felt necessary to save her son. Her words, as we returned home from the Givat Chaim school that day, still reverberate in my mind: “Michael,” she whispered in a sympathetic and encouraging tone, “you will yet be able to read. I’m *sure* of it.”

My mother, Emmy (Emily), née Perutz, was born in Vienna, Austria. My maternal grandparents’ home, in which Zionism and Austrian culture were harmoniously intertwined, was a beacon of light. My grandfather would walk my mother through the rooms of the house, commenting: “The living room is Jerusalem, the foyer is Haifa and the Galilee, the kitchen is the Negev.” In this way, he imbued in her a love for the Land of Israel without in any way detracting from the aristocratic and philanthropic qualities of their Viennese-European home. Their relationship was of a unique nature, which gave rise to a rare and deep love between them. She inherited his wisdom and forceful presence. She was a woman of action; my sister Sarit would later recall that Mother’s pragmatism is what guided and shaped our world as teenagers and adults.

When we were still young children, my mother founded Nitzan, an organization devoted to helping children with learning disabilities. For years she worked ceaselessly on a vol-

unteer basis on behalf of these children, investing tremendous resources in the establishment of study centers and teacher-training programs to cater to the special needs of children with learning difficulties. Later on, she worked as a medical secretary in the maternity hospital in the Kiriyah section in Tel Aviv. The doctors showered her with praise; she was an “institution” in her own right, they declared. She was intimately involved in everything, and she took upon herself the goal of helping others to the greatest possible extent, particularly, the weak and the needy. Indeed, she viewed this as her purpose and mission in life. Whenever someone needed help, she gave of herself cheerfully. And she always knew how to contact “the right people” and forge the proper connections.

Although she held strong and well-formulated opinions on many topics, my mother was not a big talker, nor was she ever heard criticizing another human being.

She was meticulous both about her personal appearance as well as in the aesthetics of her surroundings. The custom in her parents’ home was to drink tea from fine, British-style china. On the last day of her life, in her room in her own home, she asked my sister Sarit to prepare her a cup of tea. When Sarit served her the tea in a glass mug, my mother brushed her away with a gesture. “A teacup,” she whispered.

When I eventually began studying Chasidism, I came to understand the importance of serving God with beautiful things.<sup>12</sup> We adorn the Torah scroll, the “four species” of Sukkot, the prayer shawl, and the phylacteries. The *Shulchan Aruch* – the Code of Jewish Law – states that it is forbidden

12. Based upon the verse “This is my God and I will glorify Him” (Exodus 15:2), from which the Sages infer: “You should beautify [the performance of] the commandments before Him” (Talmud, *Succah* 11b).

for a Torah scholar to have even a speck of dirt on his clothing. My mother embodied this approach to life; she was as pristine outwardly as she was within. Her entire persona bespoke honor and grandeur; her Jewish and European heritage and traditions are what imprinted her with her unique path and lifestyle.

#### AVRAHAM, THE SCHOOL DRIVER

Avraham the driver – or Avreim'l, as we used to call him at home – was my lifeboat during those joyless years at the Givat Chaim school.

Every morning at 6:00 AM, Avraham would be waiting for me, a thick cigar butt dangling from the corner of his mouth, threatening to fall but always flipping back to place at the last instant, like some tiny acrobat. He sported a light-colored cap, which he never removed, and which reminded me of the Mafiosi that I saw in the movies in Tel Aviv.

However, his gruff outward appearance was in stark contrast to his easygoing personality, his kind heart, and his great devotion to me. He was a ray of pure light in my life.

Avraham treated me like a son, with fatherly warmth and caring, showering me with attention. I felt closer to him than I ever had to anyone, and we became close friends. Through our countless conversations, and especially with his great love, he won over my trust. I opened my heart to him, sharing with him all my feelings and frustrations over being at Givat Chaim, despite the fact that outwardly, I was a very sociable kid with many friends, and the star of the neighborhood.

One ride I took with Avraham is especially engraved in my memory. I was sitting in his luxurious Chevy Impala when he suddenly turned to me and asked: “Tell me, Michael, why do you attend this school?”

I was taken aback by the question and answered him unaffectedly: “I really don’t know, Avraham. My mother sent me here.” Not expecting such a straightforward answer, Avraham replied: “Don’t worry, it’s only temporary. Patience, Michael. We’ll get through it, and everything will turn out fine.”

One morning Avraham arrived as usual to drive me to school. I had been dawdling a bit, and when I finally left the house I saw him reading the sports section of the daily paper.

“Michael,” he asked, “what does the headline say?”

“I don’t know,” I replied.

“Don’t worry, soon you will know,” he said. His words penetrated my heart and imbued me with a deep sense of calm.

“What would you like to do today, Michael?” he asked.

“What do you mean? Why are you asking?” I responded in astonishment.

“Today we are alone; the other children won’t be joining us. What are you in the mood for, Michael?” He gave a broad smile, the ever-present cigar threatening to fall again.

His question took me by surprise; I was unaccustomed to such questions. I had no idea that other options existed besides the gloomy routine of home-school-home, day in and day out.

“Avraham, you know what I’m in the mood for?” I replied, echoing his question.

“What, Michael?”

“A sweet croissant with a cup of hot chocolate!”

“No problem – we’re on our way!” In a few moments, the Impala was sailing down the multi-lane Tel Aviv–Haifa highway in the direction of Netanya.

On the way we discussed sports, especially soccer, and movies and hobbies. Avraham expressed an interest in my life at Givat Chaim, my neighborhood friends, and in many other things. I felt wonderful and prayed that time would stand still.



In Netanya, we parked beside the boardwalk, and Avraham bought me a sweet croissant and a cup of hot chocolate. I gulped down the cocoa eagerly and was the happiest kid in the world!

Toward afternoon we returned home to Tel Aviv. Avreim'l made me promise not to tell anyone where we had been. I didn't tell a soul. And I kept that promise for thirty-five years.

That fun-filled day in Netanya will always be for me the most significant day of my years at Givat Chaim. From that time on I would awake each morning in high spirits, waiting anxiously for Avreim'l to pick me up for school. The drab routine that had been my lot was replaced by hope for better days. I longed for another "stolen" day in which we could once again enjoy ourselves and have such a wonderful time.

Much to my disappointment, those good days didn't last much longer. One fine morning Avraham failed to arrive. Instead, a somewhat-nervous young man came to pick me up. I dropped my bookbag and lunchbox in alarm. "What happened to Avraham?" I asked the young man in dismay.

"I'm not quite sure., I only heard that he was fired," he answered dryly. I felt my world crumbling. What was the point of going to school now? What would I do there?

I never heard from Avraham again; he vanished from my life. Years later, when I forged a close relationship with Chabad Chasidism, with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and with the letters and writings of the previous Chabad Rebbes, I came to understand that there's no such thing as a coincidence in life. Sometimes a soul is sent into this world to fulfill a single mission, and once that mission is completed, this soul moves on.

In addition, the letters of the Hebrew word "soul," *neshamah*, can be rearranged to spell the word *mishnah*, "to learn." If I learned anything during those days, it was thanks to Avraham's inspiring presence at my side. Though he wasn't a religious or even traditional Jew, for me he was Heaven-sent.

### APPENDIX III

Avreim'l represented to me everything that is good and noble. Even today, whenever I pass by a mini-van or school bus – and there are lots of them in my neighborhood – I often peek inside to see who's sitting behind the wheel. Is this driver aware of the strength and power that he wields? Perhaps I will get to see Avreim'l once more, imbuing other children with faith, hope, and optimism, as he did me.

As the drivers fly by at breakneck speed, I sneak one last look inside. Who knows? Perhaps behind one of the wheels sits my old friend Avreim'l, reminiscing about those wonderful years gone by. Perhaps he is even thinking of me.

# *The Beginning of My Torturous Path*

My disability first became apparent when I was only five months old. My developmental pace was too slow, and though I was a lovable and charming infant, I had difficulties eating and moving. What especially concerned my parents was the enormous gap between my older brother Danny's pace of development and my own.

I learned late how to sit, crawl, stand, and walk. My fine-motor skills were also retarded. My mother turned to the best pediatricians, who tried, with no success, to allay her fears: "Have patience," they said. "He'll catch up." Knowing my mother, these statements were of no comfort to her.

My mother also noticed that I was completely unresponsive to colors, shapes, and images. Her response was to flood me with stimuli. For instance, we would travel to the beach to enable me to look around and see new things. In those days, donkeys and horses still traversed Tel Aviv, and ice vendors and milkmen would travel in horse-drawn carriages. Yet, to her great disappointment, none of this stimulated my senses; I was completely indifferent to my surroundings.

By the age of four I could pronounce only a few words, though I compensated for my inadequate vocabulary with

gestures and the like, so that those around me could easily understand what I wanted.

My mother was quite concerned over what awaited me at school; after all, I had never once held a pen or pencil. However, though I never drew pictures like all the other children, I was very well-liked by my peers and participated in their games beyond the kindergarten walls.

As was to be expected, my disabilities only intensified upon beginning first grade. Each day I would return home and complain to my mother about the teacher, about the material, and about the fact that I didn't understand a thing said in class.

I remained in school for a few months, during which I would each day wait anxiously for the final bell to release me from the stressful environment. I longed to be out in the fresh air, riding my bike.

Around Passover time, after a boring and wasted half a year, my mother took me out of school and hired a private tutor to entertain me with games and not bother with reading and writing at all. She feared that if the tutor failed to engage my interest, my young psyche would suffer irreversible damage.

During that period, there was not a single renowned pediatric neurologist, psychologist, or psychiatrist in Israel whom my mother did not take me to, to be examined by. These experts claimed I was apathetic, or borderline autistic, or endowed with a personality as yet undefinable.

This was what life was like in a family that in all its history had never known any sort of deviation from the norm. Yet my mother struggled fiercely that I be like all the other kids.

In the fall of 1960, when I was six years old, my mother learned of a London specialist in the field of learning disabilities. His name was Dr. O'Neil, and he was considered the expert in the field. My mother took me to see him. It was

my first trip on an airplane, and my heart was bursting with delight.

I well remember Dr. O'Neil's clinic, which was situated on a farm surrounded by a large lake. A marine academy was nearby, and sailboats docked right at the entrance to the clinic. Diverse types of waterfowl floated lazily on the lake, their quacks and chirps mingling together. It was a breathtaking sight to behold; the pastoral serenity and the heady fragrance of flowers lent it an other-worldly feeling.

Dr. O'Neil was a pleasant and amicable man, and we made an immediate connection. Even though I knew no English, I nevertheless managed to understand the instructions of the tasks that he asked me to perform. Upon completing the examination, he turned to my mother and said: "Your son is an intelligent boy. He has great potential and a strong will. But he suffers from a problem called 'dyslexia.'" Dr. O'Neil paused for a moment, thought deeply, and then continued in a serious tone: "Dyslexia is a learning disability known mainly to the academic and research world. At this stage, I do not know how to treat it, and I doubt that there are any experts who do. Still, I suggest that you begin private, systematized treatment of some sort, under professional guidance, with love and devotion, until a solution is found for this disability."

My mother gave a sigh of relief. At long last, here was a medical expert who was confirming what she had always felt in her heart. Dr. O'Neil continued with a smile: "That's my theory. Current research has yet to come up with any solutions for this problem; however, it's possible – though I'm not promising anything – that treatment may be available in the not-too-distant future."

My mother fervently believed that with proper guidance I would be able to overcome this handicap. She also knew,

however, that years of struggle lay ahead of us in contending with a disability that had only now received its official name: dyslexia.

Dr. O'Neil admitted that he was unable to help me, but expressed his readiness to extend us all the support and guidance that we might need.

"Can I now return to Israel relaxed and await further research developments on dyslexia," my mother asked, "while remaining in contact with you so that you can keep us informed?" Her voice betrayed a hesitancy that I was previously unfamiliar with.

"Absolutely!" Dr. O'Neil replied. "All that you'll be missing is the British weather! We need to find the right professional in Israel to serve as our liaison. I'm counting the days until I hear that Michael has become a prominent member of Israeli society, of which I am an admirer."

Thus, it was that with no tangible results in hand, we had no choice but to make our way back home, a cloud of depression hanging over us. But at the same time, a faint glimmer of hope also began to shine – hope that perhaps the long-awaited dawn would soon break and free me from the confinement in which I had been entrapped until then.

## *An Illusory Peace*

Four years later, on the final return home from the Givat Chaim school, mixed feelings welled up in me. On the one hand, I was relieved, for I knew that I would not have to return to that detested place. On the other hand, I was plagued by fear and uncertainty over my future.

Suddenly I found myself without an educational framework. As bad as the Givat Chaim school had been for me, it had at least provided me with an organized and structured environment – despite the fact that I had never quite gotten used to the staff, the principal, or the other pupils. I had always felt like a stranger, in an atmosphere devoid of warmth and tranquility.

My mother's face showed concern as she sat beside me in the car; she was withdrawn, lost in her own thoughts. I hesitated to initiate a conversation with her, for I knew that it was I who was the cause of her worries. "It's my fault that my parents are suffering," I thought to myself over and over. I wanted to cry, but held back my tears. We both gazed out silently at the landscape, barely a word passing between us the entire way.

When we arrived home, I ran to my room, threw myself on my bed, and broke into loud, cathartic laughter. My mother followed me in, sat down next to me, and placed her hand on my head. She tried to calm me down, but I wasn't in need of

support or comfort. I had no doubts that Givat Chaim was the wrong place for me. I only regretted having wasted so much time there, time in which better solutions to my difficulties might have been found. It took my mother a few minutes to realize that my hysterical laughter was joyful and not due to dejection.

“Michael, I’m really glad that you’re finally out of that place,” she declared.

“Then why did you enroll me there in the first place, Mother?” I countered in protest. “You *knew* that it wasn’t right for me!”

“We didn’t have any other options. We gave it a chance for four years, and now it’s clear that it was the wrong framework for you. It’s a shame that all those years were lost, but let’s not waste any more time rehashing the whole matter; let’s move on. I’m sure we didn’t do the sensible thing, yet there are certainly other solutions. We just have to look around, and we’ll find the right one.”

By evening, my parents were already busily in search of a private tutor. My mother contacted a woman who worked as a part-time teacher in the Yehudah Halevi School in Tel Aviv and hired her to tutor me for several hours a day in our home.

For the most part I studied orally. As I listened to the interesting stories she would read aloud to me, my inner world slowly began to expand and unfold. I heard tales of distant lands and foreign peoples; biblical tales also fascinated me. Slowly, I began to recognize the shape of the letters. My progress was slow, but sure.

As far as a framework for my new life, I had to structure it on my own, one step at a time. I befriended the neighborhood milkman and learned about his trade and his family. I would help him set down the milk bottles beside our neighbors’ doors, collect the empty bottles, and place them in his wagon.



I began to hang out at the local greengrocer's, from whom I learned all about the various figures on the Israeli political scene and their views. I could rattle off the names of all the Knesset members, and would grade each of their performances.

The local grocery became my school for mathematics. During the long hours I would spend there, I learned to add and subtract. Over the course of time I also became familiar with the prices of the various products; for instance, I knew how to distinguish between all the different types of cheeses and their prices.

Most afternoons I would go out to play, usually with kids from the neighborhood – good friends whose company I greatly enjoyed. I was happy that they didn't ask too many questions. Although they wondered why I didn't attend school with them, they didn't pester me with inquiries.

As the relationship with my tutor deepened, the suggestion came up for me to join a regular class in the school where she taught. The prospect absolutely thrilled me: at long last I would be among a group of my peers.

My tutor discussed the idea with the principal of the Yehudah Halevi school, who was receptive to the challenge of integrating me into his educational institution.

The principal and staff met with my mother and were immediately captivated by her personality and vigor. The only condition they stipulated was that I continue learning with my tutor at home in parallel to my classroom studies.

I will never forget my first day at Yehudah Halevi. What a festive feeling! I was filled with pride as I donned the school uniform; for the first time ever, I stood straight and erect. It's hard to express the joy I felt as I mingled in the school yard with the hundreds of other pupils. Even before the morning

bell rang I had made several new friends. The future seemed bright and promising. “This is it!” I thought. “I’ve found my place!”

My pleasant reverie was rudely interrupted by the sound of the bell. The children all started dashing off to their classrooms – but me? I felt like a sledge-hammer had just crashed down on my head. All sorts of horror scripts began racing through my mind: What will happen now? How will my new classmates react when they notice my disability? I absolutely *despised* text books; I wished I would’ve been born into a world without books. Letters and words caused me anxiety attacks. What would I do with my bag full of books? I struggled with reading and writing, and only with great exertion had I mastered the art of adding and subtracting, which I had picked up in the grocery store. Can’t a person learn without books? Why can’t I just memorize all the material? But despite all this, for some reason I always had a desire to know and understand what was written in all those books.

Next to our house, where today stands the Ichilov Medical Center, was a huge, wide-open field in whose midst rose the “Pledging Hill,” where members of the Israeli Scout movement would take their induction pledges. Each day, as I would pass through this field on my way home from school, I would slow my pace and whisper a prayer to the Power Above to help me in my new endeavor. I was all-too familiar with Jewish practice, as my family was deeply traditional. My mother would light the Sabbath candles each Friday night, her lips uttering a silent prayer; my father would recite *kiddush* over a goblet of wine each Sabbath and festival. In addition, Father had a permanent seat in the front row of the synagogue reserved for prominent individuals, and he generously supported needy religious organizations. I begged that Higher Power to grant

me the wisdom and understanding to withstand all the trials that awaited me, especially when my secret would be revealed. At times, I would even weep when I pondered the gravity of my situation. I pleaded with that Higher Power to somehow save me.

Indeed, my prayers were answered. Within a few short days I managed to overcome my embarrassment. I made friends with my classmates, who showered me with affection.

I would often host my new friends in my home. We would ride our bikes together through the streets of North Tel Aviv, and I devoted most of my time to my great love: sports. I was an excellent swimmer and even made the swim team, a fact that led many of my peers to seek my company.

Each afternoon I would study with my tutor. Slowly I began to understand what was being discussed in class. Still, I never jotted down notes in my notebook, as did my classmates. But then again, neither was I ever called up to the blackboard. Thus, I was spared from potentially embarrassing situations.

When I occasionally would ride my bicycle to school and park it in the yard, I would immediately be surrounded by boys and girls. Although this of course made me happy, a storm continued to rage in my heart. My ongoing masquerade and my apprehension over what was in store for me disturbed my illusory peace.

# *The Substitute Teacher*

Springtime arrived. The upcoming Passover break was already palpable in the Yehudah Halevi school. It was as if the blossoming of the fields and the fragrant magnificence of all things in bloom outdoors had penetrated the classroom, permeating its every corner.

I waited impatiently for the arrival of the day of the excursion that I and my friends had planned. As I was lost in my sweet daydreams, two people walked into the classroom: the principal, Mr. Zakkai, and a woman whom he introduced as Miss Shoshanah, who was going to substitute for our regular teacher, Chaim, in the upcoming few periods.

The principal's words cut short my train of thought; his announcement left me thunderstruck.

Although Miss Shoshanah seemed pleasant enough, within minutes she began to scream and frown, as the pupils took advantage of Chaim's absence and began acting wildly.

Miss Shoshanah pointed straight at me. "What's your name? Yes, you!" she asked in a loud voice.

"Michael Zarchin," I replied distraughtly.

"Stand up!" she ordered.

I was panic-stricken. Then, she added loudly, "Please go up to the blackboard and write down your opinion, Michael."

"What's the topic, teacher?" I responded.

“The topic is: ‘Why it is forbidden to disrupt the lesson,’” she answered impatiently.

I never dreamed that such a routine occurrence as having a substitute teacher would turn into such a traumatic experience for me.

For some reason Miss Shoshanah chose to focus on me alone, and in an angry outburst she commanded: “Michael Zarchin, go up to the blackboard! Why are you wasting your classmates’ and my precious time?”

I stood there, bewildered and helpless. Outwardly I managed to maintain a veneer of indifference, but inside I was in upheaval. My mind played through various scenarios as to how to extricate myself from this embarrassing situation. I broke out into a cold sweat; beads began to drip down my face. I was trembling all over, and I tormented myself with the question: How on earth are you going to get out of this one, Michael? I couldn’t budge, as if unseen forces were gluing me to the spot.

“Michael, go up to the blackboard!” Once again, her voice terrified me.

In a split-second decision to make use of my drama skills, I quickly improvised a solution: I crossed my legs, entwined my fingers, and began mimicking the teacher: “Michael, go up to the blackboard. Michael, go up to the blackboard,” I repeated over and over, all in order to buy myself time. The teacher, who hadn’t expected such a response, turned bright red. My classmates couldn’t contain their laughter, which intensified by the moment until reaching a hysterical pitch. Miss Shoshanah was beside herself with rage. She began to lose control, and tears started streaming down her face. My veneer of indifference cracked; I felt her pain and started to cry, too!

Though I realized I was causing her pain, I had already decided that come what may, *I was not going up to that black-*

*board to become the laughingstock of the class.* In the meantime, all pandemonium broke loose.

The teacher's cries of rebuke were drowned out by the ear-splitting school bell, after which my classmates lifted me up onto their shoulders with a cheer: "What an actor! You really gave it to her!"

At that moment, I felt like a star. There was no sweeter feeling: Star for a Day! In the days to follow I gradually came to realize that my future was in my own hands.

Within about two weeks Miss Shoshanah was gone. However, my newly gained respect elevated my status in class even more, making me a model to be imitated and admired.

I have no logical explanation as to how I managed to get through those three years at the Yehudah Halevi school without a single pupil or teacher ever proclaiming: "The emperor has no clothes! Michael Zarchin doesn't know a single thing we've learned in class!" I credit it all to the assistance of the One Above, that Higher Power to whom I would turn in prayer.

Toward the end of the eighth grade I suddenly found myself up against two obstacles, both of which terrified me and disturbed my peace of mind.

The first one was the "Survey Examination,"<sup>1</sup> whose purpose was to assess all the pupil's achievements in elementary school, thereby determining the most appropriate high school for him. The nightmare of the "survey" hounded me day and night, keeping me insomniac. What would I do? How could I avoid it? My classmates had only one topic of conversation: how to pass the "survey" and score a good grade that would get them admitted to a prestigious high school.

1. A psychometric exam testing for knowledge, which used to be administered at the end of the 8th grade and which, to a great extent, determined the pupil's academic future.

My concerns focused on something else entirely: how to evade the cursed “survey” altogether, and what ruse to devise so that I not become a laughingstock among my peers.

In the end, the Higher Power again saved me from the abyss. Two days before the “survey” I awoke with a raging fever. My mother summoned the doctor, who subsequently ordered me on absolute bedrest. Never in my life had I been so happy to be sick! Thus, I managed to evade the terrifying “survey.”

The second obstacle, more formidable than the first, was my uncertain future. What would I do in the coming years? As the school year drew to a close, my classmates began to play the “prestige game”: Which high school are you attending next year? The popular choices were Geulah, the Herzliya high school, the “New” high school, and Alliance.

It was only natural that all my friends wanted to know what my plans were. After all, I had always been at the hub of things; where, indeed, was I headed? I felt lonelier than ever. Except for my mother, I had no one to whom to unburden my concerns. Would any self-respecting high school agree to accept me as a student?

The question gnawed at me. Until that point I had studied in a regular school setting. Although I had made very little progress in my studies, I was very successful socially. And the main thing was that I had managed to almost completely conceal my disability. But I had now reached a crossroads, and was forced to examine my options.

Mother and I sat for hours on end poring over the options. Finally, we reached the conclusion that I should enroll in the “external”<sup>2</sup> high school Ankori in Tel Aviv, this being “the least of all evils.”

2. An independent educational framework, not under the auspices of the Israeli

Armed with this decision, I showed up in school and announced to my friends, in no uncertain terms, that I was planning on attending Ankori. Eyebrows were raised; I even heard their hushed whispers: “What!? Doesn’t Michael have any better options? Has he gone mad? Ankori is where all the dropouts go!”

I had, however, already formulated an advance line of defense for my decision. I announced to my classmates that I was sick of conventional education, in this way transforming my precarious situation into an ideology!

To my great surprise, my friends accepted the reason behind my decision with a large measure of trust and ever since then stopped teasing me about my choice.

My stint at Ankori did not prove beneficial to me at all. I learned nothing there, and socially it was totally inappropriate for me. The students never got together after school-hours, my sole recourse being, as always, my neighborhood friends, who, although finding it hard to believe my cover-up story, nevertheless wisely brushed aside their doubts and embraced me warmly.

During those years, I felt that I did possess a good sense of perception, and that I was blessed with a fairly good analytical ability. Although I felt that I had matured, I was nevertheless still unable to overcome my learning disability, which weighed heavily upon me. I went around troubled, plagued by doubts and indecision. What professional field would most suit me? Would I ever be able to acquire a profession at all?

I believed that an answer was surely in the offing. However, the more time passed, the more these issues became progressively acute and disturbing.

Ministry of Education, that requires no tests or papers, and whose sole goal it is to prepare students for the Israeli *bagrut* (matriculation certificate) exams.



# *The Gift of the Sailboat*

On my fifteenth birthday, my father made me a surprise. We drove down to the Tel Aviv marina and parked the car besides an anchored sailboat. I hadn't a clue what we were doing there; I thought that maybe Father wanted to show me his hobby – sailing – from up close. It didn't occur to me that he had bought me the sailboat as a birthday gift. It was a real beauty – a sporty, shiny double-seater. Father knew how much I loved sailing and how good I was at it. The gift moved me to tears.

The weather was warm the next day, with a northwesterly wind and a calm sea. This time, as I set out on the water, I allowed myself to reflect out loud. The sea unfolded before me like a gigantic blue carpet, its waves whispering to me. All around me was nothing. I felt completely free to converse with that Higher Power that had rescued me in the past and who had already become my intimate acquaintance.

This time I decided not to settle for a mere talk, but to cry out to that Higher Power, to ask for assertively – and, yes, demand – an answer: “What did I ever do to You, God? Why are You mistreating me? Why did You bless Reuven, Tzvi, and Yoram with brains and understanding, but left me behind, abandoned by the roadside, with none of the tools required to get ahead in life, to learn and understand? Have You no compassion for me?!”

The sailboat glided between the waves. It seemed as if the blue sky were listening to me, trying to intercede between me and the One Above.

The hours flew by. It was almost dusk, and there I was, sailing far from shore, speaking with Providence, and awaiting an answer that for some reason was not forthcoming.

I felt like my heart was about to break; a sharp pain pierced my body. My voice choked up, and my face was awash with tears. Despair got the better of me, and the feeling of being forsaken threatened to paralyze me. The darkness that had settled on the sea matched my gloomy feelings. Suddenly, from a distance, a powerful beam of light shone on me. Blinded and scared, I recoiled and grabbed onto the railing of the sailboat so as not to lose my balance. The beam of light focused upon me, threatening to entrap me. Glued to my place, unable to move, I waited for it to move on.

In the meantime, the waves suddenly became stronger, threatening to wash me overboard. For a split second I closed my eyes, and when I opened them I was in the water! In an instant, the frothy waves had carried my sailboat far away. I battled them with all my might, making use of my excellent swimming skills, unwittingly discovering powerful resources hidden deep within me – or was it that Higher Power that was watching over me and protecting me in that difficult moment? Suddenly, the Hand of Providence once more stretched forth, quieting the waves and carrying me safely back to shore.

Thus it was that my faith in that Higher Power grew stronger, even though my difficulties and pain did not abate. I hoped the day was not far off when God would no longer stand aloof from my prayers, that He would finally take action on my behalf. What was I asking for, after all? To be like everyone else; that was my one small request.

Though I lay in repose on the sand, I was certainly not at peace. In the days that followed, I continued trudging along aimlessly at Ankori, singularly unmotivated. The whole time, though, my mother was working energetically and with great determination to find some way to set me on solid ground.

Quite by accident my mother met a young Jewish optometrist named Harry Wax, who specialized in learning disorders. His method of treatment, quite novel at the time, consisted of coordination exercises and activation of the limbs (mainly the arms and legs) geared to stimulate the patient's cognitive system. He demonstrated in his research that there exists a direct link between a child's motor skills and the diverse variables underlying the functioning of his cognitive system.

My mother returned from her meeting with him quite impressed, convinced that he could help me. He accepted me as a patient and began working with me daily.

During each session, which lasted about an hour and a half, I would perform various and sundry coordination exercises. Even though I didn't see any correlation between these exercises and my learning disability, I nevertheless conceded to my mother's request that I give it a try. And indeed, after a few weeks there was noticeable improvement in my ability to write and draw shapes in a more decipherable fashion. This, of course, pleased us all no end.

At the same time that my functioning was progressing, Mother continued unabated in her quest for learning-disability specialists. In the course of her searches, she discovered a renowned American specialist, a devout Catholic named Dr. Gerald Getman, whose practice was in Philadelphia. She sent him all the pertinent information about me, including the opinions of all the specialists whom I had previously seen, along with a heartfelt cover letter.

There was one factor, though, that Mother did not consider, which somewhat clouded over our joy at having found Dr. Getman: that is, his seemingly interminable waiting list. Still, Mother was not discouraged, utterly confident that we would be granted an appointment. It was impossible for this door to be locked before us, she reasoned, after having travelled such a lengthy and arduous road.

And she was right! Three weeks after sending off the documents, we received the hoped-for reply. Not only did Dr. Getman acknowledge our request: he granted us an immediate appointment!

## *Preparing for the Trip*

From the moment we received Dr. Getman's reply, our daily routine changed drastically; we began devoting all our time to preparations for the trip to the States. Since we realized that the period of our stay there was indefinite, we had to plan accordingly. My older brother at the time was studying in the United States, and with Mother and I away, Father and my sister Sarit understood that many long, difficult months awaited them. I, however, suffered from a different dilemma. While I was certainly looking forward to the trip, I also realized that I was forcing everyone else to drastically adjust their lives: was that justified? And regarding myself, was I about to become some American doctor's newest guinea pig? And how would Mother and I manage alone in a foreign country?

I told my friends that I was traveling to the States in order to learn the textile trade. This wasn't a complete lie, since my brother had already begun to specialize in that field there.

Miraculously, however, relatives of ours from the United States suddenly appeared in our lives and, like true family, opened their home to us for the duration of our stay in America.

The story is as follows: Ten years prior to our trip, my father had made some business contacts with individuals in the United States. In the course of their dealings, he met an

American-Jewish businessman, also named Zarchin, and they discussed the possibility that they might be related. Exchanging business cards, they agreed to keep in touch. In 1960, we received a letter from the American Mr. Zarchin, but over time the connection was lost.

Occasionally, my family would recall our American relatives; we even tried occasionally to track them down, although always unsuccessfully. One month before our trip, however, a young woman of about twenty, carrying an oversized backpack, knocked on our front door. I opened the door, and she urgently requested to speak with my parents. I offered her a seat and summoned my mother, who although surprised by the arrival of this unexpected guest, invited her in.

The young woman introduced herself. "My name is Jill Zarchin, the daughter of Blanche and Irving Zarchin from New Jersey." We were stunned. It turned out that Jill had come to Israel after a lengthy period of globe-trotting. In the process, she had lost almost all contact with her parents. She showed up at our door, she explained, because she had heard her parents speak many times of their Israeli relatives named Zarchin; she assumed that when she would reach Tel Aviv she would be able to locate and meet them. She opened a local telephone directory, took her chances with the address of the first Zarchin family her eyes alighted upon – and found herself on our doorstep!

Our stunned expressions quickly turned into warm smiles of welcome, as though we had found a long-lost daughter. We immediately invited Jill to stay. We prepared a bed for her to rest a bit, and after she felt refreshed, my mother phoned her parents in New Jersey to inform them that their daughter was in our house, safe and sound.

Jill had a long and moving conversation with her parents,

at the end of which they decided to catch the next plane out to Israel.

Two short days later, we held a joyful reunion in our home with the American Zarchins, with Jill, the catalyst of the entire saga, orchestrating the event. That night our entire family was invited out to dinner as guests of the American Zarchins at the Dan Hotel. It was an unforgettable evening, in which we discussed our family connections and expressed our desire to further develop them. Indeed, these connections would eventually bear fruit.

Jill and I spent a lot of time together during her stay in Israel. We took strolls together, dined out in local restaurants, and held delightful conversations in which we discovered our many common interests. I showed her around Tel Aviv and its numerous places of interest. I also told her about my upcoming trip to the States, and was thrilled when she offered to help my mother and me during our stay. The subject of our trip came up again during my parents' conversation with Blanche and Irving, who didn't hide their enthusiasm and who extended us an open invitation to host us in their home indefinitely.

It is worth mentioning that my father was very proud of his lineage; he could trace his family back to leading chasidim of all the Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbis of past generations. He was fortunate enough to have met the last Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, and had been very taken by his powerful personality. In preparation for our trip, he wrote the Rebbe a letter requesting his blessings, advice, and guidance. My mother took along the letter, in order to deliver it to the Rebbe personally (at the time, I myself had no idea who the Rebbe was), but for reasons unbeknownst to me until this very day, it was never delivered. Nevertheless, after I eventually forged close bonds to Chasidism and Chabad,

I realized in retrospect that the Rebbe's blessing had in fact accompanied me during my entire stay in America.

One of the reasons I felt confident on the eve of the voyage was my good command of English. From a very young age, my parents had made sure that I learned the language and even hired a private tutor for me. I emphasize this point because the standard textbook assumption is that individuals with dyslexia cannot learn foreign languages. On this point, at least, I can testify otherwise. I invested extra effort into learning English in those days, since I knew I would soon be using it a lot.

Around that time, I met a special person who became a role model for me: Yitzchak Bloom, a charismatic teacher in the American International School in Kfar Shemaryahu, where I had been studying immediately prior to my trip to the States, and an accomplished athlete. I treasure his memory because the devotion, resoluteness, and determination that he displayed during the long months in which he served as my teacher.

In the course of my studies at the American International School, I honed my English skills, acquired new modes of behavior, and encountered world-views very different than my own. I even tried to imitate the refined and easy-going mannerisms of the children of diplomats who were studying there; on more than one occasion they tried to imitate my own behavior and mode of dress.

My peer group in those days consisted mainly of the sons and daughters of diplomats living in and around Tel Aviv. I enjoyed their company, and felt myself growing surer of myself with each passing day. The adrenalin of youth began coursing through my veins, and I felt that I was finally becoming my own man, rid of inhibitions and complexes. At long last, I felt that I was worth something! I felt myself extremely fortunate:



I was happy to come to school each day, and my friends there were equally happy to see me, for in their eyes I personified the Israeli spirit of openness and conviviality. The educational framework also suited me perfectly, as the American International School provided an open environment with no sense of coercion or competitiveness.

The colorful figure of Yitzchak Bloom was my model of a free and undaunted spirit. He was also the one who encouraged me to learn karate. Sports, our mutual hobby, reinforced our relationship. We swam together, competed in races, went sailing in my boat, and went fishing by night on the seashore in Jaffa. I looked forward to seeing him each day, and I was constantly captivated by his personality and kind-heartedness.

This pleasure-filled time didn't last long, however. One day, Yitzchak Bloom didn't show up at our house for my daily history lesson. I was very concerned, wondering if he had fallen ill or if something had happened in his family. Days passed with no word of him. I decided to visit his home, only to find the door locked. The neighbors told me that he had simply packed his bags and left . . . I couldn't imagine what had caused his abrupt departure. Why didn't he say goodbye? What had happened? His sudden abandonment pained me deeply, and felt as if I were drowning in a sea of illusions.

It turned out, however, that this blow actually served to bolster me for the trials yet to come. Rather than letting myself regress, I realized that I had to pull myself together and move forward. In retrospect, thirty years down the line, I have to admit that the great self-confidence I acquired thanks to Yitzchak Bloom stood me in good stead in dealing with subsequent difficulties that I would be faced with later in life.

The upcoming trip to America infused me with optimism and hope. I was so excited that I could barely fall asleep at night.

And when I would finally fall asleep, I would dream about what awaited me. I thought a lot about Dr. Getman and about all the free time that would probably be at my disposal.

My father, however, perceived in me a deeper, unspoken concern. He tried to discuss my feelings with me as the day of the voyage drew near. One morning, as I came down from my room, he called me over, put his hand on my shoulder, and said with great emotion: “Michael, you are about to embark on an important stage in your life. I’m sure you are going through a hard time these days. You should know, my dear son, that it’s very difficult for me to provide you with a solution to your pain and uncertainty. Both your mother and I are doing everything in our power to find an answer to your problem. We, too, are full of hope and expectation these days. The only thing I can promise you – which I believe is the most important of all – is that whatever happens, at every stage and with each new step, we love you and will continue to support you completely, until we know beyond a doubt that we have achieved our goal, which is for you to become a man of strong character, well-educated, industrious, capable of learning whatever your heart desires, and solidly on the road to fulfilling your ambitions.” My father embraced me tightly, kissing my cheek. His warm, salty tears exuded such love and concern . . .

I went back to my room, Father’s heartfelt words still resounding in my ears. A welcome sensation of self-confidence engulfed me, and the emotional burden of the previous days gave way to a resolve and determination for what the future held in store.

One of the issues that weighed heavily upon me during the period of preparation for the trip was the fear that I wouldn’t be able to manage the heavy load of compensatory material required for high school, and to enable me to reintegrate into the difficult course of studies upon my return.

As an escape from all these troubling thoughts, I took to riding my bicycle around Tel Aviv. I would stop at clothing and shoe stores and lose myself in the display windows. The bustle of the city enthralled me. I loved the ceaseless movement, the rush of the crowd, and people's facial expressions, which often disclosed a bit of their inner worlds. I loved watching them, probing the energy of the businessmen and traders, the workers, and the diverse passers-by. I wanted to shout out to them: "I'm traveling far away, across the ocean, to solve my problems. I need a little of your *joie de vivre* – to just take life as it comes!"

It was the summer of 1970, and the entire country was still euphoric in the wake of the Six-Day War. The streets were teeming with thousands of tourists who had flocked to Israel from around the globe, seeking to behold the miracle of a country that had suddenly tripled in size in a lightning-fast war and dazzling military victory. The shops were overflowing with merchandise; the hotels were packed with guests, who filled the country's coffers with foreign currency. Across the country, another type of battle was waging – between the parties at the opposite ends of the political spectrum – concerning the fate of the liberated/conquered territories. All of this was of no interest to me, however; I was pulled toward the hedonistic "eat, drink, and be merry" atmosphere that spread like wildfire due to the removal of the former borders and the restoration of the holy sites to Jewish hands.

A few days before the big day, after all was readied and duly packed, my father suddenly approached me. "Have you packed everything, Michael?" he asked with a broad grin.

"Yes, Father, everything's packed and ready," I replied confidently.

"Then I have one more thing to give you to pack, something very valuable. And I ask that you guard it very carefully."

“What is it that you want to give me, Father?” I asked curiously.

“I have in my possession a document that was written many years ago by the head of the Zarchin family; I want to give it to you. Take a look at it during your stay in the United States, and learn all about our family’s roots.”

With hands that were almost trembling, my father handed me the document, which was written in a close, intricate penmanship: the Zarchin family tree!

“Father, I promise you to guard over it and even try to read it. And I will try with all my might to continue the glorious family line,” I added emotionally.

This is the text of the document:

*With the help of God*

*These are the annals of the forefathers of the Zarchin family, born in the Mohilev district on the Dnieper River, in the city of Lubavitch, in the Orsha region.*

*The head of the family, R. Tzvi Hirsh Zarchi, of blessed memory, was born in [the Hebrew year] 5520, or according to their [i.e., the Gregorian] calendar, 1760. He resided in the city of his birth and was a disciple of the Rabbi [Shneur Zalman] of Liozna, [author of] the Tanya, Torah Ohr, and Likutei Torah. His cousin, the renowned rabbi and Chasid, Rabbi Yitzchak Yonah of Yanovitch, was also an illustrious disciple of the [Rabbi of Liozna,] author of the Tanya; the latter’s son, the well-known Rabbi Shemaryahu, was also among the Chabad Chasidim at the time of the Ba’al HaTanya, as is related in Stories of the Rebbe’s Household.<sup>1</sup>*

*The following are the progeny of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Zarchi: His first-born son, R. Yisrael Zarchi, born in 5550 (1790), and*

1. Abraham Meir Heilman, *Beit Rebbi* (Hebrew) (Berditchov, 1903).

his younger son, Rabbi Eliyahu, were both intimately connected to the Chasidic scholars who were disciples of the author of *Torat Chaim* and *Bi'urei HaZohar*.<sup>2</sup> Towards the end of their lifetime, in the days of the [leadership of the] Tzemach Tzedek,<sup>3</sup> they were like members of the Rebbe's household. R. Eliyahu's renowned son, Isser, served as regular leader of the congregational prayers on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur for many years, until the passing of the [Rebbe] Maharash<sup>4</sup> in 5643 [1882].

The following are the generations of Rabbi Yisrael Zarchi:

His firstborn was Rabbi Zalman Leib; his second son was named R. Yosef; and the younger sons were Yitzchak Yonah and Tzvi Hirsh, all of whom were born between the years 5580 (1820) and 5600 (1840). At that time the Russian monarchy began building the king's highway, [which extended] from Kiev to Petersburg and which covered a terrain of 1300 miles. R. Yisrael Isser Zarchi was awarded a government contract for the project of laying the infrastructure, from the Vitebsk district to the border of the Paskov region. He relocated from his home in Lubavitch to the construction area for a period of several years, until the family eventually became permanent residents [there].

Upon conclusion of the project, each family member began pursuing his own area of livelihood. His oldest son, R. Zalman Leib, worked as a government contractor for road repairs. His

2. The Mittlerer Rebbe, Yiddish for "Middle Rabbi" (he was actually the second Rebbe) of the Chabad-Lubavitch dynasty, Rabbi DovBer Schneuri, 1773–1827.

3. The third Rebbe of the Chabad-Lubavitch dynasty, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, 1789–1866; he was the grandson of the first Rebbe, the Baal HaTanya, and both nephew and son-in-law of the third Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek.

4. The fourth Rebbe of the Chabad-Lubavitch dynasty, Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn, 1834–1882, son of Rabbi Menachem Mendel.

second son, R. Yosef, leased and ran the distillery on the estate belonging to the poet Pushkin, and for several years he resided on his estate and dealt in alcoholic beverages. His home was always open [to strangers]. He would feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, in fulfillment of the verse: "Share your bread with the hungry, and the wretched poor shall you bring home... and do not ignore your own kin" (Isaiah 58:7). His home was also a prayer-house on Sabbaths and festivals, and it also contained a mikveh,<sup>5</sup> which was heated in order that those immersing themselves not suffer from the cold water.

In addition, he kept close company with Chabad Chasidic scholars. He pursued neither amassing a fortune nor acquiring material possessions, rather occupying himself with the welfare of his fellow man. This was his path in life, and above all else: to extend hospitality to guests – Torah scholars in particular. Although his home was about 250 miles from his birthplace in Lubavitch, [word of] his deeds of kindness [reached there], and were highly regarded and lauded.

It is known that members of the Tzemach Tzedek's family would travel [from Lubavitch] to Petersburg. This was before the advent of the railroad, when they would travel in [horse-drawn] postal wagons. Along the way they would lodge in R. Yosef's home, resting from the strain of the journey, usually staying over the Sabbath.

In 5625 (1865), [two of the Tzemach Tzedek's seven sons,] Rabbi Chaim Schneur Zalman and Rabbi Shmuel [later to become the Rebbe Maharash], traveled to Petersburg and arrived at R. Yosef's house on Friday morning, resting from their journey over the Sabbath and remaining until Sunday morning. Then, about one hundred Chabad Chasidim from the

5. Ritual bath.

neighboring towns converged on his home, all of them partaking of the [Sabbath night] meal at which Torah scholars were present (which is likened to partaking of food from the Altar of the Holy Temple). This is as the verse states: “You shall call the Sabbath a delight” (Isaiah 58:13), and as the Sages say: “The pleasure of the Sabbath is a taste of the World to Come.”<sup>6</sup> This was the Sabbath on which the Torah portion *Kedoshim* is read in the synagogue. During the entire year [after this visit], he (R. Yosef) did not cease teaching and disseminating words of Torah and the secrets of the Torah. As R. Yosef said: “This is [in keeping with] what our Sages say: Whoever hosts Torah scholars in his home and provides for them from his own possessions is considered by Scripture as if he had offered up the daily sacrificial offering, as the verse says: ‘[Behold, I see that this is a holy man of God,] who passes by us continually’ (2 Kings 4:9).”<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, did [the Talmudic sage] Abaye say: “Immediately following a Torah scholar comes blessing, as it says: ‘God blessed me on account of you’ (Genesis 30:27), as Rashi explains: ‘One who draws close to a Torah scholar and hosts him in his home finds blessing in his home.’”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the Rebbe Maharash said to my father: “When I left my home in Lubavitch I thought that I would stay with you over this Sabbath, God willing, on my journey home from Petersburg.”

And my father replied: “Praise God that I have merited hosting guests in my home, and especially, illustrious guests such as these.” In the course of that year, Rabbi Chaim Schneur

6. Talmud *Berachot* 57b.

7. Talmud *Berachot* 10b. The Hebrew word for “continually,” *tamid*, is here read as an allusion to the continual daily offering – the *korban tamid*.

8. See Rashi’s commentary on the Talmud, *Berachot* 42a.

*Zalman also stayed [in R. Yosef's home] over the two days of Rosh Chodesh Tamuz.<sup>9</sup>*

*These two days were weekdays, and many people from the nearby villages came to welcome him. The same held true when the daughter of the Tzemach Tzedek traveled. She too came to spend the holy Sabbath, and when she met my grandmother, Frieda Leah, face to face (for they had been close when my family had lived in Lubavitch), the esteemed daughter of the Tzemach Tzedek said: "I feel humbled from all the kindness' (Genesis 32:11), for I have arrived at the home of Frieda Leah for the Sabbath." And she in turn replied: "And 'I feel humbled from all the kindness' over the guests that I am hosting for the Sabbath." And they embraced and kissed each other.*

After my father had finished reading me the letter, he took my hand, and in an emotion-charged voice whispered: "I received this document as a family heirloom that has been passed on from generation to generation. In the coming months, when you'll be far from home, it's likely that you'll feel down at times. But you should know, my dear Michael, that our family has survived many tumultuous times and formidable crises. I'm sure that you, too, will also be able to overcome the pitfalls that you'll encounter along the way. And should you one day feel overwhelmed by despair, may this letter that is now in your hands help you overcome the dark waves that pass over you."

I gave my father an affectionate kiss, placed the letter in my file of important documents, and locked it in one of the compartments of my flight bag.

My body broke out in a cold sweat and shivers ran up my

9. The first two days of the Hebrew month of Tammuz.



spine when I finally grasped the significance of this small document. Though I was at the time far from the world of Torah and spiritual life, the weight of its words touched a very deep chord within me. The document revealed the deep roots, kindness, and generosity of my family, and made me realize what an impressive lineage I have.

During the flight to the States I pulled out the manila envelope that contained our family history. My hands trembled as I unfolded the pages of the document. In a moment I became lost in it, relishing its every word.

I glanced at my mother, who in the meantime had dozed off in her seat next to the window, and at the other passengers seated around us, and I wanted to shout: "Don't you understand?! I've just discovered my grandfather's world and that of all the generations before me!" I felt truly blessed, and the journey to the unknown suddenly became immeasurably easier.

# *The First Hurdle*

Never in my entire life will I ever forget the day we flew to the States; it was my sixteenth birthday, the 26th of September, 1970.

At the airport we bid an emotional farewell to my father and sister, for we knew that the separation might be lengthy. Yet although we were flying without them, their lofty expectations and prayers for our success accompanied us along the way.

I noticed my father whispering something to my mother off to the side. It was hard for him to show the strong emotions he was feeling. I was always amazed at their relationship. It was a merger of the best of old Vienna and of Eastern Europe. On the one hand, hallowed customs such as sipping aromatic coffee from fine, elaborate porcelain cups, accompanied by delectable pastries on gilded trays; on the other hand, the bustling world of industry and trade, and the constant interaction with leading figures – and not solely from the business world, given that my father not only headed the manufacturer’s union but was also an avid book reader, enamored of the written word. It was a merger of Viennese waltzes and the world of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Goethe.

A final wave of the hand, and we were in the air, commencing the first leg of the long and tiring journey to the “Liberty Bell” city – Philadelphia.

The flight was pleasant and uneventful, and before we knew it, we heard the stewardess over the loudspeaker system

announcing the upcoming landing at Kennedy International Airport. At the same time, we heard the sound of the landing gear descending. I thought to myself: “Now we are flying above New York, the city of endless opportunities that I had heard so much about.” Still wrapped up in my excitement, which I barely managed to contain, we landed. The plane touched down softly and almost imperceptibly on the runway. The days following our arrival, first in New York and then in Philadelphia, were mesmerizing, as if taken from a fantasy world.

We disembarked and made our way to the immigration desk. When it came my turn to step up to the window, the immigration officer leafed through my passport and requested that I stand off to the side. I almost panicked. I hadn’t a clue what was going on, and I could barely respond. Mother had already gone through passport control and didn’t notice what was happening, being engrossed in a lively conversation with a flight companion. A tall black man stepped up to me and asked me to come along with him. I looked for my mother, but she was nowhere in sight. I explained to him that I wasn’t traveling alone, but he kept on walking, politely repeating his request that I come along with him. I was distraught, but having no choice, I followed him. We stepped into a waiting room sparsely furnished with a table and several chairs.

“My name is James. It’s nice to meet you. Please sit down,” he said. “I’d like to know why you’ve come to the United States of America, my young friend.”

“I’ve come for a visit,” I replied.

“A visit? I see here,” he said, holding the passport up to his eyes, “that you requested a visa for a much longer time period than what is usually considered a ‘visit.’ Tourists don’t come here for six months.”

I was hoping that my mother would appear and explain

the situation to him, but she was nowhere in sight. I started to stammer in broken English. I felt hot all over; my face flushed, and my legs began to tremble.

“I have a problem . . . that I want to solve during my stay here. I . . .”

“And what exactly is that problem?”

“I have difficulty . . .”

At that very moment the door swung wide open, and my mother burst into the room like a roaring lioness. “What’s going on here!?” she demanded of the immigration officer in her fluent English. “He’s my son! What do you want of him?”

“Please sit down, ma’am, and we’ll clear up the matter in a jiffy,” the tall man said appeasingly. “Would you like some coffee or tea?” he asked in a heavy Brooklyn accent.

“What’s the problem?” Mother replied, ignoring his offer.

“Please understand, ma’am. I saw the forms stating that you and your son have come here on a tour. For years we’ve been concerned about two things: firstly, that many individuals initially arrive in America for sightseeing purposes and eventually decide to stay, without the prior approval of the immigration office; and secondly, that young people his age often get caught up in drugs or other crimes. So in such cases our suspicion is aroused and we have to exercise extra caution.”

“Michael,” said the immigration officer with a smile, “please write me a few lines about the purpose of your visit to the United States. In addition,” his tone now turning serious, “please state that you are committing yourself to leaving the country when your visa expires.”

Mother and I exchanged glances. Once again I felt my forehead heating up; the brusque demeanor of the immigration officer made the words get stuck in my throat.

“If it’s difficult for you to write in English, you can write in

Hebrew, in your own language. We have professional translators of all languages here at the airport," he added, trying to be helpful.

"No, my English is fine. I have a different problem..." I started to tell him, but simply could not finish the sentence.

"That's precisely his problem," Mother said, coming to my aid. "He can't write."

"Really? I see that he is a bright boy and understands what's going on, so how come he doesn't know how to write?"

"He still is incapable of expressing his feelings in writing. We hope that by the end of our visit here he will be able to do so," responded Mother.

She then began explaining to the immigration officer all the details of my dyslexia. However, as the saying goes, "It's a small world, after all," and people will be people, everywhere you go. Suddenly, the officer's expression changed to one of empathy and genuine interest. Now it was *his* turn to stammer: "I... I must admit, ma'am, that your words touched me, I have a thirteen-year-old son, Arthur, who still can't read or write. I know that he's a gentle soul, but this blasted disability is killing him, damn it!"

The officer leaned over his large pile of papers and pulled out a fresh form, handing it to my mother. "Please fill out this form yourself, ma'am," he said. Mother did as he requested.

Turning now to me, he declared: "You should know that I was about to put you on a plane and send you back to Israel," he said. "But now, let me wish you lots of success in your mission in life, Michael, my fine young man." With that, the immigration officer bade us farewell.

I felt that our conversation with him and his warm words of parting accompanied us during our entire stay in the United States.

# *The Long-Anticipated Encounter*

After spending a few days in New York, we drove down to Philadelphia. I knew little about the city, other than the fact that it was the fourth largest in America and the capital of the state of Pennsylvania. However, I very much wanted to know something about the place to which I was about to travel, to arrive there equipped with at least some general information about the city and its customs, and so my father taught me about its many educational and cultural institutions, its numerous universities, and its port – most of whose facilities were located on the banks of the Delaware River. I learned of its thousands of factories and of its airport, one of the largest and most luxurious in America.

We arrived in the city and went directly to the spacious apartment that my parents had rented some time before, not far from the Benjamin Franklin Parkway – a magnificent thoroughfare that reminded me of the Champs Élysées in Paris, which I had visited more than once.

The first thing I did upon arriving at the apartment was to locate the movie channel on the television. I spent several hours gazing at the TV screen, quickly familiarizing myself with the names of all the channels and stations. However, my

initial enthusiasm soon wore off, to be replaced by a sense of boredom.

I began to feel lonely, and wandered around the apartment restlessly. I missed my neighborhood, my family, my friends. I found it inconceivable that I was so far from home, and upset that so much time would have to pass until my return.

My mother, however, didn't rest for a moment. As soon as we arrived, she phoned Dr. Getman and arranged an appointment for the following day, Thursday.

Toward evening we went for a stroll around the city. We climbed the high observation tower near our apartment building, which rose some 500 feet above the city and which was topped by a statue of William Penn. The stunning nighttime view of this enchanting city unfolded before us, but it failed to captivate me; my mind was somewhere else entirely. I was filled with trepidation about tomorrow's appointment, and I sensed that my mother felt the same. We returned to our apartment and together began preparing for the next day.

Dr. Getman, a tall man in his early sixties, greeted us at the door to his home, a large private home situated in one of the upscale neighborhoods of the city. With a beaming countenance and broad, heartfelt smile, he welcomed us in and invited us to join him for dinner in his dining room.

Thanks to my reasonably good command of English, I was able to hold a fluent, uninterrupted conversation with him, while my mother took it all in from the side, enjoying every minute.

Dr. Getman told us about the work he was conducting across America and about the university lectures he delivers on the topic of dyslexia, in which he presents his novel approach to the problem, according to which solutions for

this learning disability did exist. Dr. Getman won us over by confirming our own assumption. He explained that individuals suffering from dyslexia had up until recently been considered somewhat lacking in intelligence. However, he strongly believed that it was possible to successfully treat the disability. He even expressed his opinion that within the next few years, not only would the prevailing attitude toward dyslexia change for the better, but that sufferers of dyslexia would be able to be integrated into regular educational institutions and work places. Dr. Getman added that he was delighted to meet me, and that he was very interested in having me join him on his next lecture-series tour.

Mother and I immediately felt at ease in his presence. I was especially taken by the warmth he showed me, and I would have had no complaints staying in his house another hour, and another . . . It was only after midnight, when our exhaustion began to get the better of us, that we took our leave, setting out in the direction of home with our last bit of strength.

The next day, Friday, our plans were to travel by train to New Jersey, to the home of the Zarchin family, who had invited us to spend the weekend. However, as we were packing our bags my mother received a phone call. I could hear Dr. Getman's voice on the other end of the line. He expressed his desire to meet with my mother a second time over the weekend. We immediately altered our plans, deciding that I would travel alone to New Jersey while Mother would stay on in Philadelphia to meet with Dr. Getman.



## *Who Are You, Dr. Stanley Abelman?*

Thus, it was that Mother remained in Philadelphia for her second meeting with Dr. Getman, while I traveled alone by train to New York, where the Zarchin awaited my arrival. I felt like I was on top of the world; everything suddenly seemed attainable. I had met a likeable person whose lively and animated words imbued me with optimism, confidence, and great hope. Dr. Getman was a man after my own heart: open, warm, and understanding. Above all, my joy knew no bounds at the prospect that he actually held the keys to solving my problem.

Everything was rosy and bright. I took my seat on the train, but couldn't sit still. Rather, I paced through the cars the entire trip, brimming with excitement and euphoria.

The American Zarchins were waiting for me at the train station in New York: Blanche, Irving, Jill, and Jill's elder sister Linda. My joy was contagious, sweeping up the Zarchin family, too. Linda, in her special way, didn't leave me alone for an instant, making sure I felt like one of the family. During the drive to their home, located in a fashionable superb outside of New York, we experienced a warm, intimate feeling. Our lively and enjoyable conversation flowed freely, and we didn't feel the time pass at all.

I will never forget that weekend: the tours around Manhattan, the cruise down the Hudson River, the visits to museums, and restaurants; it all seemed yet another proof that my life had reached a turning point.

I confided in Linda as to the real reason for my visit to the States, and she on her part reacted with amazing openness. She offered me her assistance, expressing her willingness to stand by my side during my entire stay in the United States. Her generosity of spirit and kind-heartedness won me over. I felt a great fondness for her, which she reciprocated in kind.

Although Linda was a very astute person, she related to the world in a guileless manner. She was good at explaining things; her disposition was always cheerful, and her behavior amiable.

Her parents, Blanche and Irving, wholeheartedly approved of the wholesome bond of friendship that was forming between us, and told my mother all about it when she phoned from Philadelphia. I prayed that the weekend never end, although to my disappointment, time refused to stand still. I fought valiantly to hold onto and relish every moment as the minutes slipped away.

Nor did I want to lose Linda... I was determined to maintain the relationship, come what may. I believed that our friendship was capable of tempering the difficult days that still lay ahead for me.

Meanwhile, back in Philadelphia, my mother's upcoming meeting with Dr. Getman filled her with hope. At the same time, she was also quite tense about it, knowing that it would be a turning-point in our lives. Yet, as great as the hope was, that is how great the disappointment turned out to be.

As soon as she entered Dr. Getman's office, she sensed that something was amiss. The seriousness of his expression troubled and frightened her.

Dr. Getman began by praising me, my maturity, and my capabilities. My mother suspected, however, that this grand opening only veiled the blow that would surface at conversation's end. The tension was too much for her, and she clenched her handkerchief with mounting apprehension.

"I've come to the conclusion that I cannot treat Michael," he suddenly declared decisively, his voice echoing both pain and solemnity.

Mother felt like a sledge-hammer had just come down upon her head. Her face broke out into a cold sweat; her words stuck in her throat. She felt herself going faint, and only by a miracle did she not collapse on the spot. Although she had anticipated some degree of disappointment, in her worst nightmares she never dreamed of such an unequivocal verdict.

"Let me explain my decision to you," Dr. Getman continued, in a gentle yet penetrating tone. "Make no mistakes. There's nothing unfavorable or objectionable about Michael. He's a smart and diligent young man, and I have no doubts that he will one day be a source of great pride and joy to you. However, I regret to say that I cannot treat him."

In a matter of moments Mother came back to herself and, marshaling all her strength, addressed him aggressively: "Dr. Getman, we've come to you from afar and have been preparing for many months to be accepted by you for treatment. Michael hasn't stopped talking about the change that will occur in his life. He is dreaming of the moment when you will tell him that there's a solution to his problem. No words can describe his feelings of elation since meeting you. How can I now break the news to him that all our hopes have been dashed? What's to be my reply when he asks me why you can't treat him?"

A spark of anger and assertiveness flashed from Mother's

eyes as she, standing her ground, continued: “Dr. Getman, why are you abandoning us at this critical moment? Please do reconsider your decision. You must take into account that you are the object of Michael’s dreams. Without your help, I dare not *think* how gravely his condition might deteriorate. One thing I can assure you: *I will not leave you alone until you change your mind* – for the sake of my son Michael, who so longs to be treated by you.”

Dr. Getman, somewhat pensive, maintained a reserved facial expression despite being visibly shaken. “How well I understand your feelings – the loving heart of a mother. True, you made great efforts to come from afar, and you and Michael have been dreaming of the day, which I believe is not long in coming, when Michael will overcome his disability and master the skills of reading and writing. Please realize that I am not abandoning you. However, my specialty is in the field of theoretical research on learning disabilities. I lecture on the topic at universities and research centers across America. You turned to me, and, as I said, Michael made a very favorable impression on me, I have yet to meet such an intelligent and determined young man. I am truly interested in helping him integrate into society in the wisest and most beneficial manner.

“It is for this reason that I reached the conclusion that the best treatment he can possibly receive is not from me, but from my friend and student, Dr. Stanley Abelman of Philadelphia. He is an amazing man and a renowned expert in the field of the practical treatment of dyslexia.”

Dr. Stanley Abelman was a Jewish optometrist who had successfully diagnosed, treated, and even cured many individuals of their learning disabilities. However, my mother was still shocked and angry; she was not one to give up so fast.

“Dr. Getman, I appreciate your sincere efforts to stand by

our side; however, Michael will not be able to bear the sudden change of plans,” she replied in an emotion-choked voice, tears welling up in her eyes.

But Dr. Getman was not alarmed by her words. He was at peace with his decision and had apparently given it much thought. He left no room for doubt in my mother’s mind as to the firmness of his decision and its various underlying factors. Although Mother realized that she stood no chance at succeeding in persuading him to change his mind, she nevertheless wanted to share with him the great disappointment she knew I would suffer, especially because ever since our arrival in the United States I had been going around in a daze, euphoric over the prospect that that at long last the solution was in hands’ reach.

The fact that I was then in New York gave Mother some extra time to think it over, although she was already distressed by my anticipated reaction over the unwelcome news. She didn’t have much room to maneuver, though, and having no choice and with a heart filled with apprehension, took the letter of recommendation that Dr. Getman had prepared for Dr. Abelman. Mother thanked Dr. Getman profusely, expressing her hope that they would continue to keep in touch. On his part, Dr. Getman promised to be in regular contact with Dr. Abelman, to monitor my treatment, and to offer advice and guidance. He asked Mother to relay me his warmest regards, along with his assurance that we would soon realize that his decision was indeed the correct one.

As for me, during the train-ride back to Philadelphia I replayed in my mind my amazing experience with Linda. I got off the train in a cheerful mood, somewhat lightheaded, like one who was victorious in battle. Mother was waiting for me at the station, and from her serious and somber expression I

immediately intuited that our plans had somehow changed, most likely for the worse. I waited, tense and impatient, to hear what she had to say.

“Michael, Dr. Getman was very impressed with you. He has referred us to his associate, an expert in the field of dyslexia, Dr. Stanley Abelman.”

A heavy stone rolled off my heart. “That’s wonderful, Mother!” I replied, much to her surprise. “Great! If Dr. Getman recommends him, I trust him.”

Mother couldn’t believe her ears. On the spot her anguish dissipated, and her beaming face reflected her great joy and relief. She embraced me and declared: “Michael, we’re going in the right direction.”

Joyfully, I shared her sentiments.

## *Small Steps, Grand Hopes*

Armed with the letter of referral from Dr. Getman, Mother made her way to the office of Dr. Stanley Abelman. Not quite as exuberant as prior to our encounter with Dr. Getman, she was now taking things one step at a time. First, she requested a personal appointment with Dr. Abelman, and like someone who slowly pulls a cork from a wine-bottle for fear of causing the bottle to break, she cautiously opened the conversation with him.

Getting Dr. Abelman to agree to an introductory meeting with us was no simple matter; his schedule was far too packed to make room for another appointment, he claimed. But once again, Mother was not ready to give up. She clung to this new opportunity with all her might, and spoke to him authoritatively, even somewhat angrily. She made it clear that she was not about to leave his office until he promised to accept us for treatment. Dr. Abelman, unable to withstand the pressure, gave in to her request.

Now Mother geared herself up for the next battle: preparing me for my meeting with Dr. Abelman. Even though I wasn't displaying any signs of resistance to the meeting, she was concerned that the disappointment with Dr. Getman had planted in me seeds of rebellion, along with fear of a new specialist, who was sure to plumb – once again – the depths of my soul.

We discussed the matter at length. Mother serenely related to me, in simple terms, her impression of Dr. Abelman. She perceived him to be a warm, fatherly man, whose sole concern was the welfare of his patient. The sense of confidence she exuded, and her positive opinion about the man, had their effect on me, and by the end of the conversation I had decided that there was no turning back. If I had already made it all the way to the United States, I concluded, I had to grab this opportunity, which was not likely to repeat itself.

Thus, it was that I found myself sitting face to face with Dr. Abelman in his home. I was impressed by his appearance. He was about forty years old, tall, well-dressed, and eloquently spoken – a gratifying blend of seriousness and youthful mischief; congenial, yet simultaneously resolute, forthright, and assertive. He moved his desk to the side, sat down directly opposite me, on the same kind of chair as mine, and looked me straight in the eye. Nothing was intervening between us, and I was anticipating a warm and congenial conversation.

“Why are you here?” was his first, straightforward question, which left me stunned.

“Because my parents want me to be here,” I replied laconically.

“In that case, you’re welcome to get up and leave...” he responded, in an attempt at assessing my awareness of my own disability.

“I didn’t come all the way from Israel to return home empty-handed,” I countered.

Our dialogue, which played itself out much like a chess match, won Dr. Abelman over. I, too, couldn’t remain indifferent. He expressed himself eloquently, and I for my part managed to convey to him the sincerity of my intentions. Leaning back and slowly entwining his fingers, he looked at



me though half-closed eyes. He suddenly got to his feet, and with light but sure steps approached the large blackboard that was affixed to the wall. He took out a piece of chalk from the desk drawer and wrote a word in English.

“Michael, take a piece of chalk and copy the word I just wrote on the blackboard,” he demanded.

“I can’t!” I replied, my voice evincing pain.

Dr. Abelman sat back down in his chair.

“Why can’t you?”

“Because I have no command of English.”

“Michael, you’re no longer a child! Don’t you know why you’re here?” This time his voice was gentler, although still resolute.

“I’m here to get help.”

“In what area do you want to be helped?”

“With whatever’s needed.”

Once again Dr. Abelman got up, approached the blackboard, and wrote an entire sentence.

“Michael, my friend, copy this and read it out loud!”

With measured steps, I went over to the board, took the chalk, and wrote, from right to left, a word in Hebrew, much to Dr. Abelman’s astonishment. Then I looked at him and said triumphantly, “*You* read!”

“What . . . what do you want me to do? I don’t know Hebrew!” Now *he* was the one on the defensive, and the ball was again in my court. With a broad smile, as if talking to someone else, I declared, “Dr. Abelman can’t read it. Really? Well, neither can I.”

Not one to be gotten the better of, with a sheepish smile he replied, “But Michael, *I* never learned Hebrew.”

The color returned to my cheeks; once again I felt self-confident. I was enjoying the exchange, especially since I sensed

that Dr. Abelman wasn't trying to make me feel inferior; on the contrary: he was honestly trying to help me. According to Dr. Abelman theory, dyslexia actually serves as a springboard for growth for young men and women of especially high insight and intelligence.

I decided to put an end to the verbal duel, and in a conciliatory tone said to him: "Dr. Abelman, let's call a cease-fire. I'm asking you to teach me how to read and write."

But Dr. Abelman wasn't prepared to let the rope go slack – not before first eliciting from me a declaration of surrender. He asked me flat out, "Michael, do you really want that?"

I lowered my eyes in submission, and in a barely audible voice expressed my willingness to learn.

"If you truly wish to learn, then I will teach you," he said with a serious expression, his eyes sparkling.

"How?" I asked.

"Patience, and you will find out," he replied.

Alongside my intense desire to learn how to read and write, I was equally eager to see how Dr. Abelman would succeed where all his predecessors had failed.

## *Getting Down to Work*

My second meeting with Dr. Abelman was more relaxed, free of unnecessary tension. I felt at ease and uninhibited, and I no longer viewed Dr. Abelman as a threatening figure, but rather as a person who was trying to help me.

When I asked him to explain his treatment method, he replied that he was not going to teach me how to read; I was going to teach myself. He was there solely to guide me and serve as an aid.

The pleasant, tastefully furnished room lent a respectful and refined air to the meeting. With a serious look, Dr. Abelman approached his beloved blackboard, wrote the letter “A,” and asked me to read it out loud. I did so; however, he didn’t leave it at that.

“Michael, you weren’t truthful with me. You do know how to read!” he challenged me.

“Stanley,” I dared call him by his first name, “that’s not called reading!”

“Then what is it, Michael?” he asked.

“That’s knowing the letter ‘A,’” I replied with a sigh.

“Wonderful! That being the case, it won’t be long until you’ll be able to form combinations of all the letters – both in English as well as in any other language!” he announced unequivocally.

It was hard for me to believe him; my past experience had made me both skeptical and suspicious of promises that never panned out. Although he was quite different from all the other therapists who had tried to help me, my initial antagonism to all forms of treatment had not yet abated.

Yet Dr. Abelman, in his wisdom, used my very misgivings as leverage to restore and rebuild my shattered trust, destroyed through all the failed attempts of the past. Nor had I forgotten the catcalls of “dummy” and “idiot” that had occasionally been hurled at me: both the jeers and the behind-my-back mocking comments uttered in hushed voices still reverberated in my head. I was willing to sacrifice anything to finally appear “with it,” intelligent, well-informed, multi-lingual, and knowledgeable in different areas. I felt a lot of affection for Dr. Abelman and trusted in his expertise, although at times I was gripped by the fear that I would fail again, even with this new treatment.

Dr. Abelman’s treatment method consisted of a combination of several different techniques that at first seemed totally arbitrary, even chaotic. I didn’t understand what he was doing, and only many years later, with hindsight, did I come to appreciate his greatness. Only today, some four decades later, with the opening of my own treatment center, is dyslexia being treated in Israel according to his method.

#### ON DR. ABELMAN’S APPROACH AND METHOD OF TREATMENT

Besides maintaining a private practice, Dr. Abelman served as supervisor of the vision clinic at the Pathway School, on the outskirts of Norristown, Pennsylvania, overseeing its development since its inception. He was part of the school’s interdisciplinary team of specialists who treated children with learning disabilities. The staff consisted of the classroom

teacher, a reading-disabilities specialist, a psychologist or psychiatrist, an expert in child development, a nurse, and the child's parent. Furthermore, according to the child's specific needs, the staff would also refer him or her to a neurologist, speech therapist, and/or physiotherapist.

The goal of this team of specialists was to treat learning-disabled pupils by identifying and assessing the youngster's process of development, in addition to developing his ability to discover – on his own, via personal trial and error – the study techniques most appropriate for him.

According to Dr. Abelman and Dr. Getman (who had been the previous Director of Child Development at Pathway), a child learns to interpret the world and interact with it through his power of sight: what he sees, how he sees it, how he explains to himself what he sees. The speed and accuracy of a child's visual recognition are in essence what determine the majority of his actions and reactions. According to Dr. Getman, *vision imparts meaning to the object of contemplation*. Since the eyeball cannot itself distinguish between sizes, colors, shapes, textures, or distances, we derive meaning from what we see only after years of repeated experiences that occur during the various stages of our development. Through diverse regimens and age-appropriate study techniques, we build our reservoir of experiences.

Not every child is aware of his capabilities, nor of how to effectively apply them as he matures. Therefore, according to Dr. Getman, an eye examination must also include a test of all the child's learning skills, if it is to effectively assess his vision. Cases of myopia (shortsightedness) or strabismus (cross eye), for example, need not cause failure in one's studies, although one or more such visual disorders are often found among children with learning disabilities. Still, Dr. Abelman's vast

experience has shown him that even children with perfect vision suffer from a wide range of learning disabilities. For instance, when moving from one line of text to the next, they may skip letters or words, or be unable to accurately distinguish between similar letters or words, or simply experience great distress during or after reading, leading them to avoid such basic activities as much as possible. All these factors adversely affect their ability to derive meaning from what they read. Consequently, it is vital that the broadest and most comprehensive optometric exam possible be conducted.

Dr. Getman's vision exam tested various aspects of the functioning and soundness of the child's visual system, including his ability to focus at various distances, eye movements, hand-eye coordination, and visual apprehension. This was accompanied by a perspicacious grasp of the patient's social background and emotional state. Working within these parameters, Dr. Getman and his team of professionals formulated a plan of action designed to enable the child to have a variety of experiences; to learn to express himself in different ways; to train his imagination; to develop a broad perspective; to learn to distinguish between various shapes (circles, squares, triangles) and their sizes by copying them onto a sheet of paper or blackboard (this was geared mainly for the younger children, who have not yet learned to write); to identify various types of relationships (even subtle) between different objects; to develop basic mathematical concepts; and to fine-tune his or her motor coordination via the sense of touch in order to assess the ability to create images of objects through the tactile sense.

What Dr. Abelman achieved with me with his system of letter-combinations was nothing less than amazing: first he brought

me to form a word, then a sentence, and finally an entire paragraph. I would later recall the Chasidic story about the simple Jewish peasant who came to synagogue for the *Kol Nidrei* prayer on the night of Yom Kippur. He, too, wanted to pray, but did not know how to read; all he knew was the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. So he shouted out the letters in prayer, leaving it to God to assemble them into words that He saw fit. That is exactly what transpired with me in Dr. Abelman's clinic.

At the beginning of my treatment Dr. Abelman asked me to draw a picture of my house. Rising to the challenge, I drew a square composed of four straight lines, with four more straight lines inside it.

"That's your house?!" Dr. Abelman asked somewhat incredulously.

After working together for a few months Dr. Abelman again asked me to draw my house. This time, however, I drew it in great detail: the doors, the windows, the furniture, the garden, the shingled roof, etc. This time Dr. Abelman seemed satisfied, his voice evincing a triumphant note. For him, the matter became instantaneously clear. In the interval that has elapsed between the first picture and the second, I hadn't returned to Israel to look at my house again. Yet the two drawings bore no resemblance to each other. In other words, through my intensive learning with Dr. Abelman, the tables had turned irreversibly in my favor, bringing me to the longed-for change.

What was it that had brought about this quantum leap forward? What can be learned from these two drawings, made only a few short months apart? First and foremost, I had learned to write and draw in an orderly fashion. This was unlike the past, when each word I wrote was larger than the previous one, and every line began at the top of the page to finish where

it would, meaning that there would be no connection between the beginning of the line and its end.

Psychologists and other professionals believe the vast difference between my two drawings indicated that I had acquired proficiency in processing visual information, correct perception of dimensions including small details – and for the very first time – a grasp of proportion.

Dr. Abelman’s innovative treatment focused on developing a properly coordinated relationship between the eye, the ear, and the center of memory and control – the brain. Dyslexia can be compared to a short circuit, and therefore its treatment needs to focus on restoring the connectivity between these three organs.

The starting point that guided Dr. Abelman in his work was the understanding that everything is treatable, and that there are no restrictions impeding the implementation of his method. His treatment was carried out in four stages:

1. studying the patient’s visual system
2. studying his auditory system
3. studying his brain’s memory system
4. coordinating between these three systems

Integrating and aligning these three systems enabled the repair of the “short circuit” that had impaired the coordinative system, renewing the connectivity between these three organs and their attendant faculties, which until then had not been operating in sync.

Restoring the coordinative relationship between the three systems not only helps overcome dyslexia; it can also solve most of the difficulties encountered in learning math and geometry (which are considered by some to also be forms of dyslexia).



Dr. Abelman taught me that from the moment of birth, we begin amassing millions of bits of information, which are stored in the brain's memory system. Whenever we need to make use of a specific fact, the brain "extracts" that particular detail and "casts" it out into our tools of expression. I like to define this as a process of "input-output." For instance, by repeatedly reading and writing the word "father," it become etched in our mind. Then, whenever we see the letters "f-a-t-h," our brain automatically fills in the missing letters "e-r", dispatching the full form of the word "father" to our speech organs. In modern technology, this can be compared to "predictive writing," such as when texting from a cell phone.

Over the years I found myself presenting and explaining Dr. Abelman's method at various research institutes in Israel and abroad. To illustrate the point, I would cite, as one example among many, the five senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch, which together make up the totality of human cognition. But what about a person who has been damaged in one of these senses? The time-honored solution to this problem is to learn how to use the healthy senses to compensate for the impaired one. For instance, a person whose vision has been damaged can, with practice, train himself to make use of his other senses, until he is even eventually able to restore his power of sight.

Dr. Abelman based his treatment method on the above-mentioned system of stages, in which new states are gradually introduced, each providing support for the previous one. This method both protects and embraces the patient. Practically speaking, over the course of the years prior to my treatment with Dr. Abelman, I had unfortunately been exposed to and internalized various erroneous study methods and information processing, which created in me something like a

cognitive block. Under Dr. Abelman's expert and devoted tutelage, I learned how to rid myself of this obstacle – or, in other words, to revitalize the dysfunctional senses that had previously been impaired – first and foremost, the sense of sight. The process of removing this block was carried out with the utmost of caution, so that I not feel suddenly bereft of the tools to learn, something that most likely would have damaged both my self-assurance and self-esteem. With great sensitivity, Dr. Abelman instilled in me an appreciation of my own potential, and the self-confidence that I would be able to learn with these newfound tools.

“He’s a sharp man,” I thought to myself, “and his system is brilliant. Even the toughest of his patients and the most obnoxious ‘non-believers’ could never sink into despair under his care.”

Nevertheless, doubts still gnawed away at me and gave me no respite. “Even if I do become proficient at reading and writing,” I asked Dr. Abelman, “who’s to say that I’ll be able to assimilate information and utilize it properly? How will I know how to summarize a passage from the Torah, or a chapter of an anthology? What’s the guarantee that I’ll be able to transcribe the contents of a lecture, as my peers do?”

Dr. Abelman laughed, dispelling my doubts and making light of them with a big smile. “Why *shouldn't* you know how to summarize?” he chided. “What’s the big deal? You will know how to read, to write, to listen, to express yourself. Preparing a summary is a task that isn’t particularly difficult. You’ve faced all sorts of difficulties in life, but summarizing material that you’ve already learned is something you should be able to handle without much effort.”

Dr. Abelman's spontaneous reply greatly endeared him to me; I was delighted by his confidence that the day was not long off when my learning skills would be on par with those

of all other students. I knew that he wasn't merely trying to encourage me, but rather, meant every word.

Every session tightened the bond between us: I developed a real affection for him, and I believed in him and trusted in his method. Every meeting was like a celebration. I greatly looked forward to our sessions; they were totally unlike ordinary doctor-patient encounters, but more like enjoyable get-togethers of friends, filled with mirth and humor, the ever-present smile on his lips.

As time went on we became like family. I would often sleep over at his house, and became friendly with his wife Rita and their children, Eric and Mark, joining them on trips and excursions. We dined out in picturesque restaurants, with Mother joining us for weekends.

In addition to my great affection for him, I also held him in tremendous esteem. He set clear and well-defined borders, establishing both my rights and my obligations in the context of the treatment, which also helped set the boundaries between the conclusion of each session and the beginning of our personal relationship. Consequently, I also learned when I could raise my voice and when I could not. I accepted the wisdom of these borders, understanding that they were part of the "contract" between us, which defined our mutual rights and responsibilities.

Dr. Abelman made a point of letting me know that our work together was a challenge for him, as well. My progress, he would repeatedly tell me, furthered his own insights into dyslexia and reinforced his own approach to its treatment, which was still in its infancy at the time. I was always delighted when he would say that with my help he would be able to treat many other young people suffering from dyslexia and learning disabilities.

The further the program of treatment progressed, the

harder it was for me to fathom my previous condition. If only I had learned about this amazing treatment method at an earlier age! The waves of joy that engulfed me when contemplating my present accomplishments had me soaring at an unprecedented high.

My progress was steady and rapid, and with each passing day I discovered a new and unknown world, exposing me to fresh concepts with which I was previously unacquainted.

All these favorable changes led me to believe that I had already attained a significant degree of liberation from my disability, and that I was well on my way to attaining greater levels of maturity, understanding, emotional sensitivity, and intellect. I saw my future as through a clear lens; a perfect picture, documented forever.

Little did I know how far I was from achieving a genuine and complete resolution to my disability, and how distant was the day in which I would finally attain my longed-for goal: to be independent, able to make my own decisions, and unencumbered by the weight of the past.

My treatment by Dr. Abelman lasted for about six months: a period of time that transformed my life.

## *Taking Leave of Dr. Stanley: The Parable of the Date Palm*

One snowy day at winter's end, on the afternoon before the joyful and fun-filled festival of Purim, Mother and I arrived at the home of Stanley and Rita Abelman for a Purim party. We were dressed up in costumes, our spirits high. The only other people in attendance were the immediate members of the Abelman family. Our faces veiled in masks, we read passages from *Megillat Esther*, sang, and joked around. Rita Abelman served delightful refreshments, including *hamantashen*. I hadn't enjoyed myself so thoroughly or been so happy for years. The feelings of distance from my home in Tel Aviv and my longing for Father and my sister Sarit vanished in thin air.

When the celebration was just about over, Stanley motioned to me to enter his office. I couldn't imagine what he possibly wanted; it sparked my curiosity and made me a bit tense.

"Michael, you don't need me anymore," he said.

I didn't quite understand what he meant. I thought he was simply joking, in keeping with the Purim mood.

"I don't understand. Please explain what you mean." I responded.

“Michael, I’m not joking. We’ve finished our work together,” he declared in no uncertain terms.

“But why, Dr. Stanley? I don’t want to leave you. Please don’t stop teaching me!” I pleaded.

“My dear Michael, you already know how to read. The bulk of the work is already behind you. Now you should go back home to Israel, and I will guide you as to how to move on,” he added gently.

I was in complete shock and clueless as to how to react. True, I now knew how to read and write, but I was afraid of going it on my own. Being around Dr. Abelman imbued me with strength and self-confidence. His sudden and unexpected pronouncement struck me like lightning and left me speechless; I struggled to find a sensible response.

“I don’t want to lose a valuable friend like you,” I said, on the verge of tears.

“You’ll never lose me, Michael, and that’s a promise!” He soothed my fears in a warm yet authoritative tone.

Somewhat recovered from the shock, I returned to the party, which was just about winding down, although my attempts at pretending that everything was just fine weren’t particularly convincing. We bade them farewell, thanked them warmly for the invitation and for the enjoyable evening, and set out for home.

In looking back I realize that these were among the most trying moments in my life, for although Dr. Abelman never allowed me to feel dependent upon him, I nevertheless still needed time to digest the upcoming change.

I once again found myself at a difficult and troubling cross-road. Fortunately, Dr. Abelman helped me through this stage, as well, and didn’t leave me to make the upcoming decisions alone. He showered me with affection and turned us into a sort of two-man think tank, brainstorming plans of action

for the future. Indeed, after raising a number of suggestions, we finally decided that I would continue treatment in Israel with a private therapist, who would continue working with me according to Dr. Abelman's method.

Before my departure for Israel, I asked Dr. Abelman a question that had been disturbing me deeply. "Dr. Stanley, how do you view these last few months? How did such a major revolution occur in my life?" He thought for a moment, inhaling deeply as he scratched his head, rubbing his hands together while looking at the wall across from him. Enunciating each word carefully, he replied: "It's hard to determine exactly at what point this 'revolution' you speak of took place. However, it won't be long before both of us will come to understand exactly what transpired here," he responded without vacillating, in a confident tone of voice that inspired me with total faith and great hope.

"Dr. Stanley, maybe you can try to explain it to me anyway?" I pleaded. "I can't wait for us to discover the answer together."

"Well, Michael, there are certain things that are sourced in the depth of one's soul, which are not always readily apparent. I'll explain it to you briefly. Our work integrated your well-developed senses with your under-developed ones. We learned that healthy senses are capable of substituting for weaker ones and acting in their stead. However, to return to your question: If you're so insistent on wanting to know how such a major revolution took place, come along with me tomorrow to the football game, and you'll understand everything."

"Football!?" I thought to myself. "What's *that* got to do with it?" But if that's what Dr. Stanley was suggesting it, I was coming. Sitting next to him in the rowdy grandstand, however, proved to be not such an easy experience. He was in a frenzy throughout the entire game, cheering raucously and vociferously protesting his team's every fumble, and hugging

and kissing me whenever one of his team's shoulder-padded players scored a touchdown.

Gently touching his shoulder, I reminded him that he had promised to explain my transformation. Dr. Abelman smiled ("This pest!" he must have thought to himself, "Why isn't he enjoying the game!?"), and began to explain: "The coach who plans the game strategy, the players' lineup..." But when I cut him off with: "But Dr. Stanley, *I don't know the rules of the game!*" he beamed: "That's precisely what I wanted to hear. First you have to learn the rules." Suddenly, he sprang from his seat and leapt into the air – apparently his team had scored another few points. But he quickly resumed his train of thought: "But even when we do understand the rules of the game, it doesn't mean that we will use them correctly. The team's quarterback is the head; the left- and right-linebackers are the forearms, and the receivers are what you asked about: they are the ones who rush forward and try to catch the ball, which is the focal point of information that moves from place to place."

Suddenly it all became clear as day. I became just as thrilled as the rowdy fans around me who were cheering for the victory of their favorite football idols. There are rules, there are distinct boundaries, there is the flow of the game – and I am in the midst of it.

Later on, when I would eventually heed the inner call of my Chabad background, I came to understand well the words of the founder of this branch of Chasidism – Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, author of *Sefer HaTanya*. He related that he spent a mere four years composing his version of the *Shulchan Aruch*,<sup>1</sup> the Code of Jewish Law, whereas he labored a full twenty-two years in writing *Sefer HaTanya*, the seminal text

1. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* – the "Great Rabbi's Code of Jewish Law" – compris-



of Chabad philosophy. For in writing the *Tanya* he expended much time and effort on weighing and examining every letter, every vocalization mark, the precise spelling of every single word, until he came upon the “truth.” When the great Torah Scholar, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, was asked to write an approbation for *Sefer HaTanya*, he lauded it with the now-famous expression: “I can’t understand how it’s possible to have squeezed so great a God into so small a book.” Rabbi Shneur Zalman himself declared: “Now, I too have something to study: the *Tanya*.”

The comparison to my situation is obvious: the author of the *Tanya* toiled for many years to produce a brilliant work of Jewish thought. When he finally finished, he felt that he himself now had something to study and learn from in depth. So, too, with Dr. Abelman’s treatment: upon completion of the systematic treatment and after having achieved a clear understanding of the nature of the disability, the time had now arrived to begin healing it.

It was with a heavy heart that I took leave of Dr. Stanley Abelman, the individual to whom I owe my life’s greatest transformation, the person who implanted within me the desire as well as the ability to reach ever-new and endless horizons. It was he who awoke in me the desire to give to others, whose lives were not yet illuminated by the hope of achieving a fundamental transformation in their quality of life.

As I mentioned previously, upon Dr. Abelman’s recommendation we returned to Israel. One last spin around the mammoth office buildings and skyscrapers, a final appreciative glimpse of America’s pulsating, non-stop business life, and there we were, airborne and homeward bound.

ing six volumes. *Sefer HaTanya*, by comparison, is one volume consisting of 53 chapters.

The plane's wheels had barely touched down on the runway of Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International Airport when my mother, losing not a minute, embarked upon her feverish search for an appropriate professional who would continue the healing process that Dr. Abelman had set in motion. She traversed the length and breadth of the country, attending seminars, conferences, and university lectures, and meeting with numerous academics – all as part of her attempt at locating the appropriate therapist.

Time was of the essence, for I desperately wanted to conclude this exhausting chapter of my life before being drafted into the army, which I knew would be a watershed in my life. If we couldn't find someone over the next few months to continue treatment with me before enlisting, causing a hiatus – even a short one – in the treatment, not only would the treatment itself be deficient, but, worse yet, the intense efforts that had already been invested in me would go to waste, casting a shadow upon the rest of my life.

I endured many days of tense anticipation, packed to the brim with countless meetings, innumerable hours of appointments and interviews, and exhausting and draining trips to pedagogues and dyslexia “experts,” none of which bore fruit. Despite all this I kept repeating to myself, and found great solace in, the old adage: “Where there's a will, there's a way.”

Dr. Abelman's preeminence simply outshone every potential candidate. No other professional came anywhere near him – or so I thought at the time – and his greatness has not become dimmed with time. On the contrary: the passage of time has only served to further illuminate my memory of him with a precious glow.

Along these lines I once heard a commentary on a verse from the Book of Psalms (92:13): “The righteous shall flourish

like the date-palm; they shall grow tall like a cedar in Lebanon.” Why is a righteous person compared to a date-palm? The answer I personally most identified with is as follows: When a person stands beside the base of a date-tree, he cannot easily see its crest, its fruit, and its magnificence. When is it possible to see it in all its grandeur? Only when he stands at a distance are the tree’s towering height and splendor visible to him.



# PART II



## *Dr. Alan Kaye: Preparing for the Meeting*

January, 1977. It was a chilly and overcast winter's day, with an annoying drizzle that refused to let up. I was in my office in Herzliya; the clock's hands showed midday. The phone rang; Abraham, the receptionist, informed me that my father was waiting for me downstairs in the car. We were on our way to Jerusalem to meet a family friend, a lecturer on international relations and a journalist who wrote for several prominent foreign newspapers.

I was 23 years old and held a senior marketing position in my family's business. During the drive to Jerusalem, our conversation naturally turned to our daily concerns: the world of business. However, it has been said that the air of Jerusalem makes a person wise, and as soon as the breathtaking view of the Jerusalem hills wreathed in dark clouds came into sight, I was overcome by a sense of awe. It was this mood that made me turn my thoughts to the notebook I had taken along, which contained an essay to which I had devoted much time in composing and which constituted one of the concluding stages of Dr. Alan Kaye's unique treatment.

After an hour's drive we arrived in Jerusalem. My body was covered with cold sweat, an inner excitement overtaking

my entire being in anticipation of the upcoming meeting. The King David Hotel appeared in the distance, imparting a majestic yet pastoral ambience.

We took a seat at a table next to the window. Beyond the lobby, through the oversized picture windows, we could see the ramparts of the Old City, connecting us to our glorious past. Although my excitement was on the rise, outwardly I appeared quite composed. Father spoke to me about his youth, about his studies at the Hebrew University, and about how time had flown by. For him, perhaps, but not for me; as far as I was concerned, time had come to a halt. After several minutes, an impressive-looking aristocratic gentleman in a tailored brown suit and white shirt entered the lobby, a brown leather attaché case in hand. “Shalom, Joseph and Michael!” he greeted us in Italian-accented Hebrew. We shook hands, and he apologized for being late, explaining that he had returned from Torino, Italy, a few short days ago, overloaded with work. He questioned Father about how business was going and about when he expected to visit Italy next. “I’m telling you, the political situation in Israel is uncertain,” he declared. “Just this morning I spoke with my newspaper in Italy and received our prime minister’s reaction to the recent political moves taken here. Right now I’m waiting for an appointment to interview your prime minister.”

“I’m pleased to see you’re well, Dan, and as energetic as ever,” my father responded. I sat there, silently observing these two friends who had maintained their relationship for over forty years, a friendship born well before I was.

Their conversation flowed naturally. Truth to tell, it all sounded very interesting – but my patience was wearing thin; being privy to their small talk was not the purpose of my having accompanied Father to this meeting. I finally got up my gumption and, in an uncharacteristic display of bad



manners, interrupted Dan and asked him to take a look at the notebook I had brought along. His facial expression suddenly turned serious.

“I’m really sorry. I don’t have time; I must be going,” he replied.

“But showing you what I’ve written was the original reason for our meeting, wasn’t it?” I countered.

“What did you write about?” he asked with interest.

“Here, let me show you.”

“What’s special about it?”

“If you take a look, you’ll see for yourself.”

At this point, I suddenly came to my senses. Had I been rude to my father’s friend, who had already gotten to his feet and was preparing to bid us goodbye? However, his curiosity getting the better of him in the face of my resoluteness, Dan hesitantly took the notebook and started thumbing through it. What’s next? I asked myself. Will he excuse himself politely, or will he become engrossed in its pages? And then . . . I looked on as he slowly resumed his seat and began reading my notebook with great concentration, all the while periodically glancing at his watch and mumbling something to himself in Italian. He once again stood up, offering an apologetic but cursory “Be back in a moment.”

He distanced himself from us at a rapid pace. My father didn’t fully understand what was happening and stared at me accusingly, as though I had transgressed some unspoken law of nature. Dan reappeared after ten minutes, sat back down and breathed a sigh of relief, ordered a cup of cappuccino, let out a “Wow!” and resumed reading. It was obvious that he was no longer in a hurry. Perusing page after page, he asked in all innocence: “Who wrote this?” I admitted that I was its author, and he looked at me in surprise: “*You?!!*”

“Yes.”

At that point, Father – who until then had been silently taking in our exchange – spoke up: “One second. Can someone please tell me what’s going on here?”

“See here, Joseph,” Dan replied. “This is a piece on ‘The Brothers Karamazov,’ written like a philosophical treatise. Its profound depth and remarkable writing skills are both worthy of admiration. It’s been ages since I’ve come across a work of this caliber among my own students! That’s the reason I stepped away for a few minutes, to postpone my next meeting; I need to examine this work thoroughly.”

I felt a deep sense of satisfaction, which was reflected in the gleam on my face. I recalled an aphorism cited in the Kabbalistic text *Sefer Yetzirah*, “The end is wedged in the beginning, and the beginning in its end.” While half lost in thought I heard Dan exclaim: “Okay, okay!” His words brought to mind Dr. Alan Kaye, who had treated me over the course of several years after my return from the States, at the age of sixteen and a half.



After our return to Israel, my mother had sent me to meet Dr. Alan Kaye, an American-born clinical and educational psychologist<sup>1</sup> (who unfortunately passed away in 1998). As I already mentioned, I didn’t fully understand why I had to return to Israel. If there was anyone on this planet who could help me, it was my dear friend, Dr. Stanley Abelman – from whom I had such difficulty parting, and whom I already

1. A US-born clinical psychologist, Dr. Kaye specialized in special education and researched learning disabilities. He ran centers for diagnosing learning disabilities in the US, and in 1971 relocated to Israel. In the 1970s he served as advisor on learning disabilities in the Ministry of Education, and until the mid 1990s ran a diagnostic center in Kefar Chabad and lectured at Bar-Ilan University.

missed. However, after several weeks of Mother's exhortations, rationalizations, and entreaties, I agreed to meet with Dr. Kaye.

My appointment with Dr. Kaye in his Tel Aviv office was scheduled for a Tuesday afternoon. "I'll simply show up, say hi, and then walk right back out the door," I thought to myself on the way. However, as I approached 10 Kalisher Street I was shocked to see a huge sign on the building's outer wall proclaiming in bold print: "The Psychological Service for Special Education of the Tel Aviv Municipality." Quickening my pace, I walked passed the building and kept on going until I reached building number 14, at which point I stopped and did an about-face. Maybe I hadn't seen correctly. However, upon second glance I was dumbfounded to see that not only had I seen correctly, but that even from a distance one could notice that the children who were playing in the building's yard were of slightly unusual appearance. I decided to inspect the sign from up close, slowly retracing my steps in the direction of building number 10. I now saw the sign clearly, as well as the children, both of which made shivers run up my spine., I kept on walking, unable to stop.

"What am I supposed to do?" I asked myself. "I look great: my slim-cut shirt emphasizes my good physique, and I'm sporting the latest fashion in sunglasses. How can I enter such a place? No way! But then again..." – I thought to myself in the same breath – "how can I go home? What on earth will I tell Mother, who's eagerly awaiting my reaction to my encounter with Dr. Kaye? What am I to do? What am I to do? What am I doing here altogether!?"

I then came up with a plan: I'll simply reschedule my appointment with Dr. Kaye for another day, during evening hours. Since it's winter and it gets dark early, I'll be able to "sneak in" without being noticed. Noticing a phone booth a

couple of hundred yards away, I decided to phone him to cancel and reschedule. After two rings a woman picked up the line: “Tel Aviv Psychology Center for Special Ed, how can I help you?” My heart was pounding as I asked to speak with Dr. Kaye. A teenager standing outside the phone booth motioned for me to make it quick. Oh, no! How could I carry on a conversation now? He’ll overhear everything! In a split-second decision, I decided to speak in English.

“Hello, Dr. Kaye. This is Michael Zarchin.”

“Hello, Michael! I’m waiting for you!”

I apologized and rescheduled the appointment for another day, in the evening. The doctor actually had a pleasant voice. As I was exiting the phone booth I bumped right into the youngster who was in such a rush to get in, blocking my way for a moment. I felt as if he were telling me: “Don’t think you’re leaving this neighborhood so fast, friend! You’ve got some unfinished business to attend to before moving on!” However, this thought only spurred me to make an even quicker getaway. During the bus-ride home I mulled over what to tell my mother. She accepted my brief explanation that the meeting had been rescheduled for a few days later.

The next few days passed quickly, and the tension that gripped me in anticipation of my appointment with Dr. Kaye continued to mount. I felt as if I were careening down from the peak of Mount Everest at breakneck speed.

The day of the meeting arrived; the appointed hour drew near. Time to get moving. I gave one last glance in the mirror. “Everything will be fine,” I reassured myself – and then headed outside to catch the bus that would transport me to 10 Kalisher Street . . .

Along the way, my thoughts turned to Dr. Abelman – I recalled his face, his smile, and his parting words: “Michael, 1971 is going to be a very good, successful year.”

The bus pulled up at the stop and I alighted with leaden steps. It was only a five-minute walk to my destination. I looked around me in all directions, and only when I had ascertained that no one who might recognize me was in the vicinity did I cross the street, walking through the yard towards a closed door. I rang the bell. Several minutes elapsed – an eternity, from my perspective – until the door suddenly opened and I was greeted by the same voice I had heard the other day on the phone: “You must be Michael. I’m Alan Kaye. Please come in.”

Over time I would come to feel that being there was the most natural thing in the world – but at that moment it didn’t feel that way at all! Dr. Alan Kaye, whom I was now meeting for the first time, didn’t exactly win me over, either. He was about forty, although he looked quite a bit older. His clothing was outdated, he had difficulty walking, and relied on crutches. His speech was somewhat unclear and difficult to understand, and he kept switching back and forth from English to Hebrew.

Dr. Kaye invited me into his small office, which was furnished with a desk, a couple of chairs, a reading lamp, some writing implements, and sundry office supplies. On the corner of the desk perched an empty sandwich bag, a banana peel, and a few wooden blocks, as well as an oversized ashtray and a pipe. The pungent smell of tobacco permeated the room. Dr. Kaye sat down in his chair, stuck the pipe in his mouth, stroked his beard, and while puffing away asked me what I was doing with myself. His question was indeed most appropriate: What, in fact, was I doing in that room with him? I continued to remain silent, and he continued to stuff his pipe with tobacco, waiting for some response from me. Suddenly, he invited me to see the institute. “That’s all I need!” I thought to myself. Dr. Kaye got up with difficulty from his chair and slowly ambled out of the room, leaning on his crutches. I remained seated, a thousand

thoughts flooding my mind. In my mind's eye, I pictured Dr. Abelman: always dressed in the height of fashion, orderly and impeccable, eloquent and clear spoken. He had always given me a sense of confidence and the desire to be around him. Dr. Kaye's sudden request that I join him cut short my thoughts.

"This room on the left is where the children play. This room on the right is where they eat." And indeed, in every room I saw children playing with all sorts of strange-looking toys. On one wall I noticed a framed newspaper clipping, whose headline announced: "Alan Kaye, the Children's King of the Jungle." At its center was a photograph of Dr. Kaye surrounded by children, some of them jumping on his back. As I was looking around, Dr. Kaye explained to me that he had contracted polio as a child, and that during the years of his treatment he had endured great suffering, both physical and emotional. What exacerbated his plight was the fact that his childhood peers not only didn't understand him; they even taunted him over his disability. Throughout his life he continued to experience difficulty walking.

I wanted only one thing: to get out of there. I couldn't wait for the meeting to end.

Returning to his small office, Dr. Kaye sat down behind his desk and began telling me about his work with children who suffered from diverse disabilities, ranging from light to severe. He asked about my job and about what I was planning on doing until I was drafted. I started to answer him in detail, but in the meantime, our time ran out. Dr. Kaye apologized that he had to leave. We set up another meeting – which would only take place five years down the line, after my release from the army.

## *Indecision, and Reconnecting with Dr. Kaye*

In the course of my work in the sales and marketing division of Aderet, our family business, I came to realize just how unsystematic and unorganized I really was, and it was precisely these drawbacks that motivated me to try and arrange another meeting with Dr. Kaye. I had left the first encounter with a heavy heart, knowing full well that I was not going to go back to him, despite having scheduled another appointment.

After the first meeting with Dr. Kaye I went to see my girlfriend. The fact that she was attending high school with all my other friends – and that I was not – was what had motivated me to go to Dr. Kaye in the first place. I thought that he might be able to help me get accepted to high school. On the other hand, I knew that since I was going to be drafted in just a year and half, it was way too late to catch up with the school curriculum. This made me feel overwhelmed and confused.

Back in those days, I was studying the textile industry at Shenkar College; given my family's involvement in the field, it was the obvious thing for me to do. I was all of sixteen and a half – studying textiles and industrial management alongside

twenty-three-year-olds. Although I was glad that I had a place to go every day, it nevertheless seemed odd to me not to be studying alongside my peers. To top things off, when it came to math and physics I didn't understand a thing.

I experienced many difficult moments, in which I wanted to contact Dr. Kaye again, but the vast discrepancy between Shenkar College and the Tel Aviv Center for Special Education didn't exactly motivate me to try to combine the two. I continued attending college daily. My progress was minimal, but fortunately I had a private tutor.

During my first year on the job at Aderet, the gap between my cognitive skills and my day-to-day functioning widened drastically. I wanted to take on additional responsibilities at work, but that would have demanded better administrative skills. My first position was supervising the supply of threads to our customers – dozens of different types of threads to each one. The office phone constantly rang off the hook, each buyer and his own orders. To succeed in my job, I had to keep my word to my customers as well as be thoroughly familiar with the inner workings of the factory.

I was desperately in need of a guiding hand to help me organize myself at work. It was only natural, then, that Dr. Alan Kaye should come to mind, although I had had no contact with him whatsoever in five years. In fact, I recalled clearly how I had fled from his office. And although the reasons that had caused me to flee hadn't changed, I now needed his help more than ever. I shuddered when I remembered the large sign that loomed over 10 Kalisher Street, exactly one hundred yards away from the shop of one of our clients! That's all I need, I thought. What will I say if he sees me going in to Dr. Kaye's Center? How could I sell him anything the next day?

Yet with each passing day my difficulties intensified, as



did my sense of distress. Only by dint of great effort on my part did I manage to stay on top of my work to my customers' satisfaction. The fact that I succeeded in doing so made me push aside thoughts of Dr. Kaye – but not for long.



Over time I became increasingly aware that I was lacking in a solid general education, something that troubled me greatly. This was especially conspicuous whenever I would get together with friends or meet people. I read very little, which left me feeling like an empty vessel: I had no idea how or where to begin filling this lack. At first, I tried reading different types of books, which only served to bring home just how sorely I was lacking in basic knowledge – things that any ordinary teenager who had graduated high school would know. I also felt that I lacked any sort of organized method of study. I would flit from one subject to another, starting to read one book and, after barely a chapter or two, abandoning it in favor of another. I decided at that time to study twice a week with a student who would help me acquire a general education.

However, after a few of these study sessions I began feeling even worse. Not only was I lacking in basic knowledge; I also had difficulties in acquiring and assimilating new information. All this made me once again think of Dr. Kaye. Yet I kept pushing off my decision to set up a meeting with him. It was only several weeks later, thanks to my girlfriend Miri, that I phoned Dr. Kaye.

I asked him if we could meet in a nearby restaurant, and this, so as to steer clear of his office on Kalisher Street. I wanted it to look like a business luncheon. Dr. Kaye, despite his being very busy in those days, was sensitive to my feelings and agreed that we meet in a luncheonette off Allenby Street in Tel Aviv.

We set up a meeting for the following week. The days passed in tense anticipation. The thought kept gnawing at me that if only I were to work harder each afternoon with my private tutor, I wouldn't need Dr. Kaye. I firmly made up my mind to read as much as possible that week, and each day, immediately after work, I traveled to my study session with the student.

We sat together for hours on end, surrounded by books on assorted topics. My thirst for knowledge was so all-consuming that I would often stay up reading into the wee hours of the night. My job, which until then had been the most important thing in my life, suddenly took on secondary importance. By week's end I had decided that I indeed needed Dr. Kaye's help. Not only had I not acquired any significant knowledge, but my attempt to do so showed me just how difficult it was for me to gather and assimilate information. At long last, I acknowledged my pressing need of professional support and guidance.

The day of the meeting arrived. I drove my car to Dr. Kaye's office. A few blocks before reaching the luncheonette I felt a strong urge to make a quick u-turn and flee for my life. But my girlfriend's words flashed through my mind: "If you run away, it's yourself you're running away from. What are you afraid of? You *are* going to meet with him – because you've reached the right age, and because you're now capable of accepting the help that will transform you from good to outstanding."

Her words infused me with great encouragement, and after parking my car, I found myself walking at an easy pace in the direction of the luncheonette. Allenby Street was teeming with people. I wasn't familiar with the restaurant and was relieved to see that only four or five other people were dining there. Dr. Kaye had not yet arrived. I sat down at a corner table and ordered a cold drink, lit up a cigarette, and proceeded to wait. Barely two or three minutes had passed when I sud-

denly saw Miri, looking more beautiful than ever, standing at the entrance to the restaurant. I was totally bewildered. She walked toward me, smiling broadly but not saying a word. Seating herself next to me, she took my hand and merely looked at me, as if to say: “Everything will be fine, Michael. I am with you, no matter what happens. Don’t worry.” I froze, unable to say a word. Her presence filled me with calm and confidence.

At that moment Dr. Kaye walked in. He stood by the door and looked around, without noticing me. I got to my feet and walked over to greet him.

“Shalom,” he said, extending his hand.

We walked slowly over to the table. Miri introduced herself to Dr. Kaye and said softly: “It’s a pleasure to meet you. I hope with all my heart that you’ll be able to help Michael. But please do excuse me; I must be going.” I wanted to tell her “Please don’t go,” but she had already slipped out and vanished in an instant.

Dr. Kaye initiated the conversation and inquired after my welfare. I told him briefly what I was doing; I was trying to get to the point. I described the diverse difficulties I was up against, and asked him somewhat aggressively what he thought he could do for me. Silence. He didn’t respond, but only gazed at me pensively for a few moments. Then he looked me straight in the eye and said: “At this point, I don’t yet know how, and in what way, I can help you. However, I understand your difficulties. The path we will tread together is by no means short. However, if you decide to make a commitment to working with me seriously, the day will come when you’ll look back on this period and not even be able to *fathom* how you ever had difficulties. I have nothing more to add. Let’s get down to work.”

I was very impressed by his words. I was hungry – hungry to learn, in every sense of the word. I asked him what he meant

by “work.” What did it entail? I was worried that our work together would interfere with my job at the factory.

“You’re asking what it means to work? It’s very simple: open your diary and schedule the first appointment with me – and don’t find excuses for not showing up. That isn’t yet work, but it indicates a *readiness* to work.” When I heard his answer, my heart skipped a beat. Why, of all people, did destiny chose Dr. Kaye? I blushed; my facial expression was a clear giveaway to the emotions that engulfed me. Dr. Kaye turned to me and said: “You see?! You’re even finding it difficult to *decide* about working with me.” I felt as if he were rubbing salt into my wounds. We agreed that I would phone him to make an appointment.

Not wishing to exit the diner together with him, I remained seated, pondering our conversation. Five minutes had barely passed, and there was Miri again, walking into the restaurant. She took a chair and sat down beside me. Unlike the first time she had appeared, when she hadn’t said a word, this time she immediately wanted to know all the details of my meeting. I explained to her my difficulty in deciding to work with Dr. Kaye.

Suddenly I saw that tears had sprung to her eyes! I became quiet. She suggested that we step out for some fresh air. We drove to a beautiful quiet spot overlooking the sea. “Michael,” she said, “I feel your pain and your fears. But what happens to a person on the operating table? The surgeon removes what needs to be removed and stitches him up. You have no choice; you must undergo a similar process. Be grateful that it’s happening now and not when you are older.”

“Sure, it’s easy enough for you to say,” I responded laconically. “But it’s me who has to go through it.”

“We’ll go through it together. I already envision you getting

your degree in a few years. Don't forget to invite me to graduation!"

"How nice! So you've decided to poke fun at me," I muttered with a grin.

"If you don't begin treatment with Dr. Kaye, you'll just stay the same, without ever realizing your potential. The choice is yours; I can't study in your stead. With every passing day, *you* are the one who's losing out. You can't bring yesterday back," she stated with typical assertiveness. I returned home, and with a heavy heart went to bed. But thoughts flooded my mind and prevented my falling asleep. One thought, however, made me happy: at least I have one true friend – in this case, a girl – who really cares. And not only does she care; she is with me all the way. But what will happen along this way? Will it ever come to an end? And if so, when?

The next day I showed up at work as usual, but this time it was different – a little less important. All the supply headaches that invariably crop up – this customer didn't receive the color threads he had ordered, that customer didn't get the merchandise on time – no longer excited me. All my thoughts flowed in a single direction: Dr. Kaye and his treatment method. I decided to increase the amount of reading I was doing and to listen to Open University lectures on the radio. However, this barely changed the way I felt and only served to make me even more confused. I wasn't able to get the main points of the lectures. I knew that I needed Dr. Kaye's help, but I kept on postponing my appointment with him. Finally, when all other options had failed, I announced to Miri that I had decided to meet with him.

She beamed, and we drank a toast in honor of the occasion. The next day, as I was walking in the street, I had an urge to shout out loud: "There! I've decided! Now I'm sure

that nothing will stand in my way!" I felt exhilarated, and my heart beat with joy, as the Talmudic saying goes: "There is no greater joy than when one's doubts are resolved."

The following day I scheduled my first appointment with Dr. Kaye – in his office in the clinic in that very-same building on Kalisher Street... Although years had passed since my one and only time there, the memories surfaced as though it had been just yesterday. Suddenly, the sense of relief that had accompanied my decision faded away, to be replaced by a heaviness. Once again I was finding it difficult to follow through on my decision. However, my hectic work-day left me little time to think about the upcoming meeting.

The day of the appointment arrived. I found myself driving in the direction of Kalisher Street. "Everything will be fine, Michael," I kept assuring myself aloud, along the way. "The hard part is behind you." I parked the car nearby and strode with confident steps toward the clinic. Yet my heart skipped a beat. I saw passersby rushing along and wondered: "Why is my lot so different from theirs? Why am *I* the one who needs Dr. Kaye?" I tried to calm myself down with thoughts such as: "Hey, don't make such a big deal of it! You're on your way to a meeting that will probably help you a lot!"

I quickened my pace and rang the bell a few times. No answer. I looked back at the passersby, realizing that they could see me just as easily as I could see them. Heart racing, I rang the bell again. Suddenly the door opened, and there was Dr. Kaye standing in the entrance. I took a deep breath and dashed inside, almost knocking him over. I don't know if he understood the reason for my hectic entrance, but one thing is certain: it took me quite a bit of time to calm down from the intense emotions that had overcome me.

Once inside everything seemed different. It was only Dr. Kaye and me.

Dr. Kaye invited me into his clinic. He took his regular seat behind a large desk, with me sitting across from him. I vividly recalled the entire scene from years ago: the room and its furnishings remained the same; it was as if nothing had changed. Dr. Kaye picked up his pipe and commented: "You've changed, Michael. It seems to me that you are ready to commit yourself to working, which wasn't the case before." I replied that I didn't quite understand what he meant, but it was obvious that I was in the midst of an emotional storm. This didn't stop him from responding to my question, however, to which he replied with a parable: "Let's say that we're going together on a trek through the desert. One of us takes along the necessary amount of food, the other carries the water. Thus, we stride side by side until reaching our destination. Along the way we depend upon each other. Here, too, we will proceed together, step by step."

Some time later, after the Torah dimension was added to my life, I studied a difficult and piercing existential question posed by the Sages of the Talmud: Two men are walking in the desert, one of them carrying a flask of water. There is not enough water for both of them to survive; if they both drink from it, they will both die. If one of them drinks, he alone will reach their destination. What would be the right course of action? Rabbi Akiva and Ben Petora take different sides in this crucial issue. Ben Petora says that it is preferable for them both to drink and die than for one of them to witness his friend's death. However, Rabbi Akiva disagrees, saying that the one holding the flask should drink, for his own life takes priority over his friend's. In other words, your life is given to you as a gift, a loan from Above, as it were, and you are obligated to preserve it, at all costs.

# *One Eye Cries, While the Other Eye Laughs*

This time the meeting with Dr. Kaye was relatively short. Together we worked out a schedule for a series of semi-weekly sessions for the upcoming period. Before I left, Dr. Kaye gave me a homework assignment for the next session: to compose a list of areas in which I felt I needed improvement. Two days before our second session, I sat down and attempted to commit my difficulties to writing in an organized fashion, including my order of priorities for tackling them. There I sat, pencil poised in hand – but alas, I managed to write nary a single word, arriving at the meeting feeling extremely frustrated.

Dr. Kaye, as usual, was seated behind his large desk smoking his pipe: I loved the scent of the tobacco. Out of the blue, he asked me if I would be willing to help him sweep the office. His question threw me for a loop, and I didn't know how to respond. I thought to myself: What's the meaning of this odd request? *I* should clean his office? Dr. Kaye got up and, excusing himself, took a broom and started to slowly sweep the floor.

The sight of a lame man sweeping the floor didn't allow me to sit idly by, so I, too, took a broom and began sweeping the office alongside him. In about fifteen minutes we had completed the task. Dr. Kaye thanked me and, drawing on his pipe, asked me where we should begin. I didn't know what to



reply. I was at a loss for words, and offered all sorts of excuses in an attempt to avoid the issue. Soon enough, when he realized that he wasn't getting anywhere with me, he suddenly turned the conversation to my favorite sport – skiing: when would I be going skiing next, and what a classy sport it is, graceful and non-violent; how lucky I was that I knew how to ski, and that I enjoyed traveling and meeting all sorts of interesting people from around the world.

Overcoming my initial hesitation, I rose to the occasion and began telling him about the sport. Toward the end of the session, Dr. Kaye asked me to write an essay on the subject, a request that led me to think that he was one of the most bizarre people I had ever met. He was flitting randomly from one topic to another, he asked me to help him clean his office. Did I need any further proof that his behavior was completely out of the ordinary, even outlandish? Why had he suddenly begun talking about skiing (as if it were the most important thing in the world...)? I left his office in shock, feeling confused and helpless. Nevertheless, I decided to give the writing assignment a go.

Today – in light of the professional knowledge I've acquired and the experience I've accrued over the years in treating learning disabilities – I realize that Dr. Kaye's approach was nothing less than the ultimate in professionalism. He in essence employed Dr. Getman's method (formulated and committed to writing by the former in a number of his published books<sup>1</sup>), which divides the cognitive development of a child into five stages, the most important being the **ability to abstract** – that is, to be able to express the conceptual and emotional aspects of a subject both verbally and in writing. I myself acquired this

1. *Perceptual-Motor Aspects of the Developmental Process*. Remediation Associates. Van Nuys, CA. 1968; *Smart in Everything Except School*. Vision Extension. Santa Ana, CA. 1992; *How to Develop Your Child's Intelligence*. Optometric Extension Program. Santa Ana, CA. 2002.

ability, inter alia, through the taxing and agonizing experience of writing an essay on my favorite sport.

#### THE ESSAY ON MY LOVE OF SKIING

I've been a good skier since the age of sixteen. I first started enjoying this sport when I was in the United States, in Mammoth Mountain, California, later also in Davos, Switzerland and, of course, on Israel's Mount Hermon. I absolutely adore this sport.

And yet, there I was, pen in hand, a fresh pad of paper in front of me, simply unable to translate my love of skiing into the written word. I knew exactly what I wanted to write: about the special importance I ascribe to skiing in my leisure time; about my feelings while, and prior to, gliding down the snow-covered slopes. Yet I simply could not manage to organize my thoughts and emotions on the blank sheet of paper. It was as though the act of writing was, for me, an undoable task. With great difficulty I finally managed to compose a few lines. What a great feeling! I was curious to know what that strange man would have to say about my essay. However, since deep down I knew that it wasn't exactly a great piece, I didn't dare show it to anyone – not even to my girlfriend Miri. Only with great difficulty did I somehow manage to keep it under wraps, waiting for my next session with Dr. Kaye.

The days until the next session dragged by, during which numerous questions, concerns, and bewildering thoughts flooded my mind. The Midrash says of a true *chasid* – a devout person – that his one eye sheds a tear while his other eye laughs. And that's precisely how I felt during those days: racked by contradictory emotions. On the one hand, I still lacked confidence in Dr. Kaye's treatment method and was also upset with myself over not being able to deal with my problems on my own. On the other hand, still radiant from my

experiences with Dr. Abelman, I decided to take these initial steps with Dr. Kaye out of the realization that my sessions with him generated in me positive energy to keep moving forward – and *only* forward.

It dawned on me that my short essay had made Dr. Kaye into my partner – an intimate partner – something that was far from easy for me to accept, and which served to exacerbate the hard time I was having with the whole thing. At that stage I was only willing to share with him my learning disabilities and to learn how to deal correctly with his treatment; for although he (and his approach) seemed outlandish to me, I began to sense his uniqueness. At the age of I twenty-one, I had made the decision to keep my little private life to myself, and not share it with Dr. Kaye.

The appointed day arrived. Since our sessions usually took place in the late afternoon, I would travel to Dr. Kaye’s office straight from work. The whole thing was no easy matter for me. Even though my curiosity, as well as my expectations of some recognizable progress on my part, were on the upswing, I nevertheless still felt uncomfortable, fearing that my secret would be discovered.

When I arrived at the clinic, Dr. Kaye was waiting for me, already seated at his office desk, smoking his pipe.

“How are you, Michael?” he asked between puffs. “I see that you’ve written something.” He stretched out his arm and I handed him the notebook. He gave it a cursory glance and asked me to read aloud what I had written. I read my six-line essay with real emotion. Dr. Kaye asked me to read it again. I was slightly annoyed, but I restrained myself and complied.

“What’s your opinion about what you’ve written, Michael?” he asked

“I intended to write about my emotions, the feelings I have

when I ski: the tranquility, the sense of freedom, the sense of being one with nature.” I was by this time more than curious to hear what Dr. Kaye had to say about my essay.

“Michael, all those things you’ve just this moment told me about skiing: where are they in your essay?”

“Some of them appear, but in truth? Not all . . .”

Dr. Kaye asked me to read it again, for what seemed to me like the umpteenth time, after which he then requested: “Michael, describe to me what you wrote.”

I suddenly realized that what I had written in no way expressed or described my thoughts and feelings, but I hadn’t a clue as to why.

Dr. Kaye continued stuffing his pipe with tobacco and, with an irritating calmness, asked: “So where in the essay do you write about your feelings?” His question annoyed me; I was sure he was making fun of me. He repeated the question: Why didn’t I mention anything about my feelings in the essay? I mustered the courage to ask him exactly what he meant. He repeated himself again and again until I could barely contain my anger: *What in the world does he want from me!?*

Dr. Kaye looked me straight in the eye: “Michael, I’d like to give you a homework assignment for our next session.” I waited to hear what the topic was to be this time around. His words struck me like a lightning bolt. The topic? “My Feelings When I Ski.”

“Now you’ve *really* gotten me mad,” I declared, not mincing words. “I’m not so sure that I want to prepare this homework assignment for our next session.”

“Not sure that you *want to*, or not sure that you’re *able to*?” he asked.

At this point I lost my patience. I looked him straight in the eye and declared angrily: “Listen here, I’ve *had it* with this whole business!”

Dr. Kaye shot me a half-smile and said: “Ah, so I’ve managed to get you angry, my boy? I have one more thing to tell you, then. Just a second.” Rising with great difficulty from his chair, he went over to a cabinet in the corner of the room, pulled out a bottle of wine and two cups, and poured out two drinks. Holding one in his hand and proffering me the other, he declared gleefully: “*L’chaim, l’chaim!*” “Drink up, my boy!” and with that he downed the contents of his cup in one gulp.

I sat there staring, absolutely stunned by this strange man and his even stranger behavior, and then he began to sing, as if he were crooning some Chasidic melody: “I want your emotions, Michael, your emotions!” I wasn’t quite sure if I was dreaming, or if this strange scene was actually unfolding before my very eyes.

That moment was to remain etched in my memory for years to come. I headed for the door, leaving Dr. Kaye singing away.

Sleep eluded me that night. Dr. Kaye’s words kept ringing in my ears: “I want your emotions in your essay, your *emotions*...” What emotions was I supposed to write about? I asked myself. I had no answer.

Still agitated the next day, I decided to leave work early and seek Miri’s help. And indeed, she was of great help. She asked me to tell her what I felt when I went skiing. I concentrated and began describing my feelings. First of all, the sense of freedom, the pleasantness, the serenity, the marvelous sight of other skiers also enjoying the tranquility and unsullied whiteness all around. Add to this the magnificent, breathtaking view – and you have perfection. “What else? Keep describing!” Miri prodded. I couldn’t contain myself. “What’s there to add? What’s wrong with what I’ve told you? I don’t understand what you want from me!” I snapped in anger.

“I realize that you’re upset, but take a deep breath and start writing about what you’re feeling right now,” she requested.

“Why are you torturing me?”

“I only want you to write what you’re feeling. That’s all.”

“What I’m feeling is . . . that I don’t feel like writing,” I countered evasively.

“Then write that you don’t feel like writing,” she kept on tormenting me.

I felt very strange. I had no idea how to express my emotions in writing. Until then, writing had for me always been merely a technical act of transmitting matter-of-fact information. That being the case, I thought, it was certainly something to be discussed with Dr. Kaye.

I felt blocked, incapable of expressing my feelings in writing. How was I supposed to deal with this obstacle? In parallel, the question of when I would be ready for college studies was constantly running through my mind. Now I realized for the first time that part of the answer lay in my ability to write. Imbued with this new insight, I impatiently awaited the next meeting with Dr. Kaye – that strange, unpredictable man.

Only now, in retrospect, can I affirm with certainty the significant role that my dear friend, Dr. Alan Kaye, played in the transformative process that brought me to where I am. Not only did all my doubts completely dissipate in the course of the treatment, but with the passage of time I came to realize that I had merited to spend time in the company of a singularly unique human being, sensitive and wise – a human being of the highest caliber.

# *My Relationship with Dr. Kaye, from His Perspective\**

## A MOTHER'S CHARM

I had just finished delivering a lecture to a group of psychologists and educators from the Tel Aviv area when a graceful, dynamic woman approached the podium and asked to have a word with me.

It is my policy to field questions pertaining to the content of my lecture and to clarify things I said in case they were not sufficiently understood. I'm also interested in hearing comments and critiques from the audience that were not raised in the course of my lecture.

However, I was stunned by the intensity of this woman's emotional plea and by her flood of questions. I immediately saw that she was a concerned and devoted mother, with a solid knowledge of educational principles and particularly well-versed in the difficulties facing the learning disabled, as well as in the various treatment methods.

She told me that her son suffered from a learning disability. Her words were so sincere that I felt that I must talk with her. I decided to stay and listen to her story.

\* This chapter was written by Dr. Alan Kaye.

This woman, who identified herself as Emmy, had a sixteen-year-old son named Michael who had been diagnosed with a learning disability. And although he was a good-natured, amiable, and popular lad from a loving and generous home, he suffered terribly.

Michael had already been examined by numerous specialists in Israel. He had also been seen by renowned experts in the United States, who had correctly diagnosed him as being dyslexic and who had wrought wonders in helping him overcome his disability. Indeed, Michael had been very fortunate: Dr. Getman, and his student and successor, Dr. Abelman, had conducted a number of diagnostic exams that allowed them to prescribe the best course of treatment for his progress, and which indeed set him on solid ground. Dr. Abelman had also suggested that Michael continue working within a therapeutic framework upon his return to Israel.

I discovered that Dr. Abelman had not committed to writing the guiding principles of his treatment with Michael; however, I was awed by the innovative and systematic treatment he had invested in the youth.

The older Michael got, the more challenging his disability became; his parents, hard as they tried, were unable to find any effective solution. His mother, however, was impressed by a certain point that I had made in my lecture: that a diagnosis unaccompanied by practical guidance or plan of treatment is of very limited value. Neither IQ tests nor any other types of examinations that determine the student's level (in relation to his age, grade, or to other objective standards) are capable of rectifying the disability. In fact, the opposite is true: this type of information is only of marginal value when speaking of learning disabilities.

This assertion has struck many people as heretical, yet it



constitutes the basis of a creative educational evaluation and is one of the cornerstones of my approach of comparative diagnosis (meaning, an assessment of the patient's ability to distinguish between various objects with various levels of precision, including the ability to point to differences and similarities between them).

Emmy was insistent that I meet Michael as soon as possible; she refused to take no for an answer, and I simply couldn't withstand the pressure she brought to bear. Feeling quite powerless in the face of her boundless energy, I had no choice but to set up an appointment with her for the following week.

I cancelled all my professional appointments that were scheduled for that day. I have no rational explanation for the sense of urgency or how I was unexpectedly swept up into it, especially with no advance preparation. I was simply captivated by this dedicated mother.

#### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Michael, a tall, robust teenager, won over my heart from the moment we met – when he flashed me one of his charismatic smiles and said: “I'm Michael. You must be Dr. Kaye”

“Yes, I am,” I replied, both surprised and delighted.

“I believe we have an appointment, correct?” he responded, with another smile.

I asked him to take a seat in the armchair beside me. He did so with a hushed sigh. Only after I got to know him better did I realize the tremendous amount of courage he had to muster in order to start speaking with me.

The tremendous self-confidence he displayed was in inverse proportion to his complex learning disabilities. He didn't open up to me during our first meeting, but rather sat tense and apprehensive over what he was about to face. For

my part I tried to downplay the weightiness of our meeting in order to alleviate his fears. I felt as if he was open to hearing what I had to say.

I decided not to perform the standard tests during this first meeting, as I sensed that the required relationship between us had not yet evolved. To test him prematurely would have meant impeding the development and deepening of our relationship.

I also felt that the time was not yet ripe to point to his weaknesses, for that would cripple my efforts to find a way to his heart. I decided instead to create a sense of mutual confidence that would serve us in the long run.

In retrospect, I see that my approach was right on the mark. I told Michael about my professional background, my education, my family, and my work schedule. Michael didn't say much about himself. He told me a little about his family, his relatives, and his friends. Suddenly, he asked me if I had ever heard the term "dyslexia." I nodded affirmatively. He began to tell me that during his trip to the States he had met Dr. Abelman, who had begun treating him for his problem, but that he still had difficulty reading.

I tried to assess his willingness to continue meeting me, explaining to him the need for a comprehensive diagnosis. Surprisingly, he agreed. Despite this, however, our next meeting was not to take place for several years.

#### OPTICAL RETENTION INSTEAD OF VISUAL APPARATUS, AND AUDITORY PERCEPTION

Michael suffered from an assortment of problems, beginning with a difficulty in understanding basic mathematical principles and ending with his inability to read words or understand the contents of paragraphs in a simple text.

I wondered: Do all these separate problems have a common denominator? Were words and numbers the root of the

problem, or was there something more primal and complex that ramified and blocked the diverse channels of learning? Could the answer be found in the sensory realm?

At first I put my stakes on the sense of sight, thinking that it was a visual problem that prevented Michael from seeing letters and numbers correctly.

In the process of diagnosis, I first requested an optometrist's report. The results were all positive and did not point to a lack of visual acuity or any other abnormality.

I decided not to request additional eye examinations, but rather to work with a set of simple illustrations based upon the "Benton Visual Retention Test," which can diagnose and assess a patient's visual perception, visual memory, and visuo-constructive abilities.

I then checked the functioning of his visual system again, to see how he used both eyes together and each eye independently. In addition, I also examined his visual memory.

Here, I believed, we discovered something significant. The more complex the images, the more difficult it became for Michael to remember them.

I was pleasantly surprised by his visual memory. In many cases Michael exhibited an amazing ability to utilize his visual memory, over and above directly copying the diagram that was before him.

I wondered what it was that was preventing him from using his good eyesight. Further tests of his ability to copy the written material provided the answer. Michael failed to pay attention to the constituent elements of what he was supposed to copy. In fact, he may not have discerned them at all, although he was able to look at them for several seconds.

The problem seemed to be in his eyes, which also interfered with his thought processes. His use of his eyes was irregular; he did not use both of them at once. Actually, Dr. Abelman

had already discovered Michael's difficulty in focusing and had treated it very successfully; I simply tried to continue the treatment. The problem was that at times Michael used his right eye for seeing, and at other times, his left, making him unable to discern small details. Treatment of this condition, however, demanded intense and complicated efforts. I had to change years of Michael's habitual behavior until he could trust in what he saw with his eyes and believe that he perceived the details correctly.

I checked his use of his eyes again with vision experts. The tests revealed a rare phenomenon: even though Michael was able to clearly discern the different components of an illustration, the amount and complexity of these components engendered in him a lack of confidence, at which point he would consciously stop using his sense of sight, giving preference to his visual memory. This "trick" served him well when he had to identify a small number of components. However, the greater the number of components, the harder it became for him to discern them, until the trick no longer worked. Michael had to admit, unwillingly, to his own disability.

I understood him well. He didn't want to become an object of research, preferring to keep his problem to himself and not share his experience with others. He opted for telling himself that his excellent visual memory could compensate for his reading problems. Furthermore, his charisma, good looks, and impressive physique fooled him into thinking that he could somehow manage. However, deep down he realized that the problem he suffered from was complex.

My basic hypothesis was that Michael was actually forcing himself to substitute the use of his memory for the use of his eyesight. A young man who consistently fails in the use of his visual system is likely to start questioning its accuracy.

Likewise, he is likely to feel his self-esteem being undermined whenever he does not manage to perform simple visual tasks. Add to this a lack of sympathy that such a young person is likely to encounter on the part of his teachers and peers, and it comes as no surprise that the conclusion he is likely to reach is that it simply doesn't "pay" to rely on his eyesight.

I've described Michael's inconsistent use of his eyes, a fact that greatly disturbed me. During our sessions I noticed that he was left-handed, which was not the case with his eyes; neither one was dominant. I noticed that he would switch from one eye to the other, depending upon the placement of an object in his field of vision. When an object was on the right side of his field of vision, he would use his right eye, and when it was on the left, his left one. He apparently did this in order to avoid the confusion he felt when using both eyes simultaneously.

Every child, in the normal course of development, learns how to use both eyes at once. Studies have shown that this ability is acquired during the first three months of life. And even when it is at times delayed, there is rarely cause for worry. Sometimes one sees an infant at a later age squint a bit as he tries unsuccessfully to focus his or her vision using both eyes. However, if this situation does not change, problems may arise that interfere with or prevent the performance of ordinary visual tasks. These difficulties may eventually distort one's sense of orientation, as well as the ability to take measurements, assess distances, and even to establish a logical sequence of events. This, for instance, is the way in which we determine the nature of objects, according to their relative size and their position in relation to other objects in their vicinity.

I sought to discover whether Michael's case was one of "lazy eye," or perhaps part of a broader phenomenon that

might be related to an organic problem or to some aspect of a learning disability. Subsequent examinations did not yield any clear conclusions, even though Michael had to a large extent obviously overcome the problem.

Could Michael's success in overcoming his problem possibly be attributed to some physiological change that he underwent? Or was it merely the product of adaptation? At the time, the answer to this question didn't seem so crucial; to my mind, the most pressing thing at the moment was to forge a relationship of mutual trust between us. Our relationship was especially important, given that the treatment program would necessitate Michael's full cooperation and a willingness to openly admit to his disability, coupled with a strong and sincere determination to perform new and unfamiliar tasks.

I wondered whether my expectation – that Michael let go, to some extent, of his accustomed behavior and focus on the program I had prepared – was realistic. What reason would Michael have to believe that my program was in any way superior to those of the other professionals who had treated him in the past? Moreover, why should he consent to cooperate with me, of all people?

Michael understood that great effort would be demanded from him, the results of which were as yet uncertain. I was surprised by his declaration of readiness to apply himself to the work. He was resolute and determined.

Two major factors were in our favor:

1. Michael's resolute and highly motivated personality, traits that would help him overcome the myriad obstacles in his path.
2. Michael's sincerity. To the best of my understanding, it was this trait that led him to believe in himself.

I had planned on making many demands on Michael during the treatment; space does not allow me to detail each one. However, following are several of them:

The first and foremost task facing him was the need to learn to use his eyes properly, in order to verify and confirm each visual object. He had to stop relying on his visual memory and on the assumption that “he already knew” and to becoming willing to complete the task without leaving unsolved details. Likewise, I instructed him to keep a detailed journal of all tasks required of him, in order that he know which ones he was successful at, the ones in which he failed, and the various aspects that he still had to improve upon. At first Michael refused to write down his impressions, repeatedly complaining that he was “not a baby” and that he was capable of recalling many things without having to record them. When he finally agreed to comply with my request, however, he admitted that the regimen of committing these things to writing afforded him a greater sense of confidence and ease.

In parallel to the diagnoses of Michael’s visual functioning, I also felt the need to examine his auditory grasp, this due to his initial difficulty in translating graphic images – letters – into sounds or syllables. Learning a language is a type of decoding. The child looks at a graphic image – for example, the letter “A” – and translates it into a sound. When a child reads, he assembles the letters into syllables and joins together their appropriate sounds, thus forming a word. In writing, the child does the exact reverse: he extracts a graphic image from the collection of syllables constituting the word. This process is generally impaired in dyslexic children, and consequently they have difficulties reading and writing.

Initial tests proved Michael’s hearing to be completely sound; the specialists who conducted the testing determined

that no further tests were necessary in this area. He heard perfectly well in both ears and could easily distinguish between different sounds, both whispers and ordinary, uninterrupted speech. I was also pleased to discover that he was able to distinguish the phonetic differences between several European languages, and of course could point out subtle differences in similar-sounding words in English.

Nevertheless, we did diagnose one specific difficulty: when he was called upon to integrate hearing and writing, his level of performance was not high; he would miss, skip over, or ignore various exercises. Therefore, I thought it preferable to circumvent these difficulties and instead go straight to activities that he excelled in; we could fill in the lacunae later, I believed, through the skills that he would have already acquired and become proficient in.

When Michael was tested on his ability to differentiate between various complex rhythms by drumming along with his hands, I noticed that in most cases he repeated only the first part of the rhythm, skipping over or becoming confused by the latter part. He also found this task very difficult, especially when there were background noises.

In order to deal with these problems, I decided to enhance the different rhythms by increasing or decreasing the volume of the drumming, which allowed Michael to more easily distinguish between the different rhythms and to repeat them more accurately. This exercise trained his cognitive system to perform a complex task consisting of auditory discrimination of rhythms, remembering them, and repeating them precisely (with hand beats).

Furthermore, in the course of treatment I noticed that teaching Michael to distinguish between various instrumental sounds and having him reproduce them also helped him to



distinguish between and memorize various phonemes, as well as to develop additional cognitive skills.

Moreover, through these exercises I developed a treatment method that I would later use with other patients: I requested that Michael *review* the necessary information that he was requested to *remember* and then *write down* this information in his journal, the act of writing serving as a *reminder* and helping him to *memorize* the vital information.

I would like to stress that the connection between the memorization of sounds and the memorization of spoken information is a more complex challenge. It not only requires the recollection of specific sounds, syllables, or word patterns, but also the “neutralization” of a great deal of accrued information that had created in Michael a strong emotional burden and that had obstructed his progress in various stages of the treatment.

Despite Michael’s difficulty in adapting to and adopting a different approach to treatment, he felt comfortable around me, especially due to the openness between us. His good sense of humor extricated him more than once from potentially embarrassing situations and helped him deal with his learning disabilities.

Thus, despite everything, he made steady progress in his ability to learn.

#### DIFFICULTIES WITH MATH, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO READING

Michael’s limited ability to solve arithmetic problems pointed to a weak grasp of basic mathematical operations, as well as to his inability to integrate numerous operations. If the math problem presented to him was one with which he was familiar, he showed no small skill in solving it. However, as

the problems became increasingly complex, the knowledge he had already acquired failed to help him. One of his typical mistakes was to repeat numbers or number patterns without verifying whether they accurately solved the problem he had been asked to solve.

Michael wouldn't pay attention to the "minus" sign. Further investigation revealed that he in fact paid almost no attention to the mathematical expressions.

I decided to prepare for him a treatment program that would first require him to read aloud every mathematical expression slowly, in a *clear voice*. He then had to write down every stage of the sequence of mathematical operations and not try calculating in his head. This procedure guaranteed that he keep track of each step leading up to the solution of the exercise while enabling him to see his mistakes in "real time."

There is no question that the implementation of this program signaled the first turning point in his development. However, it was also a very confusing and painful process for Michael, who had learned to depend so heavily on his memory. It pained me to see him in moments of weakness, and I empathized with him; I would often take short breaks in the course of the exercises to speak with him and encourage him.

Solving a two-digit multiplication exercise or an exercise in simple division proved an excellent technique for monitoring Michael's thought processes and for identifying problematic mathematical operations. As Michael applied himself increasingly to the assignments I gave him, further difficulties arose:

1. Michael would consistently fail to pay attention to the mathematical expression as a whole. He would extract the figures from the equation and "take a shot" at the required mathematical process. Guessing was an important component of his day-to-day life.

2. Michael would not read the mathematical problem from left to right. Rather, he would rush over the line while trying to retain the details of the exercise in his head. By reading the exercise in its entirety out loud, he was forced to relate to all of it, from beginning to end, and to check if his grasp of it was correct. This technique proved essential to his development – not just in math practice but in reading exercises, as well. In other words, I noticed that his progress in either one of these areas – reading or math – was dependent upon his progress in the other.

I later on realized that even while reading a text, Michael would not read continuously down a page; he would rather jump from place to place, as if he were picking out words or “choice syllables.” As a result, he was for the most part unable to understand the overall meaning of a text.

When I would ask him to read *out loud* and even to guess what the proper word should be in the context of the passage, Michael succeeded in overcoming small stumbling blocks in the form of undecipherable letters, syllables, and words, which enabled him to grasp a great deal more of the information embedded in the complete sentence. Michael eventually began reading complete sentences and even began processing the material.

Another technique that proved useful in Michael’s overcoming his difficulty with mathematics was to *rewrite* the exercise and to *give a title to each stage of the solution*. This was in order to understand and internalize even the smallest step in the equation.

As Michael gradually began to master these learning techniques, a different world – a new and enchanted one – began to unfold before him. It was, as he himself put it, “a passage from darkness to light.”

The eventual transition to understanding algebra exercises was rapid. His joy over his new achievements imbued him with the desire to continue employing the methods we had begun with, and diminished the concerns that had plagued him at the outset.

The relationship of trust between us took on new meaning. The doubts that had initially plagued Michael completely disappeared, and he was far readier to tackle new tasks. His new motto became: Where there's a will, there's a way!

Yet despite these good feelings and positive developments, it wasn't all smooth sailing. Many a time his progress came to a halt due to one obstacle or another. Fraction exercises, for instance: although we tried approaching them from numerous angles, Michael was unable to overcome his difficulty in this area. In order to bolster his self-confidence, I went back to equations, with which Michael felt somewhat more comfortable. A long time would elapse before Michael was able to master fractions.

The very act of reading or solving a math problem was for Michael fraught with great emotional tension, and as long as this tension was not neutralized, he wasn't able to make progress in these two areas. At any rate, there's no contesting that Michael never liked fractions!

#### BIDDING MICHAEL FAREWELL

During the course of my many years of working with young people and adults, I never ceased to be touched by Michael's progress and at the tasks that he undertook – and succeeded at! He was fortunate to have had the backing of parents who declared all-out war on his learning disabilities.

Thanks to his natural aptitude, he had developed the ability to express himself verbally, cleverly using it to conceal and compensate for his difficulties in expressing himself in

writing. His dedication to his goal and his commitment to prove to himself that he could overcome life's crises were, in my opinion, what brought about this great revolution. The unequivocal statement, set forth unyieldingly in academic literature, that there is no solution to the problem of dyslexia, simply caved in in the face of Michael's unswerving willpower and determination.

An additional point worthy of note: Michael also proved that no test or examination can ultimately reflect the true potential of the patient. Throughout his lifetime Michael had the opportunity to put his learning skills into practice, participating in a wide variety of courses in the fields of administration, marketing, and Judaic studies, among others.

Therapists who work with learning disabilities must not only identify the features of the learning impediment; they must also create the tools that will help the patient overcome his limitations, thereby allowing him to deal with all facets of learning.

Furthermore, such therapists must always view and take into consideration the widest possible implications of the learning disability as it manifests itself in different settings: in the classroom, at home, and – later on – in the workplace. If the solution found will help to overcome only one specific handicap in only one area of life, the benefits to the patient will also be limited, and the young person suffering from a learning disability will be unable to face life's challenges or cope with the rapidly changing and challenge-filled world around him.

Another interesting point to be emphasized is the dramatic improvement in Michael's reading. From the moment he began receiving help with arithmetic, his reading skills improved significantly. I wondered about this connection between reading and math skills. Do math exercises and reading exercises share a commonality? Perhaps.

On a practical level, the approach we developed allowed Michael the freedom to pursue his own initiatives. I planted in him the motivation to develop skills that he had never before dared to develop. As part of this approach I stressed recognition of his own abilities, the need for receptiveness, and trying to come up with creative ways of coping with his problems. Finally, as we have already pointed out, Michael's own attitude, including his sense of humor and his readiness to face challenges, were of tremendous help to him.

In the course of my work with Michael, I noticed that his ability to process information was extremely fast, although sometimes this was precisely the reason why he failed to distinguish between primary and secondary points or between fragments of information and complete concepts. It was no easy task to wean him of his old habit of "shooting from the hip"; he had trouble weighing his answers deliberately and at length. I dealt with this by applying "sanctions": I would penalize him whenever he provided an incorrect or partial answer, or when he didn't respond to the question in keeping with the way in which it was posed.

Another technique I employed was to tell him the conclusion to a problem or the answer to a question and then ask him to "fill in the blank" in reverse, i.e., to formulate the question to which the answer applied. This practice was by no means simple; it necessitated Michael's "putting on his thinking cap," exercising his logic, and honing his ability to improvise. Yet I believed he would be able to successfully meet this challenge. And indeed, after many such exercises Michael got the hang of the game and felt ready to jump the next hurdle. The learning skills that he acquired during the course of the treatment and via our extensive conversations granted him confidence in his ability to face future challenges successfully.

# PART III





## *Reaching Far and Wide: The “No-Method” Method*

Over time I came to the decision to devote myself to helping people suffering from learning disabilities, dyslexia in particular, out of my desire to share with them the successful treatment that I had received, thanks to which I now live a full, rich, and active intellectual life.

Yet, although I constantly keep myself abreast of the latest developments in the field of learning disabilities via professional literature and research studies, I have been greatly disappointed not to have come across a single, comprehensive solution to the problem.

Many of these studies propose ways of circumventing the disability or of making it easier to bear. My own approach, however, based on that of Dr. Stanley Abelman, treats the very root of the problem and does not seek to merely “lessen the burden.” To my great joy I have been privileged to have been able to help many individuals, who now function completely normally.

This approach to dyslexia is based less upon pre-defined stages than upon techniques specifically tailored to the person’s individual needs and progress. It is rather based on the well-known principle that reading and writing skills require the simultaneous deployment of three basic elements: vision,

hearing, and the cognitive ability to interpret words. The slightest lack of coordination between these three elements can impair the cognitive processing of words and their meanings, causing difficulty in visual focusing and problems in motor coordination.

Several treatment methods exist today, which integrate these three components, in their efforts to help individuals overcome dyslexia. My own approach produces results in a relatively short period of time, and is effective precisely due to the unique personal therapy involved.

In order to explain my work, I will review how my distinguished teacher enabled me to overcome dyslexia. Dr. Stanley Abelman's approach is based on the principles of behavioral visual therapy. To appreciate the dynamics of this approach, it is necessary to elaborate on the fullness and complexity of the visual process. Our total life experience – how we respond, how we perform tasks, how we deal with what we see around us – is processed and integrated within the most amazing and still largely unknown part of the human body: the ever-evolving brain. Behavioral visual therapy enhances performance in all the above areas by introducing effective problem-solving techniques through the eyes – as an extension of the brain – with additional support from the tactile, auditory, olfactory, and balance mechanisms.

We tend to think that vision is a direct product of the eyes, but that is incorrect. In general, the eyes simply transmit electrical impulses to the brain, together with messages from the other senses. Each of our eyes has 100,000,000 receptor cells, and each eye sends one million messages to the brain each thousandth of a second. Altogether, the brain is capable of receiving 3 million messages in one thousandth of a second. This means that two thirds of the information reaching the

brain comes from the eyes, leaving one third to come from the other senses. Thus, the term “vision” really means the entire “sight-vision” complex, for the ultimate output – vision – is dependent upon *all* the input.

As is true of all the brain’s input-output mechanisms, the “sight-vision” complex must be proficient in many skills in order to function properly. The clinician carefully evaluates each component of the sight-vision complex to determine both its capabilities and inadequacies. Since this is the primary cognitive system that a person uses in reading the written word, it must undergo a full evaluation to determine its level of functioning and, by extension, the amount and scope of help the patient will need. In general, a vision assessment must examine a wider range of functions than solely the focusing mechanism of the eyes.

It follows, then, that vision is a process that must be acquired, and, as such, the degree of the efficiency of vision can vary greatly. Almost all children with learning disabilities have problems with their visual functioning. Vision therapy provides the tools for improved performance of this most important human process. Dr. Abelman achieved miraculous results by correcting the dysfunction of the above elements within an amazingly short time.

How did he do it?

The therapeutic method he developed is based on an ongoing intensive assessment of the patient’s condition, coupled with exercises performed by therapist and patient together, in a supportive and fun-filled environment. The most significant factor, without which no progress can take place, is the emotional element: that is, the supportive relationship between therapist and patient and the special bond that is forged between them. The treatment relies on the therapist’s

intuitive ability, which is the key to rectifying the disruption in the entire sight-vision complex. Hence, its name: **The “No-Method” Method**. At the same time, however, this intuitive ability is cultivated via the inner work done by the therapist in preparation for and prior to the sessions, and which continues for the duration of the treatment. This work follows the three Kabbalistic-Chasidic stages of “**Inspiration**” (*Chochmah*), “**Understanding**” (*Binah*), and “**Connection**” (*Da’at*).<sup>1</sup> In the first stage, **Inspiration**, the therapist formulates the initial therapeutic approach suitable for the specific patient; in the second stage, **Understanding**, the therapist designs the necessary tools on a theoretical basis; in the third and final stage, **Connection**, these tools are applied in practice.

In addition to the inner work of “Inspiration, Understanding, and Knowledge,” the therapist is involved in yet another inner process: that of becoming a *tabula rasa* – a clean slate – in order that his encounter with the patient not be influenced by any preconceptions that might limit his flexibility. Throughout the entire course of treatment, the therapist must remain aware of the dynamic of the changes occurring within the patient, both during and between sessions. Practically speaking, I approach treatment with the view that the patient already possesses all the requisite skills to resolve his difficulty in cognitive processing; my job as therapist is to act as a mere “facilitator” who enables the patient to implement his existing skills.

In order to reveal these latent abilities, the therapist must first find that special “language” that will activate the patient’s cognitive system. This is not remedial teaching; rather, it

1. The initial letters of these three terms form the acronym *ChaBaD*, the name of the branch of Chasidism founded by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, one of the most prominent early Chasidic masters and the founder of today’s Lubavitch movement.

serves to assist the patient in progressing to the point that he or she be able to read and write functionally, allowing for subsequent remedial teaching to be effective.

The first stage in treating a reading problem lies in the assessment; it is the jumping-off point with which I begin the treatment and that I keep returning to, at the start of and throughout each session, allowing me to constantly monitor the patient's level of functioning through casual conversation, without the use of formal instruments. It identifies his weaknesses and strengths, the goal being to penetrate the patient's inner world, including his likes and dislikes. We talk about comfort zones and areas of difficulty; we discuss his or her dreams, hopes, fears, and obstacles. This method forges a state of emotional openness between therapist and patient, shedding light on the latter's inner world and allowing the therapist to formulate a therapeutic approach tailored to the patient's specific needs.

Most researchers of dyslexia have in recent years reached the conclusion that reading difficulties are connected with speech and language dysfunction. Likewise, research studies indicate that preschoolers with language difficulties have a 40–75% greater likelihood of developing reading problems in ensuing years. Among all the language components associated with dyslexia, the lack of phonological awareness is the best indicator of future reading problems. Normal children can distinguish between words that differ by only one phoneme. Most children are able to isolate single phonemes in words and produce them separately, despite their lack of formal knowledge of the phonological structure of language. When a child demonstrates ability to isolate and produce phonemes, he is described as having phonological awareness.

This awareness is measured by assigning the child tasks

that require him to identify, isolate, or combine individual phonemes into words or syllables. A typical elementary task requires the child to separate a word that is read aloud to him into syllables, and to clap hands according to the number of syllables he hears. A much more difficult task is to reconstruct a word after one phoneme has been removed.

The exercises employed throughout the course of therapy activate the senses. A typical exercise involves visual tracking, hearing, and motor coordination, integrated with the patient's emotional and cognitive abilities. For example, therapist and patient toss a ball back and forth while discussing the patient's experiences. By distracting the patient's attention from the ball via simultaneously conversing with him, the act of tossing and catching becomes more automatic. This improves integration between vision and motor response while strengthening cognitive processing. From here the path is short to improving the perception of written symbols – namely, letters.

Let me give an example of an exercise that applies all the principles discussed above: the child is asked to perform several tasks simultaneously. He or she walks forward or backward in response to hand-clapping signals given by the therapist – one clap for forward, two claps for backward. While walking, the child places the opposite hand on the forward knee – left hand on right knee or right hand on left knee. Simultaneously, the therapist engages the child in conversation. At first the conversation centers around the task itself; later, as the child grows more proficient at multi-tasking, the topic of discussion will be unrelated to the exercise. This combination of vision, audition, coordination, locomotion, and cognition creates new neural connections in the child's brain, which allow him or her to overcome previously entrenched learning difficulties.

It is also important to talk to the patient about the dis-

crepancies between his actual reading level and his ideal one. These discussions serve as an introduction to exercises aimed at dealing with specific areas of difficulty, opening up channels of functioning that up until then had not operated correctly. In general, we tend to react to problems by either resisting them or evading them. Most if not all of us find it difficult to be in uncomfortable situations. It is especially tough to single out precisely what it is that is making us feel bad about a given situation, and how it differs from the ideal. Yet, when a person wants to progress from one level to the next, he must recognize the disparity between the desired level and his current state. The patient needs to be aware of and admit to this disparity, for it is impossible to read if one lacks the ability to distinguish between different words and their constituent letters, vowels, syllables, etc. Information that reaches the brain via the eyes arrives in a confused form. In order for a person to be able to organize this information, he must learn to recognize fine differences and be able to verbally express them. Only after the child verbally expresses his awareness of these differences can he benefit from the time and energy invested in remediating his deficiencies and achieve a structural modification of his cognitive functioning.

It is essential to once again stress the role of the bond between therapist and patient, which lies at the very core of the therapy and its success. The “music” they make together while performing the exercises, their conversations, eye contact, and intonations of speech all merge to weave the tapestry that heals the rift between the senses and cognition.

#### SEVERAL CASE STUDIES

An eleven-year-old boy who had difficulty in combining letters came to see me. He recognized the names and sounds of the

letters but was unable to combine them into syllables. As I do with every patient, after assessing the problem I sought a foothold among his healthy senses through active listening, deep contemplation of his inner world, and the use of the intuitive system of “Inspiration, Understanding, and Knowledge.” As is usually the case among dyslexic and learning-disabled individuals, he had problems focusing his eyes. We worked together on several coordination and eye-contact exercises that I formulated for him, and through this treatment he became able to read fluently in a short period of time.

Another child, with severe concentration problems, came to see me – problems that, as expected, impaired his ability to understand what he read. He was not completely dyslexic, although he exhibited certain signs of dyslexia. He read properly, although he hated reading, for he didn’t understand the meaning of the material and would immediately lose interest. He also had coordination problems; for instance, he couldn’t hold a ball in one hand or walk with alternating hand and feet movements. I also noted certain emotional problems. He was depressed and disgruntled, with a strong drive to talk incessantly. I suspected that his inability to understand what he was reading was the result of his emotional instability. I therefore decided to focus my treatment on the emotional angle. I gave him great freedom to express himself, taking advantage of his compulsion to talk to strengthen him and propel him forward. I asked him to show me the photos in his family album, using them to encourage him to speak about his memories and about the various individuals in his world. He began to describe them enthusiastically, and I suggested that together we write down these stories. Afterwards, we wrote about his thoughts and about his significant life experiences; understandably, he was very anxious to read his notebook.



The experience of reading a text that was meaningful *to him* opened the door to reading other texts and paved the way for tremendous advances in his reading comprehension. He learned to love reading, and even the state of his emotional world improved. In parallel, I was in contact with his parents, instructing them as to how to reinforce his progress and offer him greater significant feedback.

I treated another youth, a fourteen-year-old who, strictly speaking, was also not dyslexic, although he had been diagnosed as learning disabled and had difficulty following what was going on in the classroom. As is the case with many learning-disabled individuals, his attention problem was linked to problems with visual focus. I did various exercises with him, although I was dissatisfied with his rate of improvement. I learned that he played the piano, although he hadn't yet learned to read notes. I decided to use music as a therapeutic tool. I contacted his music teacher and instructed her to have him play the piano with his hands crossed, and to ignore, as much as possible, the quality of the music he produced. This exercise, as well as others that made use of different fingers on both hands, greatly improved his coordination, and his newly acquired self-confidence encouraged him to try reading musical notes. The connection that we formed between musical sounds and coordination – with the help of his piano teacher – allowed us to build cognitive associations, until his attention deficit was resolved.

Another interesting case: A young man who could recognize sounds and combine them into letters came to me for treatment; however, he read extremely slowly, with many mistakes. His ability to talk was also limited. My initial assessment was that he had some sort of emotional block, which was causing him to respond to the world verbally only with

great difficulty. After further examination of his inner world, I determined that the only thing that could take him out of his shell was physical activity. It occurred to me that we should try wrestling together. I decided to put my idea into practice, and after a few short rounds of wrestling he began to speak more fluently. It seems that physical activity, in this case the wrestling that he enjoyed so much, allowed his inner world to open up. Thus, his ability to speak, and even to read, was markedly improved.

## *In the Library*

I was deathly afraid of libraries. Their walls were lined with *books* – hundreds and thousands of them! – on whose account I, Michael Zarchin, was poor – poor in knowledge. My mind would rage with anger whenever I would set foot in a library. I wanted to rip all those books to shreds. Who cares? So there won't be any books! Yet at the same time I longed to find a way to get to know them, to befriend them and fraternize with them. The pages and letters of books stirred my imagination: What did they contain?

Unable to find an answer, I turned to that Higher Power within me and began talking to it and begging it, entreating it and trying to persuade it: “Please, oh please, give me the strength to get close to books. Let me breathe life into the written word. Bring me into its confidence; help me come close enough to embrace it.” Embrace the written word? A chill ran up my spine. That would be like embracing an enemy. But really, I asked myself: Why not? *Why not?*

For days and nights, I wandered about with these feelings. I didn't know what to do with myself, but I knew I had to do *something*. Then I made up my mind: I would visit a library, come what may! I would do it just as if I were going to a movie. I loved movies; they were my friends, my books.

For weeks on end I was tortured by my decision and took

pains to avoid even walking past the library, until one day I found myself on its front steps. I stood there, frozen like a statue, watching the frequenters come and go as if they were ghosts. A passerby stopped and gazed at me for a few moments. "Excuse me, young man, are you feeling alright?" she asked. I mumbled a surprised: "Why? Why do you ask?" "Well, you're awfully pale," she replied. "Do you need help?"

"Help!?" I turned to her, and that Higher Power cried out to me from within: "Yes! Yes! Tell her how lucky she is that she can walk into the building without batting an eyelash. Scream out: 'Please, ma'am, help me!'" However, saying that was simply beyond my power. Instead, I replied: "Mind your own business, lady!" Doing a quick about-face, I fled the place in tears, running in no particular direction as though gripped by madness. A little while later I found myself at the marina where my boat was anchored. Within seconds I had her ready to sail. I set out, guiding her skillfully, breaking the waves with her prow, tightening her sails until she sailed faster and faster. The wind whipped at my face and dried my tears. I cried out to myself: "Coward! Coward that you are! You can fight the waves and battle the wind with nary a trace of fear, but you're petrified of a library?! It can't be!" Then all of a sudden, there it was again, that inner voice, this time berating me: "Listen here: If you don't enter that library, you're going to get it from me! Make up your mind! The same way that you steer the ship, that's exactly how you're going to steer yourself to the library."

I directed the ship back toward the beach. "I'm going back!" I decided. Yet, as I walked down the street toward the library, beads of sweat broke out on my face and my stomach churned in fear. I thought about my previous determination that underlay my commitment. Where had it disappeared to? "Help me! Hold onto me and help me dispel this fear!" Slowly the fear

abated, and I felt some relief; perhaps I had managed to take control of it. Lost in thought, I suddenly found myself at the building's entrance. Once again, I watched the frequenters come and go, calmly, effortlessly. For me, however, I knew that this was it: this time it's final. Slowly, I walked inside, passing through the front door and turning in the direction of the main reading hall.

My heart swelled with pride. I was amazed by the silence that bathed the hall. Oh, how I wanted to shatter that silence, to scream out: "I made it! I'm here!" But the cry remained buried deep within me. At that moment I fully appreciated the saying of the Chasidic master, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk: "There is no cry louder than silence."

The sight of the myriads of book-laden shelves made me go dizzy and gave me a headache, but this time my firm resolve did not let up. I looked at the books from afar, imagining them to be the hundreds of movies that I had seen in my life. Suddenly, from that place deep within me I heard a reassuring voice: "You're okay, you're okay." My heart broke silently within me. I managed to contain my raging emotions until I stepped outside. I inhaled a deep breath of fresh air and shouted: "I did it! I did it!" Not wasting a moment, that inner voice responded: "Did what? You didn't even open a single book!"

In one cruel instant, all the joy that had enveloped me vanished and I was filled with a sense of profound sadness. Once again, my eyes welled up with tears: "How, but *how* could this be?" I wondered. "If it takes so much effort for me just to set foot into a library, how on earth will I ever open a book? How will I read and understand it?" I sobbed bitterly, overcome by a feeling of complete helplessness. But there it was again, that inner voice, interjecting reprovingly: "Hey! Doubt is the enemy. Fear – get away from here!! You're trying to destroy

this good-natured young man, but I'm not going to let you! Michael, listen: You're strong, and what you accomplished today is invaluable. I will bring you into the world of books. Just don't submit to your fears, don't give them a foothold. Cast them away, rebuke them."

I became filled with joy and hope. I danced and leapt around to exhaustion. I recall lying on a bench, drained, unable to move, yet happy and content. I fell into a sweet slumber, but not for long. I awoke with a start, determined to conquer the library – and this time, for real: I would devour those books, understand them, converse with them, work with them. I let this sensation move about within my entire being until not even a vestige of doubt remained; this feeling was the perfect complement to that voice that resonated from my inner recesses.

Once again I headed for the library. With quick, unhesitating steps I passed through the front door – the very same place that had defeated me just a short time earlier. Once inside the main hall I addressed that inner voice, thanking it for its great help. "Will you stand beside me now, as I take a book off the shelf and open it?" I asked. "And anyway, why weren't you with me before?"

Not evading my question, the inner voice replied: "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread."<sup>1</sup> But I cut it short, retorting: "Listen, you: Whatever you eat comes from me, so what are you chattering about? Did *you* ever work hard? Did *you* ever exert yourself?" I was furious with it, but it held its own: "Listen up, Michael: When a person desires something, he must toil to attain it; he must exert himself for its sake. Only now, after you've convinced me of your willingness to make an effort,

1. Genesis 3:19.

can I come forward to help you, so that you be truly deserving of what you attain." I wanted to get rid of the voice; instead of helping me, it was rattling off philosophical nonsense!

Stretching out my arm, I took a book off the shelf, holding it naturally and taking a seat at one of the tables in the hall. Next to me, two boys were busy summarizing some texts. I was amazed. They appeared to me like two acrobats in the circus, strutting on the high wire, swinging from place to place with absolute self-command. I looked around and wondered why people weren't cheering them on and applauding them. I thought to myself: "Where am I, and where are they? Will I ever reach their level?" Once again, I heard that inner voice: "Yes, Michael. With loads of hard work and an ounce of firm determination, you certainly will." "Welcome back!" I said to it. "I thought you had fallen asleep. You're awake? What can I do for you?" The voice replied: "Listen, Michael: stop underrating me. Open the book and start toying around with it, as if it were a mound of dough. Read one page, and don't let your fear get the best of you. Understand what is written." I broke out into a cold sweat; I knew that the voice was right. Once again, it had beaten me.

I leaned back in the chair with the book I had chosen at random. It was Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. I felt as if I were swallowing page after page with quenchless thirst. For each line that I read and understood I awarded myself a "V" – for Victory. In three-and-a-half hours I had managed to read three chapters; the effort was enormous. Suddenly, my thoughts – which had been delighting in Tolstoy's amazing words – were interrupted by the librarian's voice: "The library is closing. Please return the books to their places." I laid the book on the table, and a librarian put it on the cart. On the way home I felt elated. "I did it! I read three chapters by myself!"

## *The Bitter Becomes Sweet*

Eli was a lovely, pleasant-tempered child from the city of Lod. In fact, he was so beautiful that people would turn their heads to look at him when he walked down the street. Yet, his quasi-angelic beauty masked a bitter reality: Eli could neither read nor write, and he was able only to blurt out fragments of sentences. He went from one school to another, never finding his place. “He has dyslexia,” people would whisper behind his back – words that would stab him like a sword. Eli’s hardworking mother, who had to care for six other children, knew that something had to be done. She felt a special urgency since only five months remained until Eli’s bar mitzvah. How would Eli be able to read from the Torah, as his friends and older brothers had done at their bar mitzvah? Would he be able to present his bar mitzvah speech in synagogue and in the banquet hall?

A chance meeting in the marketplace between Eli’s mother and a woman who had connections with the social welfare authorities proved to be a turning point. “I heard about a young man who works wonders in treating dyslexic children,” she said. “He himself suffered from that problem as a child, but was cured of it completely. Here’s his phone number.” The woman handed Eli’s mother a slip of paper.

When his mother arrived at my house, I could hear the



tremor in her voice. Only five months remained until Eli's bar mitzvah. "I want Eli to read from the Torah, to give a speech, and to welcome the guests, just like my other sons did," she said unequivocally.

When Eli arrived at my office, his face said it all: doubt coupled with disappointment. However, after hearing my personal story his skepticism faded and he felt comfortable with putting his trust in me. Thus it was that I led Eli down the same path along which Dr. Abelman had once led me.

Two weeks later Eli requested that we increase the frequency of our sessions. Once again I witnessed a miracle unfold before my eyes: Eli learned to put together letters, then words, then sentences. His progress was much more rapid than I had expected. Once again I was privileged to lead a child from darkness to light.

Eli's bar mitzvah celebration was dignified, and the mood was one of unrestrained joy. The banquet hall appeared as if illuminated by a great light.

I stood off to the side, enjoying Eli's smooth and flawless reading of his bar mitzvah speech in the presence of hundreds of guests. His parents stood there in disbelief. It was a true triumph of the spirit, of hope, and of faith. I had succeeded in reaching the young man's soul, uprooting from it the seeds of doubt and replacing them with the pedagogic tools that he needed. This gave him self-confidence and faith in himself.

There were periods in my life that I wondered about the burden I had to carry around for so many years. I never dreamed that something so sweet could emerge from something so bitter.

Do you know what Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Alexander Graham Bell, Walt Disney, and Nelson Rockefeller all had in common? You guessed right – they were all

dyslexic. This only proves that parents and children should never despair.

One should never dismiss the fact that dyslexic children often face social estrangement, loneliness, and a variety of other related problems. However, if there is a receptiveness to and awareness of these problems, it becomes possible to cope with them and even to overcome them.

Well over a decade ago I made the decision to start counseling students suffering from severe learning disabilities. Slowly, by word of mouth, people heard of my success. I feel that this is my mission in life.

Author and researcher Ronald D. Davis, who established the Davis Dyslexia Association International, claims in his book, *The Gift of Dyslexia*, that “The mental function that causes dyslexia is a gift in the truest sense of the word: *a natural ability, a talent*. It is something special that enhances the individual.”<sup>1</sup> He lists a number of natural talents found among dyslexic individuals, such as keen awareness of their environment, great curiosity, visual (as opposed to verbal) thinking, enhanced intuition, multi-sensory thought and perception, and a highly developed imagination.

Davis maintains that these eight basic abilities, if not suppressed, invalidated, or destroyed by parents or by the educational system, will give rise to two characteristics: higher-than-average intelligence and extraordinary creative abilities. And from these can emerge the true gift of dyslexia: the gift of mastery.

“The gift of mastery develops in many ways and in many

1. Ronald Davis and Eldon Braun. *The Gift of Dyslexia* (New York; Penguin Putnam, 1997), p. 4.

areas. For Albert Einstein, it was physics; for Walt Disney, it was art; for Greg Louganis, it was athletic prowess.” (p. 5).

I fully agree with him.

Society must transmit the belief to dyslexic children that they are not impaired or abnormal. I am encouraged in my work every single day when a child under my tutelage thanks me for having provided him with the tools and skills that allow him to believe in himself and in his ability to overcome his limitations.

Many times, when a child like this feels helpless and despondent, I sit him in my armchair and tell him my story.

# *Epilogue*

How much suffering would I and my family have been spared if only I had met Drs. Abelman and Getman when I was a young child! Proper timing in the treatment of dyslexia is of the essence. The correct response is to seek the right treatment as soon as the problem is identified, for early and focused treatment can completely alter a person's life.

The importance of appropriate response at the right time is illustrated by this humorous tale:

On the Hungarian side of the border between Romania and Hungary was a small Jewish town, whose destitute inhabitants, typical hard-working Jews, were always on the lookout for ways of augmenting their income.

In the neighboring country, Romania, it was almost impossible to obtain gold or precious gems, and the tax on these items was exorbitant. This created a large market for such luxuries. In Hungary, on the other hand, these items were readily available for purchase at a relatively low price.

The Jews of the Hungarian border town didn't have their own cemetery, forcing them to transport their dead for burial in a town across the Romanian border.

A few sharp-witted Jews decided to take advantage of the situation. They began hiding jewelry and precious

metals in the coffins. At first they would hide these items within the coffins along with the deceased. However, when they saw that their method worked, they asked themselves: “Why wait for a ‘real’ funeral!? Let’s *stage* a funeral and carry over the gold and jewelry by itself.”

And that’s exactly what they did. They would carry the coffin across the border, where their Romanian friends were waiting for them, and everyone was happy!

Thus it happened that a lively “funeral” trade developed. Every day another funeral procession would cross the border, accompanied by a train of Jews. This continued for some time; they even included the border guard in their plans via a hefty bribe, thus making him a partner in their business.

One day, the regular guard was sick and another man took over his job. The daily funeral processions caught his attention. Something was wrong – the people weren’t crying or in tears; he even detected a slight smile in the eyes of some of the “mourners.” His suspicion grew each day, until finally he demanded that they open up the coffin. The Jews, seeing that their number was up, begged the guard not to do it – but to no avail. “It’s my job and responsibility,” he said. All their pleas, tears, and supplications fell on deaf ears. When he opened the coffin, out spilled an array of gold watches, jewelry, and precious metals. Now the Jews were *really* in mourning! Ashamed and embarrassed, they begged the guard: “Please, forgive us. We’re innocent! We have so many children and no source of income. We don’t even have bread to feed them!” However, the guard ignored their cries. “Fools! You should be ashamed of yourselves,” he yelled at them. “If you had only cried during the funeral procession, I wouldn’t have suspected anything. Is now the

PART III

time to cry, after you've been caught!?! You're a little late.  
Had you cried at the right time, you'd now be laughing.  
Too bad you laughed when you should have been crying!"

If, via this book, I have had the merit of guiding a young person down the proper path, of providing a youth with the opportunity to learn and acquire wisdom, and of implanting in a Jewish child the ability to read *Shema Yisrael*, then I have already received my reward.

# *Appendix I*

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## Summary of the Zarchin Method

The Zarchin Method for correcting cognitive disfunctions is based on the following underlying principles:

**1. A revolutionary transformation in learning and behavior can be quickly and easily attained**

The level of a person's learning capability and way of thinking are not static, unalterable facts of life. Rather, they are the result of cognitive functions that can be changed quickly and easily. This is an extremely significant idea, seeing that a person's way of thinking, based on these cognitive functions, is what underlies all his learning, his learning functions, his behavior and his behavior functions. When changes in these functions can be attained, he can be dramatically transformed in all areas of his learning and behavior.

Based on this principle, our approach regards every individual as having the potential to achieve the highest level of mental and behavioral functioning. It is not that we teach patients a new approach; rather, we connect them with and lead them to a discovery of the potential that already exists within them, as an integral part of who they are.

## **2. All learning and behavior functions are connected to the same source – information processing**

Every field of inquiry and every topic that a person is exposed to share, at every moment, the same underlying, basic model of cognitive processes. This model is comprised of five functions: (1) **Inquiry** – which entails identifying the various elements of the topic; (2) **Meaning** – attributing significance to the object of perception; (3) **Combining** – combining the details of information into a comprehensive whole; (4) **Expression and Abstraction** – using previously agreed upon signs and symbols to express and objectify knowledge and information, and (5) **Expansion** – expanding and developing both the information acquired, as well as a person's original and independent thinking.

Concurrent with this model, another fundamental model of cognitive development and flow exists, which is influenced by the totality of a person's senses, particularly the interaction of **Sight** – which includes both seeing and observing, **Hearing** – meaning listening and attentiveness, and **Touch** – which includes touching and movement. The sense of smell and taste are also relevant, but less so.

In other words, the various senses absorb energies from a person's encounter with the world and send messages all to the same place – the brain's center of information processing, where the root of the five functions, listed above, can be found.

## **3. Weak mental processes are strengthened by connecting them to strong ones**

The fact that the brain's center of information processing is so vital and central, and that it is connected to and responsible



for the functioning of the five senses, is precisely what enables us to correct it. It is always possible to find at least one area where information is being processed correctly and to link it to another area where information processing is impaired, thus rectifying the impairment.

For instance, a child who struggles with reading and the ability to distinguish between letters may suffer from impaired mental processing only in this specific context. However, there are countless other areas in which his information processing and power of discernment work perfectly well, such as during play. The moment we create a link between mental discernment in reading and some level of discernment in play, his ability to recognize letters will be corrected.

#### **4. An understanding of sight as a type of thinking and thinking as a type of sight, and of the essential role of sight in cognitive functions**

According to our approach, seeing is thinking and thinking is seeing. Correct mental processing is, in essence, the correct processing of that which a person sees with his eyes, hears with his ears, feels through his fingers, and smells and tastes. It entails correctly *interpreting* what we see with our eyes and properly *seeing* and distinguishing between all the data. The stronger a person's "vision"; that is, the better he perceives data through his thought processes, the higher his intellectual level and ability to learn.

The good news inherent in our approach is that the senses of sight and thought – seeing with the “eye of the intellect” – are not static, but can be developed and refined. Experience shows that not only can defects in mental functions be corrected, average capabilities can themselves be raised to the level of genius. This means that by employing these various

tools, a person of normal capabilities and an acceptable level of written expression can attain a high level of accomplishment.

### **5. The importance of touch and movement, and their integration with the other senses**

The sense of touch and movement play an important role in correcting deficient mental functions. Although on the surface the sense of touch seems quite removed from thought, it plays a vital role in creating a link between cognitive functions and the development of the mind.

In our exercises and work with children, we integrate touch and movement in various ways, thus forming a basis for the child's mental development and the actualization of his or her inner strengths.

Beyond touch and movement, we combine other senses, such as seeing and hearing, and if necessary, smell and taste. Integrating these senses helps strengthen the weaker areas of the mind.

### **6. The importance and influence of personal chemistry**

According to our approach, the emotional bond forged between therapist and patient, and the trust we instill in the child, play a critical role in fostering change. In order to reveal the child's inner strengths and help him actualize his true potential, we must bring him into a relationship with someone who will send him the right messages and spark his self-confidence.

In order to achieve the revolutionary changes that we believe are possible, there must be personal chemistry between the child and the adult who works with him. This occurs through emotional and verbal messages. This chemistry, when combined with tools that utilize the senses and movement, helps us resolve even the most difficult problems.

### **Our accomplishments**

Through the above approach, and based on my own experience, we have been able to solve extremely difficult problems in reading, writing and arithmetic – including those that other experts had abandoned hope of solving. We have been able to improve the reading comprehension and written expression of students who no one believed could succeed, and we have successfully effected radical behavioral changes in the most difficult and complex cases.

A small portion of our successes are documented in the stories and letters of thanks below.



## *Appendix II*

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### Two Case Studies

#### **YANIV: *From Learning Disability to Learning Facility***

Like so many other children on their first day of school, Yaniv was excited and filled with high expectations. His parents, Dan and Einat, shared his exhilaration. Yaniv was a charming and intelligent little boy, and there was no question that he would succeed in his studies and social life.

However, several months into the school year, Dan and Einat received a disturbing report from Yaniv's teacher. Unlike the other children, Yaniv was not learning how to read, and Dan and Einat were at a loss as to how to respond. They could not understand how such an intelligent and talented child as Yaniv could have trouble acquiring this basic skill.

The school began providing Yaniv with remedial instruction several hours a week, and Dan and Einat began to invest thousands of shekels in private, after-school tutors, in the hope that Yaniv would soon make progress. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

In the meanwhile, as a result of his learning disability, Yaniv started to develop a poor self-image, and his frustration and disappointment began to negatively affect his behavior at

home and in school. His willingness to work with his private tutors also decreased, leaving Dan and Einat feeling helpless and adrift. They felt that they were not getting clear answers from anyone, and that no real solution was being offered.

### **A Breakthrough in Learning Difficulties Remediation**

One day, a family acquaintance told Yaniv's parents about the Zarchin Method, and they decided to try it. "I didn't know Michael or the Zarchin Method," Einat related, "yet from the very beginning of the diagnostic interview I had a good feeling about it. I felt a ray of hope! Michael displayed amazing sensitivity to Yaniv, and gave himself over heart and soul during the meeting." As the meeting progressed, Einat could no longer contain her emotions and began to cry.

Yaniv and Michael began meeting on a weekly basis. As Einat related: "My appreciation of Michael grew with every session. Yaniv connected to him and trusted him, and the results were immediate. He finally began making progress in reading, and his self-image at home and in school began to improve."

### **A Complete Solution to Learning Disabilities**

From the very onset of their work together, Michael had full confidence that Yaniv would soon learn how to read. As one who himself could not read until the age of sixteen, Michael had no doubt that the path he himself had followed from illiteracy to normal reading could also help to free Yaniv from his difficulties – just as it can help any child or adult with learning disabilities. Michael relates: "Yaniv reminded me a lot of myself; a clever and intelligent boy who couldn't learn how to read. Luckily, he came to me in first grade, which spared him a lot of suffering."

Michael himself had been treated by Dr. Stanley Abelman of Philadelphia, who specialized in developmental optome-

try. In the years following Michael's successful treatment, Dr. Abelman taught Michael the main principles of his approach and supported the establishment of the Zarchin Institute for the Treatment of Learning Disabilities. Michael explains: "As opposed to the conventional approach, we regard learning disability as a phenomenon that can be solved thoroughly and fundamentally. Yaniv's story, like hundreds of other success stories we have, is incontestable proof of this. The concept underlying our approach lies in understanding the root cause of learning disability, and knowing the proper way to intervene and resolve each difficulty."

According to the Zarchin Method, the cause of learning disability lies in the brain's inability to correctly process what it sees. When Yaniv looked at letters and words his mind could not interpret them correctly, thus impeding his ability to read and understand them. Even repeated exercises aimed at acquainting him with the letters were of no help, because the lack of connection in his thinking and mental processing prevented him from linking what he saw with what he was being taught. In other words, Yaniv had all the information he needed in order to read; what he lacked was the ability to access and actualize that information when faced with real letters and words.

### **Correctly Interpreting Vision**

"In order to correct this cognitive disconnection," explains Michael, "and to achieve the correct mental processing of vision, we engage the patient in full and ongoing participation in his therapy, harnessing his own desire to actualize his innate potential. To this end, therapy is conducted in a free and open atmosphere and is child-centered, with the therapist focusing all his attention on the child's current state: "where he's at" at this particular moment. The child gets the message that the therapist is not trying to teach him anything that he doesn't

already know, but rather is merely serving as an intermediary, connecting what he knows with his innate capability of expression and bringing it out into the open.

“The therapeutic tools applied here derive from an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between various learning skills: hearing, seeing, touch, and mental vision, which is the process by which the mind processes information obtained through the senses. For instance, the treatment for reading difficulties requires the child to perform exercises in which he needs to distinguish between or combine various letters. This entails the actual touching of letters and discerning the differences between them.”

Michael concludes: “We strive to engage all the patient’s senses during treatment, since they are all associated with thought processes. Our focus is to teach the patient to correctly interpret what he sees. By engaging and stimulating the child’s inner drive, he discovers a new ability to process information in the area he previously struggled with. In this way, we solve the problem at its root.”

### **A New Opportunity for Success**

Returning to Yaniv’s story, his father related: “The treatment ended after only a few months, with phenomenal success. Yaniv learned to read at an age-appropriate level and finally felt on par with his classmates. His behavior at home and at school became calm and relaxed. I will never forget what Yaniv told me a short while after completing the treatments. He looked me in the eye and said with great emotion, ‘Daddy, I feel like I’ve been given a second chance!’”





### **CHASI: *Revealing Innate Capabilities***

In 2016 I received a call from a woman named Yael, who related the following story. Her daughter Chasi had been struggling with writing for years. She had managed to deal with the problem somewhat in elementary school, but upon entering high school she could no longer overcome her difficulties. Chasi also suffered from anxiety and other health-related issues, but her mother had turned to me in theory to help her with her writing.

At our first meeting, Chasi's mother related the various approaches they had already tried, in order to solve her daughter's problem. One interesting detail concerned a comment made by one of Israel's most famous diagnosticians of writing impairment. After meeting and examining her daughter, she pronounced unequivocally to Yael: "Your daughter will never learn how to write! Don't waste your time even trying!"

In an interview conducted with Yael by the Zarchin Institute, she related her initial confusion at the prevailing atmosphere during Michael's first meeting with Chasi. From previous meetings with therapists, she had come to expect an air of formality, professionalism and pragmatism. By contrast, Michael and Chasi spoke in a relaxed manner, as though they were holding a casual conversation or sharing a meal; not like they were involved in a professional encounter.

"Throughout all their meetings, Michael constantly encouraged Chasi," Yael continued. "He highlighted each strong point and positive comment she mentioned about herself, whether in relation to her writing or in some other context. He spoke about it and used it to demonstrate her capabilities – that she *could* succeed and that she *did* have inner strengths. He presented her with indisputable facts and data, not empty

compliments and exaggerations. If she mentioned the positive influence she had on her friends, he spoke about her ability to influence people. If she wrote a small number of lines, he spoke of how they demonstrated her ability to write. He did not speak endlessly, though, but also asked her to comment on his words, so that she would explain her abilities by herself, talking about them and acknowledging their existence.

“Michael kept speaking about writing difficulty as though it was a simple problem that would eventually resolve itself. He never made a big deal out of it or of all the failures that had accompanied it over the years. He never discussed the past or dealt with failure; rather, he constantly displayed to Chasi the solution and her ability to attain it. Through the techniques he used, he helped Chasi slowly actualize her potential. He showed her that her problem was not as serious as she thought, and that the solution was within her grasp. His statements about her capabilities were made simply and honestly, not dramatically with the ring of an empty promise. Instead, it was as though he was pointing out a simple, undeniable truth.

“Chasi’s meetings with Michael were unlike any treatment we had encountered before. They didn’t necessarily follow any pattern or pre-planned program, but rather conveyed an ongoing sense of flow and intensity. They were creative, surprising and constantly original – both in content and in structure.”

Chasi’s story has an especially happy ending. Not only did she learn to write well, within several months her self-image also dramatically improved. She overcame her anxieties and proved herself to be a happy and positive young woman who recognized and had confidence in her own abilities.

## Appendix III

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### Is Dyslexia in the Torah?

When I first started studying Chasidic philosophy, I became acquainted with one of its most fascinating and fundamental principles: that whatever exists or happens in our world is in some way alluded to in the Torah. In fact, not only is everything in the world *found* in the Torah, the Torah itself is the very source of creation, so that whatever is found in the Torah exists in the world, as well.

Thus, amid my ongoing involvement with dyslexia, I asked myself the following question: As an observant Jew, can I find this disability – or, more precisely, can I also find *myself* – in the Torah?

I do not claim to have come up with an all-encompassing and unequivocal answer to these questions. However, I believe I am on the right track in my approach, and that the more it is developed and expanded upon, the more applicable it will be to this entire field of research.

Before I delve deeper into this matter, allow me to provide a brief overview on the centrality of letters and words in Chasidic doctrine.

In chasidic teachings, the concept of letters is a vast subject unto itself. For instance, in Chabad's encyclopedia of

Chasidism the entry “letters” (*otiyot*) spans more than three volumes!

The Book of Genesis (*Bereishit*) teaches us that God did not create the universe with physical effort, but rather through speech – that is to say, with letters – as the verse states: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). Indeed, every object in creation has its own unique “code” that is concealed within its Hebrew name. Thus, words and letters are not merely means of communication, symbols that we use to express and indicate things around us; they are the very foundation of existence. In other words, this creative aspect of letters existed prior to, and is even superior to, the communicative and semantic aspects of language. In the language of the Kabbalah (the Jewish mystical tradition): “Words and letters of the Divine speech in the creation bring about the very life-force and existence of each thing. Were the letters to depart from the creation, the entire firmament would revert to absolute nothingness, just as it was prior to its creation.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, just as letters are at the heart of creation from God’s perspective, so too do they occupy a place of prominence in the life of a Jew. The Baal HaTanya points out, in his Chasidic discourse “To Understand the Matter of the Letters,” that both the commandment to pray, which is a significant foundation of Judaism and which serves as the avenue via which we connect with God, as well as the commandment to study the

1. This quotation and the ones on the following pages are taken from the writings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1813), also known as the Alter Rebbe – “the Old Rabbi” – a third-generation Chasidic master, founder and first leader of the Chabad dynasty, and author of *Sefer HaTanya* (thus his appellation, the Baal HaTanya – “Author of the Tanya”) and of many other works. See *Ma’amarei Admor HaZakein*, 5567, pp. 40–41; *Sefer HaTanya, Shaar Hayichud Vehaemunah*, chap. 1; *Iggeret Hakodesh*, p. 129; *Torah Ohr, Miketz*, p. 43.

Torah, which is central to Jewish life, revolve around words and letters.

Why is this so?

At first glance, the fact that both prayer and Torah study comprise letters and words is no proof of the uniqueness of the letters. After all, they are only a means – a vessel, as it were – to convey the idea that lies behind them.

However, the Baal HaTanya rejects this approach, for just as letters are spiritual forces used to create the universe, so too do the letters of speech reflect a power that far transcends the message they convey. “The root of the letters far transcends the intellect,” he states. “It is even loftier than the concepts encloded in the letters.” In other words, we tend to think of words themselves as being secondary to their meaning; the Baal HaTanya claims that the actual words and letters *are themselves* superior. He continues by examining a human being’s power of speech and expression. Here too, he claims, the formation of letters into words and the ability to express them do not originate in the mere intellect of the speaker. He dismisses this position by saying: “The statement that the conjoining of the letters of speech is sourced in, and comes into being via, the intellect refers only to the *act* of combining, as evinced in the ability of a toddler to speak and articulate letters with the five organs of the mouth<sup>2</sup> in various combinations. However, the *essence* of the letters – that is, prior to their union and revelation in speech, such as the shape of the letter *alef* – is sourced in and comes into being from a place much higher than the intellect, the difference being that it is the mind that enables the letters to be emitted from the throat.”

2. The five organs of the mouth involved in speech production are: the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth, and the lips. These produce the five main groups of consonants: the gutturals, the palatals, the linguals, the dentals, and the labials.

In light of this, he formulates the idea that letters actually constitute a supra-rational force. When a person articulates letters or words or reads them in a book, not only does he relate to the idea inherent in the words, he also forges a connection with the letters and words themselves, which transcends the message that they convey.

This is precisely what the Baal HaTanya goes on to explain: “The potency of the letters in and of themselves is far superior to anything found within *Chochmah* itself,<sup>3</sup> and, to an even greater degree, even superior to the light of the intellect en clothed within the letters.” He concludes: “Therefore, the Torah was given specifically in letters; for the light of the Infinite (*Ohr Ein Sof*) exists at the very root of the letters’ formation, which far transcends that aspect of wisdom en clothed within them. Therefore, the essential fulfillment of the commandment [to study the Torah, to pray, etc.] lies in articulating the Torah’s letters, beyond merely understanding [what one reads].” This is exemplified, for instance, in the laws of prayer, which state that a person fulfills his obligation to pray by merely reciting the Hebrew words, even when the reader himself does not understand Hebrew. We see, then, that the words in and of themselves are of value, beyond any meaning they may convey.

The Baal HaTanya even describes prayer as a metaphysical, “abstract” union between the worshipper and the words he is reciting. Quoting the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism, he says that the very essence of prayer is alluded to in God’s command to Noah: “Come into the *teivah*” (Genesis 7:1). *Teivah* can mean both “ark” and “word.” Thus, “Come into the *teivah*” can figuratively mean “Come into the word.”

3. *Chochmah* is a Kabbalistic term referring to both human wisdom (or “inspiration”) as well as to its Divine counterpart in the supernal worlds.

All this has implications as to how we pray. We are inclined to think that when we recite the words “He sustains all life with kindness,”<sup>4</sup> we should be thinking about all those things that sustenance, life, or kindness represent. However, the Baal Shem Tov states that this should not be the main focus, for the worshipper accomplishes something much loftier: through his prayers, he binds himself to the letters of the words “sustains” or “life” or “kindness,” and in doing so draws down actual sustenance, life, and kindness into the world. About this the Baal HaTanya writes: “This is the meaning of ‘Come into the *teivah*,’ because the *teivah*/word is composed of letters, by whose means one uplifts the soul and its full understanding of that word. Therefore, one must bind one’s soul solely to the letters of the word and not to one’s intellectual understanding of it.”

Subsequently, however, the Baal HaTanya states that a person’s essential Divine worship and his main connection with the world of letters *is* through the intellect and each word’s meaning, whereas the metaphysical aspect of the letters is beyond our grasp. Nevertheless, this loftier aspect does exist, and it is what provides the moving force behind the entire concept of “letters.” Thus, he concludes that the root and essence of the letters and of all that derives from them, such as reading, pronunciation, etc., is something supra-rational. “Divine power far transcends the ability of a created being [to grasp]. However, letters also possess a ‘revealed’ and ‘finite’ dimension, through which we attach ourselves [to God].”

This holds true not only of the Holy Tongue (*Lashon Hako-desh*), with which the world was created; the Baal HaTanya applies this to *all* languages: “The twenty-two letters [of the Hebrew alphabet] are expressed in every language, for there

4. From the *Amidah* prayer, the central component of a Jew’s prayer, recited thrice daily.

is no essential difference in pronunciation between the Holy Tongue and other languages, the only difference being in the way the sounds are combined.”

We can summarize the above concepts as follows: The inner root of the letters transcends our ordinary understanding of the letters. Even though the act of reading has an external aspect, such as is conveyed through the didactics of reading, these didactics are themselves derived from the inner aspect of the letters, which transcends both reason and understanding.

Today, researchers of language development have posited diverse approaches to the art of reading instruction, based upon two different perspectives. Some emphasize teaching the *content* behind the letters, maintaining that children should be taught to read at a young age; it is believed that this would also solve the problem of dyslexia. Others emphasize the purely *technical* skills involved in the act of reading and in teaching how to read.

The Baal HaTanya’s above-cited teaching incorporates both approaches. Words and letters contain both aspects: their inner aspect activates their external expression.

From the above discussion we can see that, despite the conclusions of contemporary research, there is indeed – as the verse says – “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).



# *Appendix IV*

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## Letters

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### PRE-PUBLICATION LETTERS

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September 26, 2004

In April 2004 I had the privilege of meeting Mr. Michael Zarchin, upon the recommendation of Professor Reuven Feuerstein. As a diagnostician and therapist of learning disabilities for the last twenty years, I discovered Mr. Zarchin to be a unique phenomenon.

His personal history, one of severe early-childhood delays in speech and motor development, coupled with his teachers' failure to teach him how to read until he was sixteen, were very hard on him. Despite the fact that he impressed all who met him as an intelligent and eloquent young man, he failed to master the most basic reading and writing skills. He seemed fated for a life of illiteracy, low self-esteem, and unskilled labor.

A miraculous turn of events occurred when his devoted and determined mother discovered Dr. Jerry Getman, one of the American pioneers in the field of learning disabilities. After a brilliant diagnosis, Dr. Getman referred Michael for treatment to Dr. Stanley Abelman, who radically altered the young man's fate within a mere six months.

Despite the fact that Dr. Abelman taught Michael how to read English and not Hebrew, his mother tongue, the knots in his cognition were nevertheless untied, and he learned to read and write in English and – upon his return to Israel – in Hebrew, as well. Furthermore, the transformation in his ability to process information paved the way for resolving his difficulties in mathematics as well.

For years, the story of Michael's reading impairment and learning disability remained a family secret. He developed a rich social life that masked his difficulties and became a successful businessman. Only in the last decade did he begin to actualize his personal mission: to help young people with similar conditions. Recently, he undertook a courageous task: to commit his personal story to writing in the book *The Mission Beyond the Words*.

For me, reading this book was a touching, uplifting, and amazing experience. As a therapist of learning disabilities, the book refuted numerous axioms in the field of dyslexia in particular, and of reading disabilities in general. It forced me to delve into books that I had read way back in the seventies, and to reexamine things I had learned in the course of writing my own doctoral dissertation.

First of all, current research strongly affirms the crucial importance of early detection of learning disabilities, and of professional intervention at the earliest possible stage. The claim is that children who do not read before the end of first grade will fall further and further behind their peers, maybe never to catch up. Michael's story challenges such assertions. He suffered from a severe case of dyslexia, yet today is an avid reader and a fine writer who can communicate with others in a truly captivating way.

Secondly, researchers are inclined to think that students

with dyslexia are incapable of learning a second language, and thus they regularly receive exemptions for college language requirements. Michael dispelled this myth, too. He speaks fluent English, albeit with an Israeli accent.

In conclusion, Michael is an example of a unique and strong personality. Children like he was, who experienced so many years of failure, are likely to develop social and emotional problems, among them low self-esteem. Michael, however, has always been popular and well liked.

In his book, Michael shares heart-wrenching anecdotes of the tricks he pulled off to conceal his limitations. Despite his pain over not being like his peers, he had three pillars that bolstered his positive self-image: his mother, his father, and his unswerving faith in God.

When I first met Michael, he had already been working as a dyslexia therapist for seven years and had quickly gained both national and international repute. After reading his book, I felt I had to see his work firsthand. "What is it that he does that I did not learn during my nine years of academic studies and twenty years of practical experience?" I asked myself.

I invited him to work with me in my summer program for children who had completed kindergarten, whose goal was to close gaps for children who had fallen behind in the acquisition of early reading skills, particularly in their phonological awareness and their understanding of the connection between letters and sounds, and who were experiencing difficulties in integrating their skills in order to learn how to read. I wondered how Michael's techniques would complement my own intervention strategies with these pupils. Would he identify additional skills that these students were lacking?

I knew that the person who discerned his problem was Dr. Jerry Getman, one of the early pioneers in the theory of

sensory-motoric and perceptual deficiency. His approach, similar to that of Kephart, Barsh, and Doman-Delacato, was superseded by theories of phonological awareness, which took center stage among researchers in the 1970s and 80s. I was curious to see how Michael would incorporate these basic theories in his work.

In observing Michael's work, I noticed that he acted very much like a "family doctor," observing the entire picture of the child's functioning. He worked with twelve of my pupils, and explained to me the interconnectedness of visual tracking, coordination, and phonological awareness. His amazing and unique abilities enabled him to bond with even the most severe cases of attention deficit, so that within a few sessions he had succeeded in acquiring their trust.

Using the methodology he acquired from Dr. Stanley Abelman, he reached the very root of the problem, not merely treating the symptoms. I believe that certain aspects of Michael Zarchin's approach are in use by developmental optometrists, occupational therapists, and sensory-motor integration and other therapists, although not always in the context of the acquisition of reading and writing skills.

After two weeks of intensive work with Michael, I feel that it's high time for us to reexamine the knowledge we have acquired in the last four decades in regard to learning skills, and to admit that visual, visual-motor, perceptive-motor development, and reading and writing skills are inherently interconnected. The success story of Michael and of his numerous students are sufficient proof of that.

Dr. Orna Ariel-Lenchner  
Teacher, Counselor, Author



January 18, 2004

The term “learning disability” refers to an entire complex of problems, one of them being the reading problem commonly known as dyslexia. Research on and familiarity with dyslexia have progressed markedly since the 1950s, through a growing understanding of the mental processes involved in reading and writing, additional related cognitive processes, and research into the brain function of dyslexic individuals.

Nevertheless, even today, scores of studies down the road, direct treatment of dyslexia remains a somewhat mysterious and nebulous process.

Children or adults suffering from dyslexia have to contend not only with the obvious reading and writing difficulties, but also with emotional and social challenges on a daily basis, which leave their mark on their psyche.

Professional therapists learn a great deal about the inner world of dyslexics from first-hand reports of dyslexic individuals who suffered from this disability their entire lives.

The book *The Mission Beyond the Words* presents the rich and exciting inner world of Michael Zarchin. He introduces himself as having been a youth diagnosed with dyslexia by the leading experts in the United States, after traveling there in search of a solution and treatment for his continuing failure in the Israeli education system. As a result of the treatment, which afterwards continued in Israel, he overcame dyslexia.

Based on his personal experience, on the treatment he received, and undoubtedly on the fact that he is a sensitive, intelligent, and broad-minded individual, Zarchin developed his “No-Method Method,” as he puts it, which is based on three principles: the Inspiration, Understanding, and Knowledge of the therapist in relating to the patient.

In his book, Michael brings the reader to a step-by-step understanding of the experience he himself went through, to identify with him and laugh at the amusing anecdotes related to his disability, to cry at his misfortunes and disappointments, and to share the excitement of the challenges he faced and of the achievements he won.

The book, which offers a holistic and profound view of the comprehensive cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural network, as personified by the figure of Michael, is an informative and highly instructive personal voyage.

Dr. Varda Sharoni

Expert in Learning Disabilities



July 9, 2003

Dear Mr. Zarchin,

Warmest greetings!

The name you chose for your book, *The Mission Beyond the Words*, truly reflects its content. We read a lot about dyslexia in the media, and also know about dyslexic individuals who were ultimately successful in overcoming this problem. In your book, you describe the evolution of a fascinating personality whose motto was to “never say die” and who ultimately vanquished the enemy.

As a layman in the field, I can relate to the personal element in your story. You serve as proof that determination, a healthy brain, and a good mind are incredible assets for one who knows how to use them advantageously. Above all, one can learn from your story how to deal with severe handicaps and illnesses.

LETTERS

I wish you much success, for the success of your book will help many people.

Best wishes,

Shlomo Nakdimon

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LETTERS FROM DR. STANLEY ABELMAN

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Over the year I received many letters from Dr. Stanley Abelman, whom I had the privilege of learning from and working under. Below are two letters I received from him, which I particularly treasure.



Feb. 13, 2001

Dear Michael,

I was delighted to hear the news that you are about to publish a book describing the amazing path you traveled, from the time when one of those “experts” decided that you would never learn to read and write until you became a successful businessman, deeply involved in Israeli life and economy, and devoting quality time to children and youth with difficulties in the world of words and sentences.

Throughout my lectures across America, I never stop bringing you as an example of a young man who has freed himself completely from the bonds of dyslexia, and who has devoted his life to disseminating, with exceptional talent, the therapeutic approach that we used here in Philadelphia, three decades ago. In my extended acquaintance with you and your family, I dis-

covered a world that I had never known – a world full of good deeds for the sake of others. It is a time that I shall never forget.

I would like to mention here some main points of my own life, for a simple reason: to prove that a person requires special talent in order to help those who long to join the world of activity, of letters, words, and sentences. One must be equipped with a basic yet essential tool – besides the obviously required knowledge, experience, and professional training. I do not mean the standard learning in an academic framework; rather, it is a certain gift that the Higher Power bestows upon an individual. Beyond this, something else is needed: willpower. I would like to state unequivocally that you are equipped with all those characteristics that are needed in order to help people who are beset with learning disabilities. You have those powers, and I am therefore sure that you will find the right time to free yourself from your many occupations and take up the burden that so few are willing to bear: to give, a trait you inherited from your glorious ancestors. I was able to trace a bit of the Zarchin-Perutz family history, but there was more to it than that: I discovered a flowing spring of human warmth that has coursed through all the family members. My dear Michael: the desire to give courses through your veins!

When you seek to help your friend, your brother, or a stranger whom you have only just met, you should realize that the help you offer not only benefits the recipient; you help yourself as well. At least, that is what I felt during the time we worked together.

I finished my studies in psychology at New York University and had planned on continuing on to learn social work, but the idea was dismissed. Instead, I studied optometry in



Pennsylvania, because as a World War II veteran, I was directed toward this profession.

To be quite honest with you, I wasn't particularly fond of this field – the tiring chore of routine eye check ups – and felt empty. Today, I would define my condition then as being depressed and miserable.

Completely by chance, I heard that Yale University offered a special study program combining research in child development with research on vision; the program was offered to ten eye doctors. I was accepted to the program and learned there for about a year.

In the course of my studies I met highly gifted, professional optometrists who exposed me to a world I had never before encountered. They had developed innovative methods that I had not been seen during my years of study in Pennsylvania. This world that I discovered was a catalyst in the new area of proficiency that I began to acquire. I was invited to lecture at schools and academic institutions, and I got the clear impression that my audiences were very interested in the topic. At that point I opened a clinic and began treating patients.

One winter morning, I received a visit from Dr. Getman, whose acquaintance I had made while at Yale. He wanted to know if I would be willing to abandon my practice and come to work with him in a newly formed school for children with learning disabilities. I asked for a few days to seriously consider his proposal.

My acquaintance with Dr. Getman at that time was superficial; I had never before discussed with him any sort of joint project. Obviously, I held him in the highest professional esteem. We did share some common areas of academic research in the past, but I never imagined that he would ask me to work together with him.

I was extremely flattered by his proposal. The time I asked for was only to digest the upcoming radical turnabout in my life, and after a few days I informed him that I was happy to accept his offer.

The “Gesell Institute of Child Development” changed my life. I met individuals from diverse fields of specialization who were involved in the field of learning disabilities.

Suddenly, a fascinating world of new methods in my fields of interest opened up to me. I was invited to lecture across the United States.

When your mother, my dear Michael, arrived at the Pathway school in search of a solution to your problem, she requested the best teacher possible to help you. Thus she reached Dr. Getman.

However, at that stage Dr. Getman was unable to help her, due to his many commitments. He had been invited to lecture around the world. Therefore, I was fortunate enough to meet your mother.

I recall telling her that I wasn’t sure if I could find the time, since, in addition to my work at the school I ran a private clinic out of my home, where I received patients each evening. I was so busy that I barely found time for my own children. Sunday was my only free day, and even then I couldn’t disengage myself from the flood of work-related calls that inundated me for most of the day.

I will never forget your mother’s impassioned plea to meet for dinner one evening, together with my wife. I explained to her over the meal that unfortunately, I was unable to find time to talk with you, my dear Michael, since I was overloaded with work, and that there was no chance of my finding time for another year or two. Your mother did not give up. She kept insisting, like a true Jewish mother. She claimed that I could save time by cutting short my meals, my sleep and rest hours,

and even the time I spent in the bathroom . . . and she insisted that I devote this saved time to you!

Rita, my wife, was as taken as I was by her determination, her commitment to the mission she had accepted upon herself, and her courage. We couldn't help admiring her for that.

At the end of the meal, I requested that she give me some time to think about it, and I promised to call her no matter what.

I couldn't sleep that night. I thought about your mother and the indomitable Jewish spirit that she displayed. I discussed the matter with Rita, and together we decided that I had to make time in my schedule, and so I did.

I gave a lot of thought as to how I would cross the language barrier. Sadly, I do not speak Hebrew. I decided that I would use Time Magazine as our textbook, since its articles and photographs reflect on current international events. And since events in Israel were also covered, I was sure that I would thus be able to overcome the language problem.

I never set a plan or prepared for our meetings. I simply did what I felt was appropriate to do. I wanted the sessions to be free and spontaneous.

As an eclectic person I took a little from each school of thought. My goal was for you to be able to sense your progress, until you reached the optimal state.

My intention was also to help you actualize all of your potential. I believed that you, on your own, could come out of your straits. Now, in retrospect, decades later, I can affirm that I was correct. Your natural abilities, your powerful drive to succeed, leave no doubt that you can serve as a model to all those who doubt a human being's ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable disabilities.

In the course of our work I looked upon myself as a type of orchestra conductor, and upon you as the lead violinist. Each of us did his job, and together we made harmony. There was no

individual or superior who decided and directed; rather, we strode the way together, to the desired goal – and we made it!

I would like to add one more thing, no less important: Rita and I feel very privileged to have known you, the Zarchin family, and are grateful for it.

I would like to add a few words to Yosef, our friend: Even though our encounters were brief, they were very rich. We have encountered very few individuals whose personalities impressed us as much as yours did. The meetings were exciting, engaging, and filled with life-wisdom.

I was truly fortunate in having ultimately decided to work with you, Michael. And you were fortunate when Heaven appointed you to be part of such a special and warm family.

Whenever my family wants to remember something good that happened to us all, we immediately mention your names, and a feeling of deep satisfaction, great delight, and joy comes over us.

May you be blessed!

Dr. Stanley Abelman



Sept. 24, 2001

Dear Michael,

I completely believe that when two people meet, it is never by chance. It is certainly directed and intended from Above. From the moment we met, I believed that we would share a part of our journeys, and that is indeed what happened...

You continued in my path, and have had the privilege of helping countless individuals in a place so distant, across the ocean. There is no question that we are blessed, and that our meeting served as a springboard to ultimately help thousands

## LETTERS

of children, youth, and adults separated by a blank wall from the world of books and creativity.

Thank you, my dear Michael, for the privilege of being at your side all those years. May we continue to work together, for the good of the many people who so need advice and guidance.

On this occasion, let me take the opportunity to wish you and your family a good and fruitful New Year.

In true friendship,  
Yours always,

Stanley

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## LETTERS FROM PATIENTS

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May 13, 2001

To my dear friend, Michael Zarchin,

I received the draft of your book, and deeply identified with young Michael's experience in many stages of his life.

I, too, was a teenager with learning disabilities. I was handsome and could sing well, and through my impersonations and songs managed to get around all the limitations I experienced at the time – if only apparently.

However, left alone at the end of all the jesting I performed for my friends, I experienced a deep crisis with no perceivable end.

I knew that I had a difficult time finding directions, discerning between right and left; outwardly, however I denied my difficulties.

In the meantime, I took driving lessons and got my license for an automatic transmission. I considered this a failure, however, since I had to give up on getting a license for a standard vehicle.<sup>1</sup>

I developed my talents as a singer and impersonator and became a popular performer in the Orthodox Jewish community. During one of my shows, I told the audience, half jokingly, about my disability. I told them how my impresario arranges for me three shows a day, so that I show up to at least one of them!

I once performed for an prominent political figure. However, I showed up a half hour late. “Why are you so late?” he asked me. I told him that it was because of my dyslexia (in those days, it was a general term for learning disabilities). He scolded me, saying: “I don’t care where you came from, just get here on time!”

At the end of that evening’s performance, a young man with a beard and glasses, looking somewhat like a stranger, approached me. He asked me if I really had dyslexia. That was you, Michael. I said yes, but more in the sense of losing direction, and the inability to distinguish between right and left, between east, west, north, and south.

You, Michael, said to me: “I can help you rid yourself of this problem completely.”

“How much will it cost me?” I asked. You answered that you were on a mission from the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

After that, we met four times. Each time, we worked on spatial orientation. I arrived late for the first meeting because I had gotten lost and couldn’t find the way, but by the last time,

1. In Israel, separate driver’s licenses are issued for automatic and standard transmission vehicles.

LETTERS

I arrived by myself, extremely proud of my success. From then on I have almost never lost my way.

I travel a lot, and I will always remember that you, Michael, were the first to explain to me how to remember how to get somewhere, how to remember where I parked my car, how to clarify my doubts.

You have made my life so much easier!

With gratitude,

Ushi Gross

Stand-up comedian and singer



23 Kislev 5761 (December 20th 2000)

Dear Mr. Zarchin,

I want to thank you from the depths of my heart for the time, determination, and efforts that you invested in me.

When I first came to you, I didn't believe it was possible to improve my reading. And if such a possibility did exist, I was sure it would entail great difficulties.

You taught me a way that was completely new to me. Through it I learned to read better, as well as see better all the details of the written material. The eye exercises we did also gave me a feeling of greater clarity of vision.

I bless you to be able to help many others, and to teach them that their limitations are not only not so limiting, but that they are in fact gifts that God has given them in His compassion.

Thank you very much.

Omri

## *About the Author*

MICHAEL ZARCHIN was born in Tel Aviv to a prominent Israeli family shortly after the Israeli War of Independence. At an early age, he was diagnosed with dyslexia and other developmental impairments and spent most of his childhood hiding his inability to read from his peers. Yet despite negative prognosis from leading Israeli experts, his fierce determination to overcome his disabilities eventually bore fruit. Under the guidance of Dr. Gerald Getman of Philadelphia, a pioneer in developmental optometry, and Dr. Getman's student, Dr. Stanley Abelman (and years later, with the help of Dr. Alan Kaye, an American-Israeli learning specialist), Michael was able to free himself from his disabilities. In 2005 he opened the Zarchin Institute, and, based upon his own experience, developed a unique technique that has helped hundreds of individuals successfully overcome their learning disabilities.

Michael lives with his wife in Jerusalem, Israel.

## *The Zarchin Institute*

Founded in 2005 and located in Ramat Gan, Israel, the Zarchin Institute offers practical solutions to a wide range of learning disabilities, treating such problems as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADD and ADHD. For more information about the Institute and to learn about Michael's unique approach to treating learning disabilities, please visit: [www.zarchin.org](http://www.zarchin.org).