

Thoughts from our Alumni Coordinator

The Chagim season has come and gone, and everywhere around me, the world is reawakening to reality. The year is finally underway. But for me, I still feel like I'm waiting. My wedding is in less than two months, and no matter what else is going on, my transition from single to married is front and center in my mind. It's as if the rush of the world around me feels more intense, and more forceful. It's therefore very fitting to me that Cheshvan is the month of the Mabul, the flood. It's such an interesting concept that water, which is actually the essence of life, and the symbol of Torah, was the force used to destroy the failed attempt at humanity.

I remember last year asking a friend who was engaged if she could give me any insight into what it feels like to be waiting to get married. She told me that every Kallah looks calm on the outside, but on the inside she's going crazy. This limbo, this constant flow of questions and clarity, unknowns and certainty, is an internal flood like nothing I've ever felt before. I know who I'm marrying, but we can't start our life together. I know who I want to be sharing with, but I have such limiting boundaries to give within.

I was thinking about the Mabul, the Teiva, and all of the miracles involved in allowing the chosen procreators to survive. I realized that although the Mabul was an act of destruction and death, there was incredible kindness and care that really carries the story of Noach. In order for all of Noach's family and the animals to

fit into the Teiva, Hashem needed to bend the laws of physics. Also, somehow everyone stayed sustained and fed, no muscles atrophied from sitting still, and no predators ate prey. Amidst a story of failure and tragedy, there lies one of incredible hope.

Water, like Torah, can be calming, still, and soothing. But it's very powerful, and has the potential to be wild, overpowering, and intense. The water that Hashem used to destroy the world was a message. The world ignored the basic boundaries of morality, and abused the gifts of physicality. As a punishment, water, which symbolizes Torah is used as a destructive force. Without boundaries, without contained passions and actions, the result is a flood. Uncontrollable and destructive.



Hashem has created my own personal flood to battle. This process, this stage, is difficult and full of challenges. But He has given me the greatest gift- a Teiva, a confined space to be safe and sustained within. The boundaries of Torah are allowing me to stay above water and see incredible miracles. I am sailing towards dry land, towards a

home and a life that will allow me to truly begin phase two of my life. I hope we are all able to see and appreciate the resources and miracles that Hashem gives us during both the storms and rainbows of life.

Shabbat Shalom and so much love,

Leah

Reach for the Stars by Meryl-Lee



If someone asked you to step outside and count all of the stars, what would your reaction be? I would probably say, "Yeah right! Do you think that I have time to stand around counting an infinite amount of stars?!?! It's impossible!!!"

Ok, Avraham wasn't asked by just anyone to step outside in Parshat Lech Lecha. He was asked by Hashem. Without questioning, Avraham stepped outside to attempt to accomplish the impossible. Hashem responds to him, "So too will your descendents be!" The traditional

understanding of the posuk is that we will become as numerous as the stars in the sky. However, Rav Meir Shapiro from Lublin, gives an interesting understanding. Hashem is telling Avraham that just as he reaches to attempt what seems impossible, his offspring will also have this strength: "כה יהיה זרעך"

Rabbi Frand strengthens this point through the Haftorah on Parshat Lech Lecha. The Navi Isaiah comments that those that place their trust in G-d will be endowed with new strengths. "יקוי ה' יהליפו כה" Because of their faith and efforts, those Trusters in G-d will get new strengths to accomplish their difficult goals.

If you look at our history we see this כה, strength, displayed many times. Look at the existence of our holy state of Israel. Our dream of 2000 years seemed more than impossible. Creating a Jewish homeland surrounded by our enemy with little resources was scoffed at by many. But, we the children of Avraham are blessed with the ability to dream the impossible dream and actualize it. And we did!

May Hashem reward all of our efforts that are לשם שמים, for the sake of Heaven, with new strength, to ensure that all of our seemingly impossible dreams are attainable.

Avraham and College by **Natasha Kaufman**, '07-'08



One elegant idea, developed by a child some 3,800 years ago, has transformed the world forever. That child was the patriarch Abraham, and his big idea, on closer inspection, seems more akin to ecology than to ethical monotheism.

So what's the big idea? And how did he come to it?

According to tradition, Abraham was born in 1813 BCE in the ancient Iraqi town of Ur Kasdim. As a young child in a pagan culture, he practiced idolatry and prayed to the sun, believing it to have created the heavens and the earth. But something didn't quite click. Whenever the sun set, it was out of the picture and the moon and stars dominated the night sky. Realizing the sun's limitations he prayed to the moon. With time he realized that neither is the ultimate answer, and so he came to the conclusion that there must be one Creator with unlimited power and knowledge.

Such is the story. But is it really so simple? If it were you that discovered that the sun and moon aren't the ultimate answer to life's questions, would you desert your family, wage war on the government, and risk martyrdom? So what that the sun and moon don't run the world? Is that a reason to go fanatic?

Let's step back and look at Abraham's quest as a logical problem. He was seeking some entity capable of creating and controlling the world as a whole. With nothing more than the world itself to go by, he had to work by inference. Knowing that everything that happens happens for a reason, Abraham set out to discover that reason. Put another way, he set out to identify that being responsible for the existence of... well, you name it: Matter, energy, motion, and life on the grandest scale imaginable. A theory of everything, if you will.

He made an impact, not consciously at first, but inwardly. He made the decision to change his whole world view and to be consistent and persistent in it. Abraham taught us that a Jew must never be comfortable with his/her spiritual standing. No matter how much has been accomplished, it is incumbent upon every Jew to embark yet further in their journey towards the Promised Land. And this journey must be open-ended. Although Abraham and Sarah had a spiritually comfortable and fulfilling life before their journey to Israel, G-d demanded of them to drop everything and travel on an open-ended trip, intentionally neglecting to inform them of their destination. WE should never set limits on his spiritual growth. The journey must always continue; just as G-d is infinite, so too the journey to reach Him is infinite.

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WHERE IS SHE NOW? ALUMNA OF THE MONTH:

SARA GURZA '07-'08

Where are you these days and what are you studying? Right now I'm at the University of Western in London, Ontario. It's my first year and I'm studying social sciences, but hoping to major next year in psychology.

What do you miss in Machon Maayan?

I really miss being with such amazing and interesting people all the time. Every single person that I got close to in Israel, especially at Machon Maayan, changed my life in some way, even if it was something small- they made an impact. Every one had personal experiences, and so much to offer. We were all there to share and to teach, with Torah to give over and to appreciate in return. My role models truly lived a life of Torah and Mitzvot, and had such a love for Israel. I miss that... the passion of the people in Israel, a passion for what they believe in, and how they chose to live that belief... and I miss Burgers Bar... a lot.

Machon Maayan really taught me how special and lucky I am to be Jewish. Every little thing that I learned last year, I can now apply to my life in some way or another. I learned how to make Judaism my own. The most important thing I gained from last year was Emunah. Life is tough, especially when you leave Machon Maayan and don't have those amazing people constantly motivating you and inspiring you. Things can get confusing, but at the end of the day, knowing that Hashem is there for me, and watching over me, I know I can make it. Hashem has a master plan for all of us and only wants what's best for us, and knowing this really motivates me. Emunah is knowing that you're never alone. I know that even though I'm in a city filled with a very small religious chevra, i can play an integral part in keeping this Jewish community alive, and inspiring others to stay connected.

As of now I'm planning on completing a degree in psychology here at Western. I want to work with developmentally delayed children through therapy. And, Be'ezrat Hashem, make it back to Israel as soon as I can.

Any words of wisdom for this year's Shana Alef? Take advantage of the amazing people you meet. Listen to their stories and learn from them. The teachers and Rabbis at Machon Maayan are some of the most inspiring people you'll ever meet. Ask all your questions. Travel for Shabbos- don't stay in all the time. GO TO CHEVRON. Learn to love tiyul-ing, its so much more fun that way... and when you're on them, try and keep up with Rav G. Just remember how lucky you are to be learning in Israel surrounded by such incredible people.



Heaven and Earth

by Debbie Katz, '06-'07

The intense introspection of Elul is far behind us. The royal crowning of Hashem on Rosh Hashannah is but a distant memory. The pressure of Asseret Ymei Tshuvah has come and gone and the books of Yom Kippur have officially been closed. The sukkot have been dismantled for another long year, and our feet have healed from the joyous dancing of Simchat Torah. Yet as sad as we are to pack away our various machzorim and see the Days of Awe fade away, the change of seasons brings with it a sigh of relief. We couldn't possibly handle another barrage of huge meals, impose on another family for a place to stay, or afford to miss a single extra class. We couldn't possibly pick out another outfit, afford another trip home or stand for another moment in shul pretending we know where we are in the machzor. And it is official, as a thunderstorm rages outside, answering the tefillot of Jews all around the world, that the cold front has brought with it someone we've both been dreading and secretly anticipating: The month of Cheshvan. Mar-Cheshvan. Mr. Bitter Cheshvan.

As the only month of the Jewish calendar without a holiday, the mark of the dismal beginning of winter, and a sudden return to the mundane after a period of spiritual bounty, Cheshvan doesn't have the best reputation among the other months. He represents a fall from grace – spiritually, emotionally, and physically. The flood in the days of Noah that destroyed the world happened in Cheshvan. Rachel Immenu passed away in Cheshvan. So why does our tradition say that the Third Temple in the days of Mashiach will be built in this bitter, cold and empty month?

The challenge of Cheshvan is to ground the unbelievable spiritual energy of the chaggim in our seemingly mundane physical world. The word עולם, 'world', literally means 'concealment'. In order to grant His creations the gift of free will and allow for the illusion of the existence of anything other than His All Encompassing Oneness, Hashem creates worlds of concealment. He masks Himself behind the mundane and allows for a world in which His very own creations can flatly deny His existence. And that is Cheshvan.



Natasha Kaufman *continued from previous page*

What I have found the most is that in college, in America and in general the secular world venerates and almost worships wisdom, logic and reason. The academic world is filled with its unrelenting in its pursuit for the "truth" but never seeming to attain it. The culture teems with emptiness, inadequacy and unfulfillment. And of course we get pulled in, we get pulled in to that race and that culture that feels nothing is ever good enough and that the race will never be over. We get consumed with this reason, this ability to reason and scientifically analyze everything we do. But we must take a step back, and reconsider, what does this reason do to us? How can this never ending pursuit be against everything we have internalized as children of Abraham? What can we learn from his impact?

The message of Abraham is that all human beings have a potentially positive role in creation. To realize this we too need to make the step beyond rational, to accept absolute moral standards and principles.

Abraham was one alone, yet he changed the world. Perhaps we can do the same. Remember that everything you have internalized is your choice! Just like no one forced Abraham to come to the conclusion that he did no one is forcing you. We need to learn from his lesson and stop being sucked in by the culture around us and be proud! We must go beyond reason and except that life is full of many mysteries that we cannot reason and that cannot be scientifically analyzed and we are OKAY with that! We are ok, we are satisfied. We can't be consumed by this race. WE can make an impact. Our VOTE does count (had to put that in there lol)

Love Natasha, working hard at Rutgers University, dabbling and asking the same questions I think we are all dealing with.

I hope these words of Torah help you in your search for it. Even when we may get bogged down in papers and tests and what our textbooks may be telling us what to think we must always go beyond reason and to the essence, to Hashem the creator of everything. I wish you all luck in your studies and in your thoughts.

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NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 4 - Emily Samuel
- 12 - Aliza Goldstein
- 16 - Ronit Broekman
- 18 - Deborah Goldstein
- 19 - Orly Gasner
- 26 - Rena Rosen
- 30 - Esther Berkowitz

Alumni Mazel Tovs/
Machon Maayan News
Ilana Peters ('07-'08)
and
Alexis Rosen ('06-'07)
made Aliyah over the Summer



Tiyul to Tzfat by Shira Finkelstein, '08-'09



Before returning to Tzfat, I confined my neshama to the mundane aspects of the physical world.

Throughout my journeys there, my mind took a much-needed temporary leave, allowing my buried spiritual half to breathe.

Our enlightenment began in the ancient village of Peki'in. As we descended the mountain, we learned of the village's intense historical background that clearly demonstrates our struggle of Jewish survival. Rav Ben Zion Goldfischer highlighted the life of Rav Shimon Bar Yochai (Rashbi) as we paused to fathom the significance of Meiron.

We had the honor of meeting Margalit Zinati, the very last Jew in Peki'in. Her home is proudly lined with Israeli flags. Learning of her strength and courage completely shook me, giving me an entirely new perspective of real Zionism. She gave us an enormous container of her ripened olive treasures before introducing us to the shul that she has guarded for so many years.

In the shul were ornaments that, according to Zinati, actually decorated the shul in the time of the Second Temple. The murmur of prayer rested within the shul- even before we started davening- from the Jews who cried out to Hashem there before us. I discovered His presence in her shul. Before leaving, she gave us abracha and I could not resist giving this hero a hug of appreciation and admiration.

Later, we met glass blower and artist Sheva Chaya, who showed us the parallels between an artist and her finished work, and Hashem and the world through the process of glass blowing. I could actually feel the spirituality

emanating from Tzfat when we listened to Baruch Erdstein's stories and songs, clustering together in his candlelit home.

The next morning, artists Avraham Lowenthal and David Friedman held sessions covering an introduction to Kabbalistic thought. Lowenthal explained several of his pieces, revealing the balance between inspirations and artistic expression. The Artist Colony brimmed with blinding spirituality that left my neshama wanting more and my wallet empty. All money is spent well, however, if it is spent in Israel.

Rav Uri Etigson guided us through the Tzfat Cemetery, where we visited the graves of several Tzaddikim and davened in their merit including Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of the Shulchan Aruch; Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, author of Lecha Dodi; and Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, author of the Zohar.

After returning to the Ron Hotel and preparing for Shabbos, we had the luxury of choosing from four shuls in the area: Beirav, Breslov, Ari z"l, and Hesder. I took advantage of this opportunity by shul hopping throughout the night, nearly missing Kiddush back at the hotel.

The Etigsons' shared their hilarious story of how they met and eventually married, leaving me with the hope that I, too, will someday, G-d willing, meet my besheret across the table at a Shabbos meal.

Many girls said they connected to Hashem through Tzfat-style spiritual meditation with Dina Etigson. Shoshannah Newman found inspiration, saying, "I felt like G-d was right there, listening to me and that he wanted to hear everything that I had to say."

We removed ourselves from the physical world, went outside to select regions and spoke to G-d without siddurim. "It was like having a conversation with your best friend," continued Newman, "but more so because G-d knows everything and you don't have to explain anything to Him."

In the morning, we had the opportunity to daven at Carlebach, Hesder, Breslov and Abuhav Neitz.

After enjoying an Israeli lunch and singing at the hotel, I attended Rav Daniel Hartstein's shiur, "When Kabbalah conflicts with Halacha." Dvar Torah's enriched our understanding of Parsha Noach.

Connecting to Hashem is often difficult for me to achieve through everyday routine. I feel closest to Him when exploring and learning about the actual land of Israel and when seeing His works in nature. So, naturally, Rav Goldfischer's extensive tour of the Old City of Tzfat greatly affected me beyond all other activities provided over the Shabbaton.

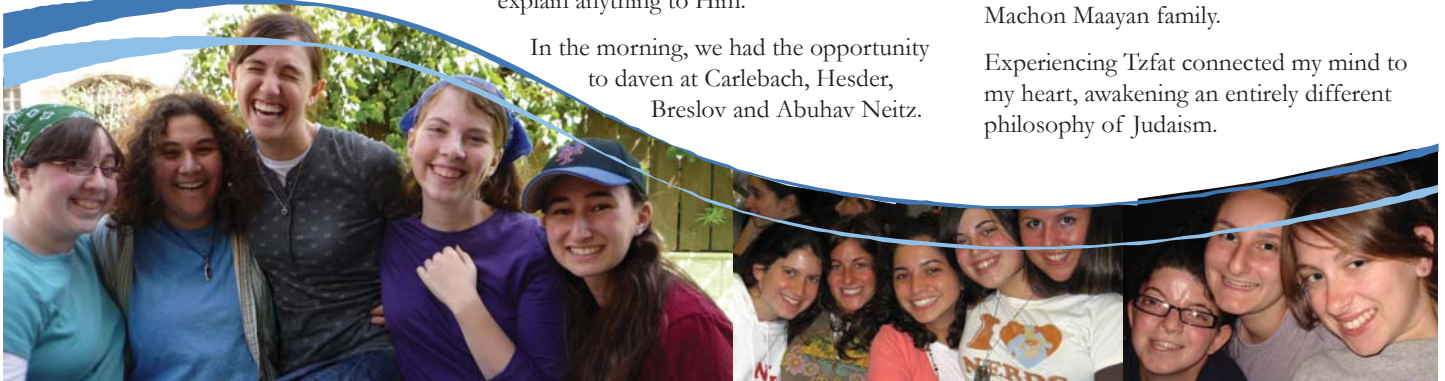
Among one of the sites we visited was Rav Karo's house and cave in which he actually wrote the Shulchan Aruch. Returning to these sites made me feel as if we just received the Torah from Mount Sinai a few years ago. Hashem's presence blinded me with anticipated understanding.

Those who ended the tour by davening Mincha at the famous ARI Synagogue somehow managed to sprint back to the hotel at the last moment for Seuda Shlishit. Havdalah came before I was willing to let Shabbos go in a bitter-sweet ceremony led by Rav Goldfischer.

I personally introduced the robot to Israel later that night during the concert with Tziona and Chava Rachel Saban in Bedouin Tent. Don't be surprised when you see my moves in the next big, Israeli music video. The songs and dancing throughout the women's concert completely connected the Machon Maayan group. Saban free-styled a song about women's abilities and expectations in a male-dominated world.

Machon Maayan Shana Bet girls organized the Shabbaton; planning the Friday night tish and the bitter-sweet kumzitz, buying essential snacking foods, recruiting girls to share Dvar Torah's and establishing room placements. Shana Bet Ahuvah Blumenfeld thinks that we needed this experience after the long Chag in order to unite and strengthen the Machon Maayan family.

Experiencing Tzfat connected my mind to my heart, awakening an entirely different philosophy of Judaism.



"בראשית ברא אלוקים את השמים ואת הארץ. והארץ...". The Torah opens by telling us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He created the spiritual realities of the universe, the happenings of the heavens, the secrets of existence, the holy, the transcendental, the beyond. And He created the earth. He created the physical world, the mundane, the imminent, the simple, the here and now. The second verse begins with the word 'והארץ'. Don't worry about the spiritual secrets, God hints to us, I'll worry about that. Your life, your existence, your Torah that I am about to reveal to you, all takes place in the physical world. Know that השמים exists, He demands, but live in הארץ.

Machon Maayan is over for all of us. We may remain connected, but our year of basking in perpetual inspiration has dissolved into university, work, and the challenges of every day living. There is a danger of descending into this Cheshvan-like existence and dropping all of the spiritual enlightenment we have been granted out of a fear that there is no place for it in this bitter world of gashmiut. The challenge is instead to both bring the light down and raise the world up by revealing that behind the dark, heavy rain clouds of this world of concealment exists a Light and a Truth so bright that it is only through the chessed of concealment that we can exist. Perhaps if we manage to use this month of Cheshvan properly, as a way to scratch away at the surface and reveal the hidden spirituality surrounding us, we will merit to see the Bet Hamikdash rebuilt, revealing that Mr. Bitter Cheshvan is really the bearer of the greatest spiritual gifts we could ever dream of. His storm clouds may bring darkness, but his rains bring unprecedented potential for growth.

Schedule of Upcoming Reunions with Rav K:

MANHATTAN

Sunday, November 9th

Heads: Kaley Wajcman & Hanna Sorkin

Contact Info: Kaley: kayk1440@aol.com

Hanna: omghanna@yahoo.com

TimeFrame: 11am-2pm Lunch
or 4pm-7pm Dinner

BOSTON

Monday, November 10th

Head: Rebecca Astrachan

Contact Info: astrachanr@gmail.com

TimeFrame: 6pm-9pm Dinner

SILVER SPRING

Thursday, November 13th

Head: Dani Beckerman

Contact Info: qtpiebeck2000@aol.com

TimeFrame: 6pm-9pm Dinner

TORONTO

Sunday, November 16th

Head: Sara Gurza

Contact Info: saragurza@gmail.com

TimeFrame: 1pm-4pm Late Lunch

CHICAGO

Thursday, November 20th

Head: Rena Rosen

Contact Info: zushie1@aol.com

TimeFrame: 2pm-5pm Late Lunch/Early Dinner

NEW RELEASE:
The Machon Maayan Promotional Video

created by: Eli Veffler
(Leah's chatan)

Check it out on our website:
www.machonmaayan.org

