

דער רבי וועט געפינען א וועג...

The Gift of Speech

AS TOLD BY RABBI MENDEL BENNISH

Our first-born son, Levi Yitzchak, came into this world on 8 Teves 5772. By the time he was 18-months-old, it was evident that, developmentally, he was not on par with other children his age.

His speech and communication skills were quite underdeveloped. At age 2-and-a-half, Levi only possessed about twenty consistent words at a time; he would often 'lose' new words, and the rest of the time he jabbered in his own undecipherable language. A child at that age is meant to retain at least 50-100 words in his or her vocabulary, and to string words together to form simple sentences.

In addition to this, Levi also had a difficult time processing simple questions, and providing the correct answer was too hard for him. Even when asked his name or what he did on a particular day, he would ignore the speaker, or at best, repeat back some words of the question in a manner known as "echolalia."

I'm not the type to worry so I wasn't overly concerned, but as time passed my wife grew increasingly apprehensive. We consulted with doctors and specialists, and we began various therapies; but his speech still did not make any big improvements.

On Gimmel Tammuz 5774 I went to the Ohel and I took Levi, then two-and-a-half, together with me. Leaving at four in the afternoon, we chose to take the bus that was shuttling between Crown Heights and the Ohel throughout the day. After waiting a long while for it to arrive, the bus was stuffy and uncomfortable. By the time we arrived at the Ohel it was already late in the day and Levi was very restless.

Due to the lateness of the hour, and being that I wanted to enter the Ohel before the day ended, we immediately joined the line upon arrival. I didn't have a chance to write a *pan* nor did I manage to properly explain to Levi what we were about to do. As the line inched forward

and I prepared myself to enter the Ohel, Levi played quietly in the heat on the ground next to me, occasionally watching the screens that played videos of the Rebbe.

After waiting in line for two hours, I entered the Ohel with Levi in my arms where we spent a few precious moments before being ushered out to make room for the crowds still waiting outside. I proceeded to head back to Crown Heights with a very tired Levi.

That evening we met family for dinner and my wife asked Levi, "Levi, where did you go today?" No one was expecting any form of an answer, but it was routine to ask Levi stimulating questions, even if they didn't elicit any reaction from him.

We were floored when Levi calmly replied, "To the Rebbe," after which my wife, still shocked, asked, "And what did you do there?" Levi replied, "Daven." Not only had Levi processed the situation on his own and used words he hadn't used before, but even more astonishingly,

at 2-and-a-half-years-old he finally understood a question and answered correctly for the first time!

Over the next few weeks, Levi's speech improved drastically, until his communication skills and cognitive abilities were about where a child his age should be.

As mentioned before, I had not written to the Rebbe that day at all but just being in the Rebbe's presence had brought Levi this tremendous *brocha*.

His therapists were astounded and there was no logical explanation for this sudden, dramatic change that seemed to have occurred practically overnight. **T**

A REPORT FROM A THERAPIST DESCRIBING THE DELAYS IN LEVI YITZCHAK'S SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

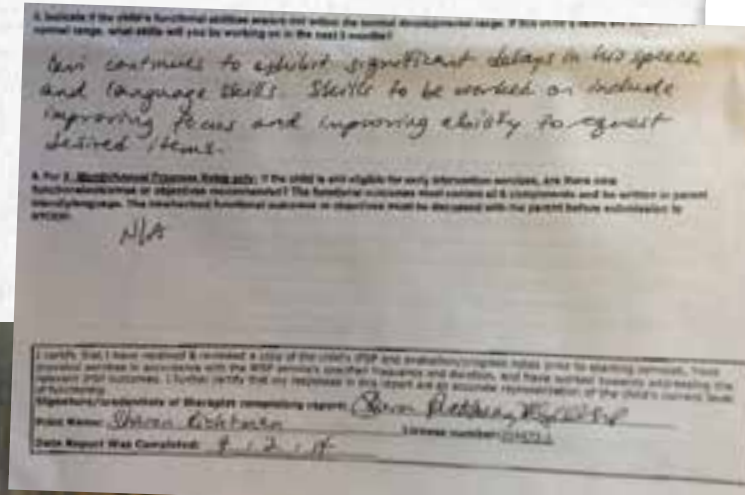


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