

THE DIALOGUE

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR THE CHABAD HEBREW SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Megan's Discovery

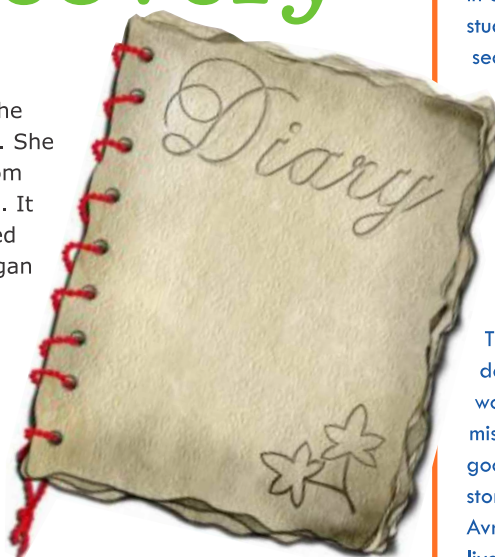
By: Shula Bryski & Malkie Herson

Megan snuggled into her blanket. Her mother said she had a bedtime surprise for her. Megan was excited. She loved surprises! Megan's mother came into the room smiling and put a beautiful deep purple book on Megan's lap. It looked well-loved from its distressed, worn cover, and stained pages. It looked like it had been read a thousand times. Megan traced the carefully hand-written words with her fingers.

"This is a storybook that is over seventy-five years old," explained her mother. "It is kind of like a diary. Your Grandma Mimi filled it with wonderful stories that happened to her and her family. When I was your age, Grandma Mimi read them to me. Now it's your turn to hear them, too. They're interesting stories that happened to our very own family! But they also teach us important lessons about life."

"Stories that teach lessons about life?" Megan looked confused.

"In some entries, Grandma Mimi talks about a personal lesson she learned by overcoming a certain situation. In other entries, we can learn important lessons just by reading the stories," said her mother. "Let's read one, and see what this book is all about."



"Stories that teach lessons about life?" Megan looked confused.

*April 25th, 1935
Lublin, Poland
By Mimi*

My cousin Marishka came today with her parents to stay with us for the holiday. They traveled here from their hometown of Krakow. I didn't really like when Marishka came. I had to share my bed with her and play the games she liked to play. I tried to pretend that I

was happy when she visited, but I really was not. We hadn't seen each other in a while, and those first few minutes felt awkward. We both felt shy. Then I realized how uncomfortable this must be for Marishka, too! She must be feeling just as unhappy as I was. I decided that I was going to try to make her feel comfortable. She was a guest in my home, after all. I offered her my new doll, the one Papa had just gotten for me from the market. Marishka's eyes lit up. She smiled at me. I felt good about making an effort to make her feel at home, instead of just being shy 'cause I wasn't in the mood. Marishka looked a lot happier.

"I never imagined Grandma as a little girl!" Megan said dreamily. "It's neat to read about her

Hashem (G-d) wants us to be our best! To that end, Hashem gave us the Torah. A Torah is a scroll with words written in calligraphy on parchment. It has been written this way, ever since the first Torah was given to us 3,300 years ago!

The Torah is rewritten in print form, in a book form. This way, we can study from it easily. There are five sections to the Torah, so when it is reprinted in the book form, we have it in 5 books. (Sometimes, the 5 books are printed in one giant book). Each book is called a Chumash. "Chumash" means 1/5th - it is 1/5th of the Torah.

The first chumash, Bereishit, describes Hashem creating the world, giving all people the mission to fill the world with goodness and holiness. It tells us stories about the first Jew, Avraham. He and his wife Sara lived in what-is-present-day-Israel. The Book of Bereishit describes the beginnings of their family. It closes with the story of one of their grandsons, Yosef, who has risen to the political position of second-in-command of a neighboring country, Egypt. Yosef invites his family to settle in Egypt. The family of 70 moves to Egypt. That is how the Book of Shmot, opens.

Shmot is full of stories - our slavery in Egypt, our freedom from slavery, our getting the Torah on Mt. Sinai, our travels in the desert as we made our way to Israel, the land that Hashem had promised to Avraham all those generations ago... As we learn the stories, we can learn lessons that will help us be the best we can be. Just as Hashem asks of us!

going out of her way to make Marishka feel at home. I never thought that Grandma also had to work hard at things.”

The next night, Megan’s mother read a diary entry from when Grandma Mimi was twenty-two years old:

November 4, 1947

Lower East Side, New York

By Mimi

How different the Lower East Side is from our beloved hometown in Poland! It is still not easy to get used to the different weather, the different neighborhoods, the different challenges. Yet, Papa, Mama, and I are grateful to have survived the terrible war in Poland. We are grateful to have a home here in America, and are hopeful for a bright future.

Papa is lucky to have a job, but not every family does. There are many families who came here from all over Europe with so little, and continue to struggle. There are individuals, even young children, who don't have families with them, and are having a hard time surviving.

Mama and Papa take care of these people. They don't have that much themselves, but every night, they quietly place little food packages and blankets by people's doors, giving as much money as they can to those in need. They also give support and friendship to these people in need, who need a kind, listening ear.

Many of these people are thriving and doing well much because of Mama and Papa's kindness. I am proud and inspired by all that they do.

“Wow,” said Megan, “That is inspiring, thinking of Grandma Mimi’s Mama and Papa who didn’t have that much, yet still worked so hard to give to others!

“It’s like they’re giving Tzedakah in different ways,” said Megan, “It’s like Tzedakah doesn’t only mean giving others money. It can mean giving food, giving

time, giving help, giving friendship... There are so many ways to give to people in need.”

She turned the page to the next story:

December 18th, 1947

Lower East Side, New York

By Mimi

I am really enjoying teaching third grade. I always dreamed of being a teacher, and now I am living that dream, for four months already - teaching, guiding, getting to know fifteen wonderful children.

“When I read stories about people - my people - who worked hard to do the right thing, it makes it all seem possible!”

Today, a new student joined my class. She recently emigrated from Russia. I could see that she was nervous, getting used to a whole new language, whole new surroundings, meeting many new people.

I remember how hard it was getting used to a new country when I moved here from Poland, and I was 22!

When Marina walked into class, the other students looked at her warily. She seemed different, wearing different styles of clothing, speaking with a foreign accent. During recess, she stood alone on the playground while everyone played with friends. I heard some of her classmates laughing at her clothes.

I immediately went outside and reminded my students firmly that name-calling and taunting can hurt feelings. Everyone fell silent. They seemed to feel bad about their taunting. They hadn't really

thought about how hurtful their laughter was.

But it was Hannah who actually left her friends to go over to Marina and talk to her and befriend her. It could not have been an easy thing for her to do. Her friends were still not sure about this 'new girl.' And yet, Hannah knew she had an obligation to make this newcomer feel comfortable in her new school. I was impressed to see Hannah stand up, and do what is right! Perhaps tomorrow, some more girls will get to know Marina, too.

“I think I get it now,” Megan told her mother as they closed the beautiful big book, “what you mean when you say that stories can teach us lessons about life.

“The story about the red doll shows the importance of taking another person’s feelings into consideration. From the East Side story, I heard about what a great responsibility it is being generous to people. From Grandma Mimi’s experience as a teacher, I learned how a person can stand up to do what’s right, even if you’re the only one. When I read these stories about people - *my family* - who worked hard to do the right thing, it makes it all seem possible!”

“Yes,” began Megan’s mother, “and you know that there is another book like that. The Torah is *our* family story book, as well,” said Megan’s mother. “It’s stories that happened to our great-great-great-grandparents. Those stories also teach us many lessons.”

“Wow!” said Megan. “I never thought of it that way...”

Mom smiled, “Grandma Mimi loved our family and wanted to share her experience with us. Hashem, too, loves us and wants to share with us Wisdom. He speaks to us through Torah. Jews have studied the Torah’s mitzvot and stories for thousands of years! And we still do to this very day! It is truly like a living storybook. Our living storybook.”

THE DIALOGUE

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Describe what it feels like to be loved?
Can you imagine that Hashem loves us in an all-enveloping, personal way?

“The Torah is Hashem’s way of talking to us.”
What does this statement mean?

The word “Torah” actually means “teacher”. Not only can we learn from the mitzvot that are included in the Torah, we also analyze the stories to glean lessons between the lines.