

Good Shabbos Everyone. Menachem was unfortunately born very premature and with many disabilities. Among his disabilities were blindness and cerebral palsy, which meant that his walking would be awkward all his life. Knowing that Menachem would not be able to attend a conventional yeshiva, the Eisenbachs sought a school specifically geared to handicapped children.

The only institution available was Achvah, a government-run secular school. It had excellent programs for handicapped children, but much to the Eisenbachs chagrin, Achvah provided no religious education - Nevertheless, Menachem proudly wore his yarmulke and tzitzis to school every day, and thus his religiosity was obvious to both students and staff alike.

The Eisenbachs tried to teach their handicapped son as much as they could at home about Torah and mitzvos. Father or mother would daven with the child every morning, and he began to recite berachos regularly, before and after eating. Every Shabbos, despite the difficulty, Menachem would walk to shul with his father, and he soon became familiar with the routine of Shacharis, Minchah, Maariv, and Krias haTorah (the reading of the Torah).

Another handicapped student at Achvah was the granddaughter of a prominent rebbe in Jerusalem, a charming eight-year-old girl named Yehudis. Yehudis unfortunately suffered from leukemia, and because she and Menachem were the only religious children in the class, they became friendly.

The Eisenbachs were very thankful to Yehudis because she went out of her way to help their blind and crippled son. She would walk alongside Menachem and carry his books so that he could steady himself as he slowly and hesitantly limped to class.

Both children progressed in their schoolwork, but Yehudis' health began to deteriorate. When she was absent from school, the children in the class would worry for her, but Menachem would be terrified. She was his closest friend, the eyes he had never had. In her absence, he missed her daily words of encouragement. Gradually she missed school more and more often, and eventually she was hospitalized. One dark day she passed away.

Parents and children in Achvah were devastated by her death, he and many came to be menachem aveil (pay a consolation call). Menachem, who was ten at the time, went with his father to Yehudis' family.

Sensing the sadness in the home, he asked to be brought to the little girl's mother. Standing unsteadily in front of the grieving woman, Menachem said, "Please don't cry for Yehudis- She is going straight to Gan Eden. She is with Hashem." Containing his own anguish, the youngster continued, "Don't cry. She is with all the tzaddikim (righteous ones)."

Those who heard Menachem's high-pitched voice fought to hold back tears as he concluded,

"She was my best friend, but I am happy for her that now she is in Gan Eden and is healthy." A week later, the school faculty decided to have a memorial service for the beloved Yehudis, Parents and students were invited to the auditorium, where they were to be addressed by the principal and a psychologist who would discuss how to cope with the loss of such a young child.

When everyone had gathered in the crowded auditorium, the speakers addressed the assemblage in comforting tones. When the principal announced the end of the assembly, Menachem stood up and called out from the back row, "I would like to say something for my friend Yehudis."

Startled, everyone turned around and looked at the blind, crippled boy leaning on the chair in front of him. It was common knowledge that Yehudis had been an enormous support to Menachem.

The principal knew that she could not deny Menachem this opportunity, and so she turned to him and announced, "Please, Menachem, we would be delighted to hear what you wish to say," Down the center aisle Menachem made his way slowly and laboriously towards the podium. His father walked with him and guided him up the three steps to the little stage.

Before we finish the story, let us briefly discuss one inspiration thought from the Torah this week. In this week's Torah Portion Pinchas, we read about the last counting of the Bnai Yisroel (the Jews) in the desert. Why did Hashem need to count the Jews, did Hashem not know how many they were? The answer is perhaps the following: every Jew counts. Rashi brings a parable in this regard, one who holds a valuable object in his pocket will constantly check to make sure that it is there. Thus is Hashem's love for the Jewish people. The Talmud brings that Hashem as it were, wears tefillin. Asks the Talmud, what is written on Hashem's tefillin? "And who is like you Yisroel, a [unique] Nation in the land..."

Menachem took his position by the podium, steadied himself, and turned his head first sideways and then upward. He began the words no one had ever heard him say before or even realized he knew: "Yisgadai, v'yiskadash Shemey Rabba ..." Slowly and tediously he finished the entire Kaddish. It was all he wanted to say. Menachem couldn't see that everyone wept. (Along the Maggid's Journey, p.76 Rabbi Peysach Krohn) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**