

THE LA Jewish Home

January 12-February 1, 2023 • VOL 1, #7

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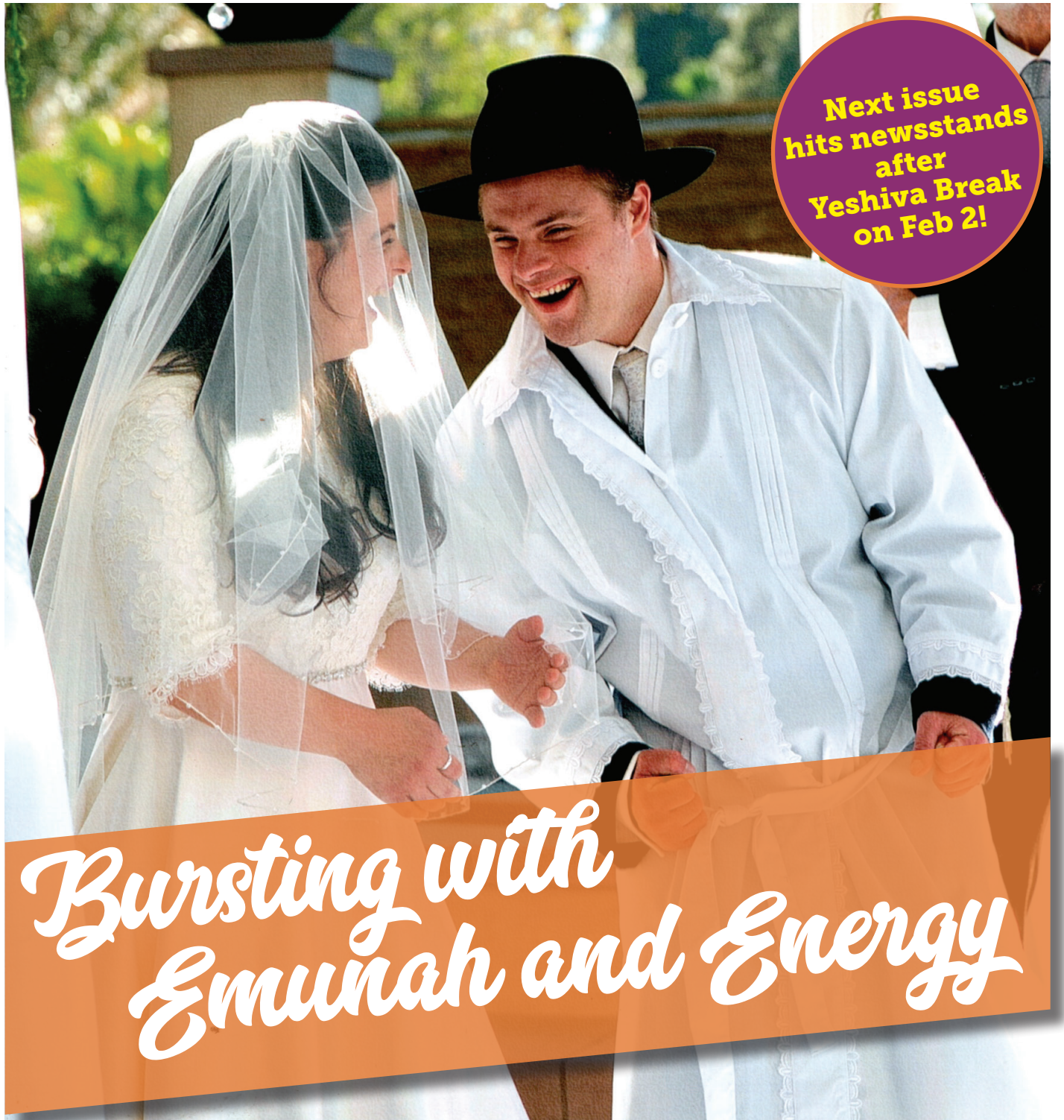
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Dear Readers,

My daughter's school has a Mother-Daughter learning program, where last week we learned the importance of gratitude, to have Hakaras HaTov, even if you may never express it to the person, so that cultivating the middah changes us and becomes a part of who we are. I believe this is also true with the middah of chesed.

Not too long, in the first issue of this newspaper, I introduced our team, stating that Sara, Avi, and I have known each other for over 20 years and have served together in community activities.

It began in the summer of 2001 at Summer@ETTA. We were 14-year-old junior counselors, barely even knowing ourselves, while getting to know children and adults with special needs. My adorable camper that summer was Danielle Magady along with two of her friends. I spent the next 4 years not only as a counselor at Summer@ETTA, but spending all of high school actively involved in everything ETTA. I helped to plan Shabbatons and spent countless Shabbosim at the group home, where I not only enjoyed time with the adults living with special needs, but watched them live nearly independently (with assistance), cooking for Shabbos, doing laundry, setting the table, taking their medications, and helping each other.

Today, there are many beautiful organizations around the world that provide for the needs of clients and families with special needs. But it wasn't always that way. Creating a classroom for children with special needs started for the LA Jewish community in the 1960s, when Rabbi Menachem Gottesman hired Mrs. Etta Israel to teach a class in Harkham Hillel Academy. This classroom not only served as a role model for future Special Education, but also shared activities and experiences with the rest of the school. When Mrs. Israel retired, she left whatever assets she had to create the Etta Israel Center, known today fondly as ETTA.

I work as a registered nurse in an adult medical unit in one of LA's largest hospitals. One day, I saw a familiar name on our unit - an adult who used to live in one of the ETTA group homes where I volunteered years ago. While she wasn't assigned as my patient, I kept an eye on her. She was admitted with a new medical diagnosis that needed to be monitored, but most importantly, she needed to learn how to care for herself with this new medical condition. She became agitated and insisted on going home. She had her bags packed and began to walk down the hall, tears streaming down her face, and nurses chasing her.

Picture the scene as I swooped in, put my arm around her shoulder, and said "Hi Shalva! (name changed), it's me Ariela, remember me from Summer@ETTA? And when I used to come for Shabbos to the group home? What's going on?" And so began a long few hours, where I sat with Shalva and helped her to understand

why she was hospitalized, why she could not leave at the moment, and what we had to do to get her home safely. It was not easy. I cannot count the number of times Shalva tried to walk out and how often I had to redirect her. We would be halfway down the hall toward the elevator, and I would whip out my phone and show her old photos of Avi Heyman's costumes at our Summers@ETTA (BH there were many saved on Google Drive!) I'm not very good at the art of distraction, and boy was this exhausting!

But I could not give up! Because I cared for Shalva and I knew she could do it. Because I could see how afraid she was and overwhelmed. Because she was my friend and she trusted me. Because she was the same as every other one of my patients after finding out a new diagnosis. And that's what I saw - her humanity and her being the same as anyone else.

This week's feature is a profile of an amazing man in our community, who speaks for himself. Shlomo Meyers works at one of our local Jewish day schools, attends many of our local shuls, and regularly communicates via text with dozens (if not more) of the LA locals. He serves as an active member of our community, a role model to many. This would never have been possible without organizations such as ETTA, Yachad, Keshet, and so many others, whose mission is to support, include, and integrate those with special needs into the larger community, to make their lives meaningful, and thereby also ours.

I wouldn't be who I am today, serving as a local nurse or writing for this paper, if it wasn't for my volunteering experience with ETTA, which shaped my values, my desire to give back, and create community connections and spread awareness, which I feel is one of my missions in serving for this paper.

Volunteering shapes priorities, provides direction, and creates a community of shared values of like-minded individuals who create lifelong friendships. I have so much gratitude for Dr. Michael Held, for Menachem Litenatsky, Mrs. Leah Schachter, and all the ETTA families, clients, and volunteers who provided me these opportunities to develop myself as a person, one who hopes to use what I have to give back. I also have tremendous gratitude for the current volunteers of LA, mostly in high school, who continue to support all of the amazing organizations that we have.

To learn more about what's happening locally in real time, sign up for the Schmooze LA whats app group. If you want this newspaper delivered to your door, sign up on our website for a delivery subscription! We will see you in 3 weeks, with our next issue on February 2nd. Enjoy Yeshiva Break!

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Shabbos Zemanim

Friday, January 13

Parshas Shemos: 4:46pm

Shabbos Begins: 4:46pm

Shabbos Ends: 5:51pm

Rabbeinu Tam: 6:18pm

Friday, January 20

Parshas Va'era: 4:53pm

Birkas Hachodesh

Shabbos Begins: 4:53pm

Shabbos Ends: 5:57pm

Rabbeinu Tam: 6:24pm

Friday, January 27

Parshas Bo: 5:00pm

Shabbos Begins: 5:00pm

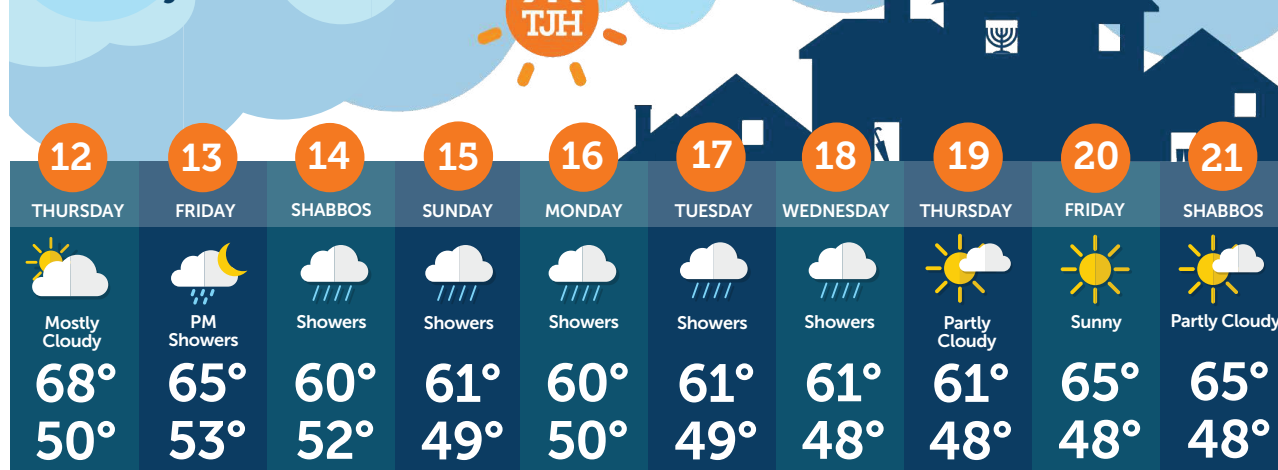
Shabbos Ends: 6:04pm

Rabbeinu Tam: 6:31pm



10 Day Weather

January 12 - 21





Bursting with Emunah and Energy: Shlomo Meyers

by Ariela Kauffman

It's hard to believe that Shlomo Meyer-smoved to LA only nine years ago. He is the familiar, friendly face everyone knows and loves to run into!

Born in NY, Shlomo moved to Chicago when he was eight years old. He is one of seven children, with siblings now living all around the world. He attended Solomon Schechter for elementary school and Ida Crown for high school. After graduating high school, Shlomo worked for eight years at Skokie Arie Crown Hebrew Academy.

Shlomo's mother, Shalva Meyers, recalls Shlomo serving as his own advocate from a very young age. At that time, over thirty years ago, inclusion was rarely an option for children with special needs in their community but it was starting to take off, as Shlomo attended Jewish day school. This was the beginning stage of integrating children and adults with special needs into the community. In high school, Shlomo was hired by Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream shop to work at the counter. When interviewed on a national radio program about his job, Shlomo spoke from his heart saying how great it was to work there, but that Ben & Jerry's needed him too. That interview went "viral."

Happy Wife, Happy Life

In the summer of 2012 when Shlomo was 26 years old, he met his future wife while attending a sleep-away camp for the first time. While Shlomo was at Camp Morasha, Danielle Magady was attending Camp Lavi, and with the help of Yachad counselors, they were able to go on a few dates in Pennsylvania that summer.

"Shlomo's constant desire to learn and draw lessons from everywhere is one of his most endearing traits."

After dating for almost two years, flying back and forth between Chicago and LA, Shlomo proposed to Danielle with a long poem (he's always been a writer!), and they married in the summer of 2014. Since then, Shlomo and Danielle have lived here in LA, both working and participating as active members of the community.

When Shlomo met his future father-in-law, Terry Magady, he immediately brought up the moral themes of the Disney movie he had watched on the plane. For Terry, Shlomo's constant desire to learn and draw lessons from everywhere is one of his most endearing traits.

At every Shabbos



meal, Shlomo is always prepared, actively sharing deep and insightful Torah thoughts about the Parsha and life.

Danielle's favorite thing about Shlomo is his consistent learning schedule.

Shlomo has multiple chavrusas each week, some he meets locally, and those out-of-state, remotely.

Recently, Shlomo celebrated a Siyum!

"Shlomo is a role model, he gives great Dvar Torah and advice, he's romantic and so caring, gives great marriage advice,

and he has a sweet personality," shares Danielle. This is emphasized by his in-laws, who say that Shlomo can give great marriage advice because of his credibility.

Mother-in-law Holly Magady says that Shlomo has always "wanted to be a

good husband and made sure to learn how. No one knows how before they get married.

Shlomo is willing to take pointers and has many

heart-to-heart conversations with Terry, his father-in-law.

Shlomo is always willing and eager to put into place all that he learns because he wants nothing more than to make Danielle happy because he adores her." Shlomo loves to quote a plaque that is hanging in his kitchen: Happy life, happy wife!

With her intuitiveness, highly positive way of thinking, and her quiet demeanor, Danielle grounds and strengthens Shlomo. Shlomo, on the other hand, is more outgoing, always busy doing, and has the drive to be productive and to contribute. They perfectly complement each other. The most beautiful thing about their relationship, according to Shlomo's mother, is that Danielle is Shlomo's advocate. She speaks up for him when people cut him off or assume what he meant before he finishes

speaking.

"Sometimes things are more difficult for those with Down syndrome, but don't assume that someone with Down syndrome needs help," Shlomo advises. "Give them a chance, everyone needs it. If I need help, I will ask!"

Shalva Meyers marvels at her son and daughter-in-law, "while they may not know it all, they definitely know each other."

A Mover and a Shaker

When Shlomo moved to LA after getting married, he began working at Gindi Maimonides Academy where he still works today. Shlomo enjoys being busy and trying different jobs, including art assistant, supervising the younger early childhood, working security, refilling supplies for staff and teachers in the office, monitoring P.E. and recess, and assisting in the music department. Shlomo feels he is good at helping to control the class.

It wasn't easy moving to LA, uprooting everything he has ever known at the age of 28, to move to a city, marry into a new family, find a new place of employment, and be tasked with making new friends and a place for oneself in the community. As Shlomo recounts, "it was really hard when I moved to LA. At that time I didn't have any family, there were many people that I had not yet met."

For Holly, "Shlomo is [her] hero. He left everything he had ever known: his family, hometown, reputation, connection, friendships, and started his life all over again at age 28."

As demonstrated by his various positions at Gindi Maimonides Academy, Shlomo is someone who likes to keep busy

and cannot sit by unproductively. During Covid, when schools were closed, Shlomo found himself with too much free time. So he started his own business! He began by cleaning a few people's backyard furniture and then began to market himself by knocking on doors, making calls, printing business cards, and his business spread by word of mouth. His entrepreneurial idea helped so many who were stuck at home and primarily spending time in their backyards.

Talking Torah

Shlomo is famous for the Divrei Torah that he regularly sends out via text to those lucky enough to be on his list, spreading messages of Torah, parsha, emunah, and middos. "I used to have people help me with Dvar Torahs and speeches by telling them what to write down, but now I do it all myself."

In his drive to improve his writing and public speaking skills, Shlomo has decided to do more by himself. "I am improving my process. I write down my thoughts, and make the messages more clear so I can share them with others to help them."

Even though many people are too busy to respond, Shlomo still does it to "help them feel positive, in case they are feeling negative or sick, [he] can be there for them."



Many of Shlomo's text and WhatsApp readers live all over the world: Israel, New York, and Chicago. "The point is to keep in touch because even though I'm not with them, I feel more connected to them by sending it. Because during these times, there's a lot of disconnection."

His newest passion is public speaking and Shlomo is taking classes to improve his skills. He aspires to become a professional public speaker, driven by his desire to become clearer when speaking. "One year, I flew to Chicago to be a guest speaker. That felt so

good, that I thought that could be me someday. I don't mind having someone else to help me, but now I'm thinking 'no, do it yourself.' Now I can go do it on my own."

These efforts of self-improvement have increased Shlomo's confidence. "I used to put myself down but I don't want to put myself in the wrong way anymore." He is working on improving his awareness, and self-confidence, and getting rid of all negative self-talk. When he stutters or hesitates in his speech, he says that "other people's only concern is not to make me feel bad, but they're not giving me a chance, and

it makes me feel uncomfortable." With light in his eyes, Shlomo speaks about being a professional speaker, "I found the someone who I am meant to be. I like to speak to make other people feel good about themselves. It's not just for me, even though it makes me happy."

Shlomo feels that writing Divrei Torah and speaking publicly are "things that help me be calm and controlled when I'm sending words out." He plans to become an author by compiling his words of Torah into a book. He is also writing a book on how to party.

Creating a Community

Finding himself a place within the LA community was very important to Shlomo. In Chicago, he was used to going to different places to daven. He continues that tradition here, by rotating the shuls he attends, some of which are Beth Jacob, Adas Torah, YICC, the Community shul, LINK, and sometimes Shaarei Tzedek in the valley. Recently, Shlomo spoke at YICC on Shabbos at last month's ETTA Shabbaton.

Shlomo has also developed a sort of "men's club." Shlomo initiated this meet-up, and now many of the men have developed close friend-

ships. Mr. Magady describes that Shlomo created a network of guy friends, of all different ages and walks of life, and he is the glue that holds them together. Shlomo "feels more at home now in LA because of the close friendship relationships. It doesn't feel good to be alone. That's what makes a community - to be with other people. Being available and making time is important." Shlomo puts the most value on his relationships with others. "If you are always busy, you may not know your own life, you're not

making your life and you're not really knowing others." Shlomo recommends taking your time, having patience, and being yourself when getting to know someone new.

The other men have received so much value from their relationship with Shlomo. Shlomo is "an amazing soul that is so deep and passionate, whom I enjoy getting together to speak about life," says Rabbi Shlomo Seidenfeld.

In the month of Elul during Covid, Rabbi Seidenfeld invited Shlomo over every morning for a week to his front lawn to blow

the shofar, because Shlomo knew how and Rabbi Seidenfeld and others needed to hear it. With tears in his eyes, Rabbi Seidenfeld recounts that "the way that Shlomo blew the shofar stirred my Neshama in exactly

"It wasn't easy moving to LA, uprooting everything he has ever known at the age of 28, to move to a new city, marry into a new family, find a new place of employment, and be tasked with making new friends and a place for oneself in the community."

the way that the shofar is supposed to, in a way that no other shofar blowing ever did." The best part was Shlomo's thrill to be the shaliach of the mitzvah of shofar.

Another close friend, Saul Blinkoff, who shares a love of Disney with Shlomo, says that Shlomo "is honestly one

of the most interesting people I've known in my life. I've been a teacher with influence on the Jewish world for many years, but when it comes to Shlomo, I am his student."

Saul loves that with Shlomo, there is no facade - what you see is what you get. Shlomo is able to share wisdom that is so profound and with such clarity that many are surprised by the shock of truth and depth that he comes up with. Saul amazes, "Shlomo brings clarity to my life, things I have overlooked. Shlomo is that person for me who reminds me what life is about and empowers me to grow."

A Parent's Perspective

It takes a village to raise any child, let alone one with special needs. Terry and Holly Magady are parents who were visionaries themselves, and early on made certain commitments on how they would raise their daughter Danielle, who was born with Down syndrome. After Danielle aged out of early intervention at age three, the Magadys were absolutely certain that full inclusion in a Jewish day school was the only option for Danielle. With the support of ETTA, the Magadys began searching for the right school. They went to many educational and other experts for advice. Terry remembers the exact words he heard from one of the top specialists: "It will never happen. It will never happen." Full inclusion at Jewish day schools wasn't done before.

Walking into their interview at Yeshiva Aharon Yaakov Ohr Eliyahu, the Magadys were prepared with their reasons of why the school should accept Danielle as a student, not as a chesed, but with a list of benefits for the other students, staff, and the school. Before they could say a word, Menahel Rabbi Shlomo Goldberg said, "I was just talking to our administrators about having children with special needs in our school." This was the opening of the door for Danielle to be fully included and integrated into the Jewish day school system, where she later also graduated from Bais Yaakov LA. The Magadys believe that the only reason this worked so well at YAYOE is that the support came from the top down, from the administration, who supported the Magadys and Danielle's inclusion when other parents were opposed. YAYOE allowed the Magadys to bring in an inclusion coordinator, Carol Faucett, who served as a huge benefit to the entire school.

ETTA, an organization that provides programs and services that enable people with disabilities to live fully enriched, independent and active lives, was born around the same time as Danielle. ETTA has been supporting

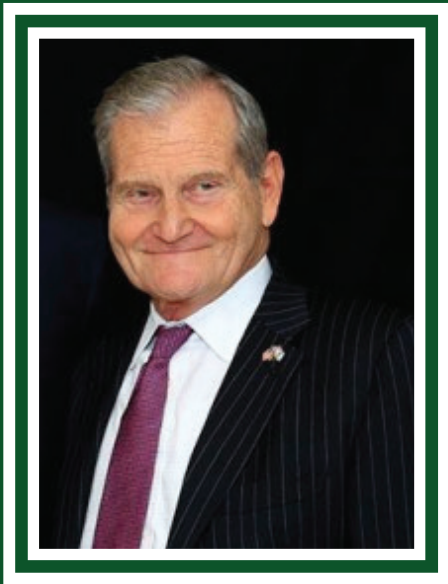
Danielle, the Magadys, and hundreds of other families with inclusion and integration into the community. As Holly fondly says, "Danielle and ETTA grew up together." At that time, there wasn't any other place to turn, and ETTA ensured that the Magadys never felt alone. ETTA supported Danielle by sending volunteers to help with homework, which not only served as an avenue for socialization and lifelong friendships but also was very helpful for her parents.

Danielle loved attending Summe@ETTA every summer of her childhood, and even her husband Shlomo worked there the year before moving to Los Angeles. ETTA supported Danielle's full inclusion in school, with the Magadys working hand-in-hand with ETTA to find education specialists to allow Danielle to be a part of a regular classroom, have typical childhood experiences with friends, provide role models to be inspired by, and help bring her up to reach her true potential.

When Danielle returned from seminary in Israel, the Magadys reached out to a shadchan in Lakewood who specializes in clients with special needs. It was then that Yachad counselors helped to facilitate Danielle and Shlomo's dating during the summer they were working at two different Yachad summer camps in Pennsylvania.

The support that has always been there will continue to be there for Danielle and now Shlomo when they hopefully move into the forthcoming full-service, multi-unit residential complex ETTA help inspire, Cornerstone Village, of which the Magadys are supporters. "People with special needs are often relegated to the fringes of the community," Terry says. "Yet the reality is that when genuine relationships are formed between those individuals and others without special needs, the result is magical and that connection becomes a true cornerstone, invigorating everyone with remarkable meaning and purpose." Danielle's success is a tribute to everyone, all the organizations, and all the individuals, along the way.

Happy
Tu B'shvat!



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The Value of Volunteering

At the very young age of nine, Jake Schochet was already having Shabbos meals with adults from the ETTA group home when his mother would invite them for lunch. A few years later, his older sister was involved in the summer camp, and before he knew it, Jake was spending every summer at Summer@ETTA too. That first summer in 9th grade he worked as a CIT, continued every summer in high school as a counselor, and eventually served as head counselor and assistant director. In 10th grade, Jake joined the Etta Youth Board, later becoming President in 11th grade, all the while garnering other high school students to be involved through volunteering and participating on the board. ETTA lit the fire of volunteering under Jake, who became so passionate about volunteering, that his whole life revolved around it. He was volunteering for 5-6 organizations during his time in high school.

While Jake was still in elementary school and attending ETTA Youth Board events with his older sister, he met Shlomo Meyers, who he describes as "warm and friendly, wanted to chat and share about his life." When Jake was in 8th grade, Shlomo started working at Maimonides, and Jake would often sit with him at lunch just to schmooze. Shlomo then came to spend time at Summer@Etta, now texts out his Dvar Torah to many (Jake is one of the many recipients), and they see each other when Jake comes to LA for ETTA Shabbatons.

During the summer of 2020, Jake served as the head of staff at Summer@ETTA, returning in 2021 as the Assistant Director which gave him opportunities to run activities and mentor counselors. During his year abroad in Yeshiva in Israel, he volunteered for another organization

serving those with special needs. He credits the Jewish sense of chesed, connecting to G-d, and giving back to the community in other ways as his inspiration. Jake attributes his volunteering to having "increased my patience for others, helps me to see the good in everybody, and appreciate all the aspects of the life we are given."

Now, in his second year of YU, Jake serves as the ETTA TV program coordinator. While very different from any of his previous experiences, it has been very rewarding to be able to give back in a new way to ETTA and to continue to be engaged in the lives of all the participants that he's grown close to over so many years despite being thousands of miles away. While Jake no longer attends each TV session as he did when he was working the technology portion, he ensures the presenters and tech are present, and that the program is planned and run efficiently.

Jake continues with his passion to be involved in ETTA, which has led to his current employment while he is still a college student. He has learned so much about himself and his passions, and it has led to the trajectory of his life. Now Jake is taking on leadership and management experience and plans to pass it on to the next generation. His volunteering with Etta has developed Jake's passion for giving back to the community, caring for others, and ensuring that everyone has the support and resources that they need. "It gave me a new perspective of Chesed, helped me as a leader, developed me into the person that I am today, and has impacted every aspect of my life."

Jake is currently majoring in accounting so that one day, he can be a CFO or CEO of a nonprofit, taking the professional career of accounting, but using it to give back to the nonprofit world in some way. His time at Etta has even led to his career choice and influenced his long-term goals. 🏠

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