

The Accident

Menachem Weiss, a "special needs" teen, reports every week to "Merkaz Ha'inyanim," a local periodical circulated in Central Israel on the angle of life that he is familiar with - living with CP.

Hi, everyone!

Remember me? I'm the one with CP who got to go on that fantastic trip to the beach - this time not in my imagination, but for real.

Remember how I described how my counselor made things so great for me? He actually got me into the water. Waves crashing around me. The feel of the sand under me. Being able to touch the crest of the wave as it came to meet me. Not even my imagination - and remember, I have a great one - could have pictured what that felt like. So you understand how close I feel toward him. Nothing could keep me away from sharing his special moments. Nothing. So listen to what happened.

As you recall, last week, there was very heavy rain. I was on my way to Yerushalayim. The driver who took me in his van always drives pretty fast. Usually, that doesn't bother me, because I also want to get there - the faster, the better. After all, I may be a CP patient, but, first and foremost, I'm young and enjoy the same things all of us young people enjoy. But that day, it was really pouring buckets during the entire trip.

At some point along the way, there must have been potholes on the road, or maybe speed bumps; I don't know what exactly. Suddenly, the van gave a very big jump, and along with it I jumped too, even though I was strapped in, and I got a strong blow from the wheelchair handle. I let out a real howl. The driver got scared and stopped at the side of the road. He got out to check what happened to me. I told him that I got banged in my back and that it hurt a lot. He explained to me that in the rear section of the vehicle, the springs are very high, and it is more sensitive to road bumps.

This didn't make me feel any better and

didn't help alleviate the strong pains either. Every movement was painful, and I was afraid that if I lied down, I wouldn't be able to get up.

Towards noon, they called my mother to tell her what happened, and she said that they should give me a pill to relieve the pain. It hurt a lot. When it was time to return home, I was frightened about the trip, but I had no choice. All the way home, I suffered every time the van jumped. I groaned to myself the entire time and *davened* that we will get home quickly. The driver tried to drive slowly so that it wouldn't hurt me too much.

I finally went to the doctor, who sent me for an x-ray. Thank G-d, the x-ray showed that I did not have a break or even a crack, but the doctor said that a dry bruise hurts a lot and that I should take pain relievers.

Since then, almost a week has passed. It still hurts, and I haven't been going to Yerushalayim much (I went only once and it was hard for me). I missed a lot of stuff and I felt bad about it, but there are some things that cannot be missed, no matter what.

Four days after the accident, my counselor from last year's Ezer Mizion retreat got married, and I knew that I just had to go. Look what he had given me! He gave me experiences. He gave me understanding. And, most of all, he treated me like a person who wants to enjoy things like anyone else. He gave me self-respect. That's Ezer Mizion for you. From the top to the bottom, the staff treats you with such love and dignity, you can't help loving them back. I had to share his special day. I had to. We were almost like brothers.

The *chasunah* was in Modi'in Ilit and my parents said it would be too difficult for me to make the trip. I refused to give in, and in the end, they had no choice. My father took me together with my attendant.

We came in the middle of the dancing, and the *chosson* was really excited to see me. I was even more excited to see him and to be there with everyone. He danced with me (in my wheelchair, of course!) in the middle of the circle, and after the dance finished, he sat me down next to him and told me how happy he was that I came. He said that the wedding would not have been the same without me sharing in it. I knew he meant it. We're all family at Ezer Mizion. We really care about each other.

I came home with aches and pains on the outside, but inside, where it really counts, I felt so good. I'm part of Ezer Mizion and they are all part of me. My "brother" got married and I shared in his joy. Hope I feel better next week.

From me,
Menachem Weiss

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Dovid's Dilemma

Shavuos: A Night of Torah and a Day of Public School

By S. Gottlieb

My Jewish name is Dovid, but my friends call me Dave. In Russia, I was known as Mi-sha.

I am a twelve-year-old boy, living in Queens, and a sixth grader in a local public school for gifted boys. We emigrated three years ago and I live in a fourth-floor apartment with my parents and sister, Stephanie.

The year after we arrived, I realized that there was something called *yeshiva*, a place where boys like me can learn Torah and pray to G-d. I so badly wanted to go to *yeshiva*, but my parents refused. They said that there was no money for tuition, and besides, they wanted me to get a regular, "American" education and maybe become a doctor one day. I said that all I want to do is learn Torah, but they said I was too young and didn't know what I wanted.

The next year, I cried to my parents to let me go to *yeshiva*, but again they refused. I told them that I hate public school and don't have any friends. There are gangs in school and they frighten me. My mom told me to tough it out and that I don't have any choice. But she did let me go to synagogue for *Shabbos* services, so I went with my Jewish neighbors. There are some boys like me who go to *yeshiva* and they are so, so happy. Their faces shine when they learn Torah. I know, because I sometimes watch them.

This year, I was hoping to be allowed to go to *yeshiva*, but it still didn't happen. On my own, I decided to eat only kosher and not to write on *Shabbos*. It was very hard. I had to come up with all kinds of excuses. The whole year, I went to synagogue every week and taught myself to read Hebrew.

A few weeks ago, I heard about the holiday of *Shavuos*, when the Torah was given. My friends said they are planning to go learn in the synagogue and that I was welcome to join them.

I was so excited. My mom gave me permission and I went. The synagogue had an all-night learning program, with rabbis and refreshments and stuff.

There are no words to describe how I felt as I sat with my neighbors, who are so lucky that they can learn in *yeshiva*. All night, we learned together, and they explained every-

thing to me. We only stopped once for coffee and cake, and we continued learning until the morning.

All too soon, the dark sky turned pink, and the first glimmers of light were reflected in the synagogue windows. It was time for the early morning prayers, followed by a *kiddush*.

It was at this point that all my excitement disappeared. I knew that after the prayers, after the refreshments were served, I would have to go home, take off my holiday clothes, and choose my school clothes. The first day of *Shavuot* was just another day in public school, and my parents would never allow me to be absent.

Sure enough, as soon as the prayers were over, my friends bid me goodbye. They looked sad as I left.

I took a tiny piece of cheesecake at the *Kiddush* - it was already late - and ran back to my apartment to change and grab my school-bag. I went to school dragging my feet and tried to avoid writing notes all day long. It wasn't easy.

"You're acting so weird today, Dave," a guy on my basketball team said. "Why don't you want to play?"

"What's with you, Dave?" someone else scoffed.

How could I explain what I felt like, how empty I was inside? How could I describe the beautiful night of learning I just experienced and the pain of being forced to go to school on such a day?

When I came home, I decided enough was enough. I couldn't take it anymore.

One of my friends (who goes to *yeshiva*) brought me to Nechomas Yisroel one day. I went into the office on my own and asked to speak to someone in charge. They asked Rabbi Chaim Kugelman to speak to me. He's the nicest, warmest rabbi, a real *tzaddik*. Rabbi Kugelman promised to find me a *yeshiva* and promised that Nechomas Yisroel will pay for it.

It's only late May, but I'm already registered in *yeshiva* for next year. I can't wait! Pray for me that I should learn Torah and do *mitzvos*, just like all my friends. Pray for me, please, because I have so many years of catching up to do.

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