

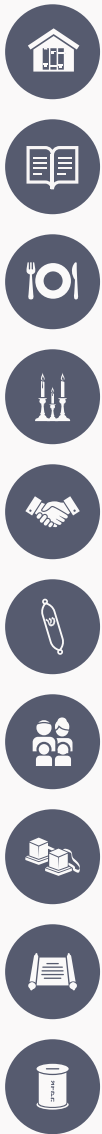
BY: RABBI MENDEL JACOBS

נדפס ע"י ולזכות
הרה"ת ר' שרגא פייוול
וזוגתו מרת דבורה לאה
ומשפחתם שיחיו
מאן

MIVTZA BAYIS MALEI SEFORIM

TAKING ACTION

WHEN
MORALE
IS LOW



“We don’t want your singers! We don’t want your entertainers!”

It was shortly after the Yom Kippur War. Despite being caught off guard and suffering devastating losses in the beginning, the Jewish people had overcome their enemies. However, the cost of victory was steep. Morale among the Israeli soldiers was at an all-time low.

In an attempt to boost the soldiers’ spirits, many of the country’s entertainers toured the bases and did their best to help the situation. But it was clear that the soldiers needed more.

At the Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen that year, the Rebbe addressed the issue:

In the “olden days,” the Rebbe said, it was accepted knowledge that the stronger an army is physically, the better chance they have at winning a war. With time, however, that perception has completely changed.

As the centuries progressed, it became clear that having a larger army in terms of numbers doesn’t guarantee victory. In fact, even having more ammunition or larger ammunition won’t necessarily help either.

Quantity became less relevant in the face of good quality. The more technologically advanced your weaponry became, the better the chances of success.

If this is true of the material ammunition used in battle, the Rebbe pointed out, all the more so is this true of the soldiers themselves. Having a greater number of soldiers, or even soldiers who are physically stronger than their opponents, is much less important than how the soldiers themselves are. Army morale is a decisive factor when it comes to winning a war.

The Rebbe went on to report that the Israeli soldiers were indeed demanding of their superiors a boost in

“YAVNEH V’CHACHAMEHA”

At the start of the year 5735, the Rebbe called for older *talmidim* to travel to other *yeshivos*, quoting the Mishnah “*Hevei goleh l’mekom Torah*” (“Exile yourself to a place of Torah”). The Rebbe also called for the founding of new *yeshivos* and places of Torah study—ensuring that every Jewish community should have a designated place for Torah study.

In doing so, the Rebbe said, we will fulfill the words of the Gemara in Gittin, “*Ten li Yavneh v’chachameha*” (“Spare Yavneh and its sages for me”). The Gemara tells the story of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai’s visit to the Roman governor, and his request to spare the city of Yavneh and its sages from destruction.

The Rebbe pointed out that Rabban Yochanan’s request implies that having *yeshivos* and houses of Torah study is almost paramount to having the *Beis Hamikdash* standing.

“Recently,” the Rebbe explained, “talks have been held of conceding the Jewish people’s hold on the newly conquered territories of Eretz Yisroel (the “*shtachim*”). In order to counteract this, we should establish places of Torah study like ‘*Yavneh v’chachameha*.”

Eventually, the Rebbe merged this *mivtza* of “*Yavneh v’chachameha*” with *mivtza bayis malei sefarim*. When asked in a letter why these two were being connected, the Rebbe explained that they are both elements of *mivtza Torah*.⁵



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FARBRENGEN, YUD-TES KISLEV 5733.

morale, but not the conventional type. They specifically said they don't need singers and entertainers.

They wanted something much more substantive; an injection of inspiration that would appeal to their hearts and minds, and leave a lasting impact.

"And that's when the real arguments began..." the Rebbe said with a smile.

Jews famously can't agree on much.

"When I was in *cheder*," the Rebbe said, "they used to say that if one Jew greets another with '*Shalom aleichem*,' the other responds, 'Well, you say *shalom aleichem*, I say the opposite: *Aleichem shalom!*'"

There were many ideas and opinions on what would bring about a true boost in morale.

The best idea, said the Rebbe, is the one that has been scientifically proven to work over millennia.

The Jewish people have been through many phases

and stages throughout the generations. They have tried all types of philosophies and ways of life. Ultimately, the only one that lasted, the only one that succeeded in keeping the identity of the Jewish people alive, is Torah and *mitzvos*. With more than three thousand years of unbroken success, we can confidently assert that Torah and *mitzvos* is the only path that keeps us together and flourishing on, from one generation to the next.

This is the "secret weapon" of the Jewish people, and it's time we allow the soldiers to enjoy it as well.

In practical terms, the Rebbe suggested:

Every army base should be given sets of tefillin, *siddurim*, Tehillims and tzedakah *pushkas*, corresponding to the three pillars on which the world stands, Torah (Tehillim) *tefilla* (*siddurim*) and *gemilus chassadim* (*pushkas*)—all equally applicable to men and women. Having them around would give the soldiers access

to these materials, as well as serve as a physical reminder to fulfill these *mitzvos*.

Providing for their spiritual needs, the Rebbe said, will give the soldiers true meaning in their lives and energy in fulfilling their mission, and then “fear and terror” will fall on all our enemies. Quantity in numbers has no import; “Others go with valor, still others with strength,” but “we rally with the name of Hashem.”¹

Later at the farbrengen, the Rebbe expanded the initiative. Every Jew is part of the army of Hashem, the Rebbe explained, so each one of them must also be given this secret weapon.

Every Jewish home should have at least some basic holy *seforim*, as well as a tzedakah pushka, serving as a reminder to daven, learn Torah, and give tzedakah every day.²

With that, “Mivtza Seforim,” or as the Rebbe later called it, “Mivtza Bayis Malei Seforim,” was born.

The Prelude

As was the case with many of the Rebbe’s *mivtzoim*, the Rebbe laid the groundwork for the *mivtza* and explained its importance sometime before its official launch.

One year earlier, at the Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen of 5733, the Rebbe spoke about founding Torah libraries in every Jewish community, adding that he would personally participate in a portion of the expenses.

Then the Rebbe said:

Though every community will have a library, it’s also vital that every Jewish home should have *seforim* of its own.

The ones privileged with ensuring that this happens are the Jewish women, the mainstays of their homes. Women generally determine what the interior of their home should look like; what type of furniture to have, how to arrange it, and so on. They should also make sure that the home has *seforim*, enabling the inhabitants of the home to learn Torah at all times.

Furthermore, having *seforim* on display will turn the house into a “beautiful home.” Anyone who walks in will immediately take note and see that this is a Jewish home, filled with an atmosphere of Torah and *mitzvos*.

As to the community libraries, the Rebbe assured everyone not to worry. “Until Moshiach comes,” the



JEWISH HOLY BOOKS

An interesting edit from the Rebbe on a brochure about the *mivtzoim*, prepared by Tzach in New York:

In the place of “**Torah** books,” the Rebbe inserted “**Jewish holy** books.”

In the parentheses, several suggestions were offered (a Chumash, Siddur, Tehillim, etc.), and the Rebbe added the words “**at least**” (indicating that ideally there should be many more).

Rebbe explained, “it seems highly unlikely that every Jewish home will have every existing *sefer* of Torah *Shebiksav* and *Torah Shebaal Peh*. There’s plenty of room to build and operate libraries in each community, in addition to ensuring that each home has *seforim* too.”³

Full to the Brim

About the name “*Bayis Malei Seforim*,” the Rebbe explained at a later date that the mere fact that the home is “filled” with *seforim*, even if no one is yet learning from them, is in itself a great accomplishment.

In reality, having a house that is truly “*malei seforim*” seems impossible. Is there nothing else in the house besides *seforim*? What about a bed, table, chair, and lamp that are basic to every home? What about other furniture?



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This can be understood from a ruling in Hilchos Shabbos:

If a person carries an item smaller than the prescribed amount, he is not liable for violating Shabbos. If the small item was carried in a utensil, even if the utensil is much bigger than the prescribed amount, he is still not liable, since the only reason the utensil is there is to serve the object inside it.

Similarly, when the main item in the house is the *seforim*, the whole house becomes a “house full of *seforim*,” a home imbued with Torah knowledge and values, just the way a Jewish home should be.⁴

Seforim and Moshiach

When every Jewish home is filled with *seforim*, it will generate a tremendous amount of Torah learning on an individual level, making each individual home filled with holiness and knowledge of Hashem.

With that, the phenomenon will spread to the entire

world. *Geulah* on a personal level brings about *geulah* on a communal level as well. Individual homes being filled with the knowledge of Hashem will cause the entire world to be filled with the knowledge of Hashem—*kamayim layam mechasim*—like water covers the seabed.⁶

Redemption of Seforim and the World

Speaking about the *seforim* of our Rabbeim that are still held captive in Russia, the Rebbe said that every Jew can contribute to the effort of redeeming these *seforim* by purchasing more *seforim* for his own home and broadening his *bayis malei seforim*.

This, in turn, will lead not only to the redemption of the *seforim* from captivity, but also the redemption of all the sparks of holiness all over the world, with the coming of Moshiach now!⁷



14 TISHREI 5737.

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THE UNENDING POWER OF SEFORIM



Interview with
Rabbi Mendel Shemtov
(Uruguay)

By: Rabbi Bentzion Pearson

Manifesting the Inspiration

The idea of *seforim* always spoke to me. Whenever I would visit my grandparents as a young boy, I always got a *sefer* as a gift. This had a lasting impression on me. My grandfather, Rabbi Avraham Shemtov, has a special connection with *seforim* as well. Readers of Derher will know that he was sent by the Rebbe to rescue the Frierdiker Rebbe's *seforim* that were lost in Poland,⁸ and later, to defend the ownership of the Chabad library in the Hei Teves story.

Growing up on *shlichus* in Uruguay, I ran my own lending library, making the many books in our house available to other kids at school. Little did I know this would eventually become an integral part of our *shlichus*.

After getting married and moving back to Uruguay in 5771, my wife and I started

working with different segments of the community. We immediately saw the powerful impact that books could have.

I began to gift *seforim* to people, whether for their birthdays or on other special occasions. After each crowdfunding campaign, I would send the larger donors a *sefer* along with the thank-you letter. If I went to someone's house to put up a mezuzah or for any other reason, I always tried to use the opportunity to give them a *sefer* for their home.

Several years ago, there was a family from another country who visited Uruguay over the summer. While I was helping them *kasher* the kitchen in the house they were staying at, I noticed some beautiful *seforim*. They shared something really interesting: the shliach in their home country had a custom that every year on Yom Kippur, right after *Ne'ila*, he gives each attendee a new Jewish book for the year ahead.



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I thought to myself: wow! That's a great idea. The inspiration from Yom Kippur is still fresh; it's a perfect time to give them the opportunity to keep it going even further.

Right on the spot, this individual offered to sponsor books for me to do the same at the next Yom Kippur davening. Since then, I've continued this practice and seen remarkable results.

Another benefit of giving someone a book is that the book itself travels to places you might not be able to reach. The book will go places for you.

Several years ago, I gave someone a copy of *Toward A Meaningful Life* by Rabbi Simon Jacobson. Sometime later, he was traveling and he met with the president of a different country, and he gave him the book. You never know what sort of impact a small gift can have.

Likkutei Sichos In Every Home

Let me tell you about a very nice campaign we had in our community connected with Likkutei Sichos:

If I recall correctly, it was around the time of Yud Shevat—Shnas Hashivim, celebrating the 70th year of the Rebbe's *nesius*. I happened to be meeting with a shliach in Argentina, Rabbi Nassan Grunblatt, and he showed me a project he was working on: translating the first two volumes of Likkutei Sichos into Spanish, divided into five volumes.

I was so excited. This was an opportunity to give people authentic Torah from the Rebbe himself, not merely an adaptation. By giving people these *seforim*, I could genuinely bring “the Rebbe” into their homes!

At that moment, I decided to challenge myself with a commitment in honor of Yud Shevat—to bring Likkutei Sichos into 70 Jewish homes.

I started giving them out, one volume at

a time, based on the time of year (Bereishis during the Bereishis season, Shemos during Shemos, and so on).

Eventually, I created an Excel spreadsheet, and I realized that we brought the Rebbe's Torah into 101 Jewish homes!

Imagine! You walk into their home, and it is immediately identified as a Jewish home with beautiful *seforim* adorning the living room.

A Minefield of Holiness

I recall reading that the Rebbe compared *seforim* to—*l'havdil*—a minefield. The bombs could remain dormant in the field for years, and suddenly, when someone steps on them, they're immediately set off.

Similarly in the positive sense, when you have a *Yiddishe sefer* in the home, it might sit dormant for a while, but eventually, when someone stumbles upon it at the right



THE FIRST VOLUME OF LIKKUTEI SICHOS IN SPANISH.

moment, it has its desired effect.

I'm reminded of a campaign we did a few years ago with our CTeen kids. At the end of the year, we sent a gift package to each of their homes with a pair of tzitzis (or a pair of socks for the girls) and a book, *Seeds of Wisdom*, with stories of the Rebbe and lessons to be learned from them.

Fast forward several years.

A few weeks ago, I got a message from a girl. She had gotten the book from us back then, and now she sent me a photo of one of the stories with a question she had on it. This past week, she sent me another question, and it led to a more extended discussion about the ideas in the book.

I was shocked. It's a book she received three or four years ago. By now, she's a university student, and she decided to read this book in her free time. All because we planted a book in her house.

I'd like to conclude with an incredible story:

A few years ago, I officiated a wedding, and I spoke to the *chossan* about the idea of gifting

each of their guests with a *sefer* as a memento from the celebration. In our country, it's common for people to give their guests a gadget or a chocolate to take home with them, so I suggested that instead, he should give out something meaningful. He agreed, and we ended up giving out copies of *Daily Wisdom*, a book that has a *vort* from the Rebbe on each daily section of the Chumash. He had 500 copies imprinted with a dedication about the wedding, and all the guests enjoyed the gift.

As it turned out, this couple struggled to have children for a while. When they finally had a baby boy, it was a big *simcha* in our community. Before the bris, he approached me with an idea to again give out a gift to all the guests. This time, I suggested that he should give out a Chumash with the Rebbe's insights published by Kehos in Spanish.

Later, they had another child, and when they celebrated a one-year birthday party for this child, they again gave out a children's parsha book to all the guests.

It was so touching to see how they marked each milestone in their family life by gifting



RABBI MENDEL SHTETOV AT A RECENT CHANUKAH EVENT WITH THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN URUGUAY.



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Torah books to others. You see clearly what kind of impact *seforim* can have, both on individuals and on a whole community.

The Rebbe Is In the Home

Perusing the Rebbe's *sichos* about *Mivtza Bayis Malei Seforim*, you can discern that there's an advantage of having *seforim* in the home, even over some of the other *mivtzoim*. While there is infinite Divine value in doing a one-time mitzvah with another, having a *sefer* in one's home serves as a constant reminder to study more Torah and has a lasting impact—even in a very tangible sense!

It's incredible when you think about it: The Rebbe himself spent hours upon hours, gifting people with *seforim*! Whether it was Tanyas or *kuntreisim* with *maamarim*, and so on. The Rebbe gave these to men, women, and children. I believe the Rebbe is teaching us how to spread Torah to fellow Yidden: in addition to teaching Torah directly, the Rebbe gave printed articles of Torah to others.

There was once a Yid who had to travel to

Minnesota from New York, but he was afraid to fly on an airplane. The Rebbe gave him a Tanya and told him: If you carry this with you, you will have the Alter Rebbe with you on the airplane and you won't be afraid.

Giving someone a Likkutei Sichos or any other of the Rebbe's *seforim* is literally like bringing the Rebbe into their home. Imagine the profound impact that will have on them, their friends, and their community as a whole.

It's a simple gesture and can be easily done by anyone.

Try it and you too will see amazing results.

1. Toras Menachem vol. 74, pp. 268–281.
2. See Motzei Zos Chanukah 5734; Toras Menachem vol. 75, p. 30.
3. Toras Menachem vol. 70, p. 276.
4. Toras Menachem vol. 78, p. 71.
5. Simchas Torah and Shabbos Bereishis 5735; Toras Menachem vol. 78, pp. 188, 217, 248.
6. Toras Menachem vol. 70, p. 278.
7. Shabbos Parshas Vayigash 5752; Sefer Hasichos 5752 vol. 1, p. 227.
8. See "Rescue of the Library," Derher Adar II 5774.