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GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT MIKETZ

The Rosh Chodesh Gift

It was the seventh night of Chanukah — one of the brightest and most joyful moments of the Jewish calendar — when a knock on the door shattered Hadas Lowenstern's world. Her husband, Elisha, just 38 years old, had fallen in battle in Gaza. He was killed on Dec. 13, 2023, Rosh Chodesh Tevet, only hours before the lighting of the seventh candle. Elisha had entered Gaza on a mission to rescue wounded soldiers when an anti-tank missile fired by Hamas took his life.

Elisha left behind his wife and six young children, the youngest only eleven months old and the oldest twelve. He was a rare soul: a successful software engineer, a humble and accomplished Torah scholar, a pillar of the Charish community, and a man known for his quiet nobility and kindness. Hadas later shared that throughout their thirteen years of marriage, Elisha bought her a gift every single Rosh Chodesh — without fail. In his personal journal, he once wrote that a person should open WhatsApp at least once a day just to see how he could help someone else.

Though exempt from army service due to his large family, Elisha and his wife felt that this was his responsibility. The night before his death, fellow officers urged him to write a farewell letter, just in case. Elisha declined. He explained that he had spent his life making sure the people he loved already knew how deeply he cared for them.

Two months later, thousands of miles away in Crown Heights, Lilach and Sholom Goodman welcomed their first child — a baby boy. Deeply moved by Elisha Lowenstern's life, though they had never met him or his family, they chose to name their son after him. On Feb. 8, 2024, just hours before Rosh Chodesh Adar I, they held the brit and named him David Elisha, honoring both Elisha Lowenstern and King David, Israel's greatest warrior.

That very night, Sholom reached out to Hadas, sending her a photo of the newborn and telling her that a Jewish family across the world had named their first child after her husband. Hadas replied simply and powerfully: "I have no words... This is the most meaningful gift I could have received." She added that Elisha had been taken from her on Rosh Chodesh Tevet — and now, in the depths of her pain, she felt that this child and his name were her husband's Rosh Chodesh gift to her. Months later, the two families met in Israel, and Hadas held baby David Elisha in her arms.

Our nation was never meant to be divided or fragmented. Our enemies know this well. Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran do not differentiate between religious and secular, right or left, activist or apolitical. Jews who sent aid to Gaza were murdered with the same hatred as infants taken hostage. So we must ask ourselves: what is it that binds us so deeply — and provokes such hatred? It is something far beyond opinions or identity labels. It is the infinite Divine spark present in every Jewish soul.

As actor Nathan Buzz remarked during his visit to Israel: "Don't let Hamas be what keeps you together. Let it be Hashem." (Retweeted by R' VV Jacobson)

Dedicated for the complete & rapid recovery of David Farid ben Aziza Dina

Success, Defined

Success is a word we all chase, even though we rarely stop to define it. We want success in education, in marriage, in parenting, and in our careers — but what does success actually mean?

If you scan the Torah, you'll notice something surprising. Hashem almost never pauses to declare, "You're successful." Even the greatest figures in history are not labeled with grades or accolades. There is, however, one striking exception.

When Yosef is sold into Egypt and arrives in the house of Potiphar, the Torah states: "And G-d was with Yosef, and he was an *ish matzliach* — a successful man" (Gen. 39:2). What makes this so puzzling is the timing. Earlier in Yosef's life, he sits and learns Torah from Yaakov Avinu, absorbing the deepest wisdom from the holiest man of the generation — yet no mention of success. Later, at age thirty, he saves Egypt and the surrounding world from famine and builds the greatest economy of the ancient world — still no declaration of *hatzlacha*.

But in between, when Yosef is sold as a slave and stripped of dignity, likely performing menial tasks for a morally corrupt master, that is when the Torah calls him successful. Why?

R' Mordechai Kamenetzky offered a powerful insight. Imagine waking up as Yosef. One day you're immersed in Torah with Yaakov Avinu; the next, your own brothers have betrayed you and sold you away. You're no longer learning secrets of the universe; you're now making coffee and scrubbing floors. The natural response would be despair; where is Hashem now?

Yet the Torah tells us, "His master saw that G-d was with him." Rashi explains that the Name of Hashem was constantly on Yosef's lips. Yosef woke up each morning saying, "Baruch Hashem." When asked how he was doing, he responded with gratitude and faith — even in the lowest place.

Hashem looks at Yosef and says: When you praise Me while learning Torah, it is beautiful. But when you praise Me in the depths, when you feel abandoned and still call My Name — that is true success.

Hashem tells each of us the same. Use your talents, your intelligence, and your opportunities for good. But when you can't find Me and you give Me your heart anyway, that is the greatest form of *hatzlacha*. When life feels heavy and you still whisper a genuine 'Baruch Hashem,' that is real success.

(Based on a d'var Torah shared by Charlie Harary)

"Every crack in your heart is a place for the light to shine through."
(Meaningful Minute)