

Discovering the HASC Center, Inc.'s Binuryni – בניורני Program

After the Monroe-based Chazak support group organizer who had been coordinating meetings in Williamsburg returned home, a couple in Williamsburg realized that there was an entire community of parents around them with special-needs children who were lacking a support system like Chazak.

Avraham Chaim and Esther Mirel Kraus had joined the support groups run by Chazak in their search for *chizuk* as they came to terms with their own young daughter's diagnosis. When the Chazak-led groups came to an end, the Krauses recognized that just as they had a need for the *chizuk* offered by this type of group, so did the many others who had attended — and so they took over and formed their own organization, which they dubbed Binuryni — “Our Young Ones.” HASC Center, Inc., a renowned not-for-profit agency that provides services for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities and their families, graciously took on the responsibility of overseeing the organization and provided the necessary funding; and in a clear stroke of *hashgachah pratis*, Avraham Chaim Kraus is now a valued member of the HASC Center's professional team.

Binuryni of Williamsburg offers a variety of support groups that take place on a regular basis. Many are monthly, with special speakers and events scheduled periodically. At times special “lunch dates” are held, enabling mothers to bring young children or babies along with them.

“Binuryni is here to help peo-

ple, to allow parents to communicate with other parents of kids with special needs,” explains Esther Mirel Kraus. “We have events where we introduce a panel of parents to discuss certain issues, we bring doctors and other health professionals, and we do all that we can to provide both educational and emotional support to the many parents who need us. We also provide sibling support groups for elementary-school children, which was virtually unheard of before. We are there to share experiences and be *mechazek* each other and, *baruch Hashem*, we are successful.”

Last year, Bracha Lavrinoff, the young mother of an adorable little girl with Down syndrome from Boro Park, approached Mrs. Kraus and asked, “Don't you think we have enough parents in Boro Park and Flatbush to warrant our own group, so we don't have to keep schlepping to Williamsburg?”

“Certainly,” replied Mrs. Kraus. “Would you like to coordinate it?”

Mrs. Lavrinoff considered it, and then decided it would be a fitting *zechus l'iluy nishmas* her son, Pesach Aharon ben Naftali, z”l, who was *niftar* last year. And so, Binuryni of Flatbush and Boro Park was born.

At this time, Binuryni of Boro Park and Flatbush has three different support groups: one for parents of children with Down syndrome, one for parents of children with autistic-spectrum disorders, and one for parents of children with multiple disabilities. Each group currently has one evening meeting per month.

Apart from the regular meetings she arranges, Mrs. Lavrinoff also coordinates special events, such as an upcoming gathering on June 17 that will feature Jason Kingsley and Mitchell Levitz, two young men with Down syndrome who penned the book *Count Us In: Growing Up With Down Syndrome*.

This year's annual *melaveh malkah* was a combined event for the Williamsburg and Boro Park-Flatbush Binuryni groups, featuring (alongside other entertainment) renowned *meshpia* Harav Binyomin Eisenberger, although Mrs. Lavrinoff says that as her groups grow, they will likely hold their own annual events. While the support groups at this time are for women only, the *melaveh malkah* was for both men and women.

“These events are not fundraisers,” stresses Mrs. Lavrinoff. “HASC Center completely covers all our expenses, and our meetings are held in the HASC Center building at 42nd Street and Ft. Hamilton. These evenings are solely to provide *chizuk* to our parents.”

When asked how parents find out about the meetings and when and where to attend, Mrs. Lavrinoff explains that due to issues of confidentiality, she cannot contact parents at the request of friends or family members, but she does ask therapists of various agencies to inform their clients about Binuryni's services.

“It's basically word of mouth, although if I'm walking down the street and I see someone with a child who has Down syndrome, at first I'm surprised, because I thought I knew everyone with

special children in Brooklyn!” Mrs. Lavrinoff laughs. “Then I'll approach them and explain that I, too, have a child with Down syndrome, and I'll give them the information about our meetings and tell them I hope to see them there.” Not everyone takes her up on it, but so far no one has seemed to mind the gesture, and she usually receives an extremely positive reaction.

“Our last meeting was for parents of children with Down syndrome up to age 5, and we had fourteen mothers show up,” says Mrs. Lavrinoff. “And our last group for parents of autistic children had thirteen attendees. Each group meets once a month, so at this point I'm organizing three meetings a month on a regular basis.”

Mrs. Lavrinoff says she never saw herself running an organization of this kind, but she adds, “Obviously, the way *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has directed my life has had a lot to do with it. As with everything, *hashgachah* has played a clear role, because I have a master's degree in rehab counseling, which I earned long before I had any children. Hashem was good to me and gave me that background so that I am successfully able to run group meetings.”

Is there any marked difference in the parents as a result of the meetings?

“Definitely. We're clearly filling a void, providing *chizuk* where it is desperately needed. The meetings provide a forum where parents can just sit and exchange information and benefit from feeling that everyone around

them understands where they're coming from.

“One of the hardest things people in trying situations have to deal with is feeling that the general public doesn't understand them. In our meetings, they can share the small — and large — accomplishments they may have achieved, and feel secure in the knowledge that the others truly feel what they're feeling. We share experiences and are *mechazek* one another. In that way, we're providing a tremendous *chessed*, *baruch Hashem*.”

Will Binuryni expand its target group anytime soon?

“I'm definitely willing,” Mrs. Lavrinoff replies. “I recently had a call from a woman who heard about the autism-spectrum group and was looking for a support group for parents of children with Asperger's syndrome. I told her that if she gets a group of people together, I'd be more than happy to run it.”

It is a well-known dictum that Hashem distributes life's *nisyonos* according to the way He deems those on the receiving end can handle them. Avraham Chaim and Esther Mirel Kraus and Bracha Lavrinoff have not only met the challenges dealt them with grace and dignity, they have risen above their personal situations to provide *chizuk* and support to an entire community.

May they continue to go *mei'chayil el chayil*, until a time when there is no longer a need for organizations like Binuryni.

For further information, please call Binuryni @ HASC Center, Inc. at (718) 599-4272, ext. 2203.

Jerusalem Rabbi Who Met Pres.

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Peixotto, a descendent of colonial Sephardic Jewry, was the grandson of Moses Levi Maduro Peixotto (1767 – 1828), who served as Hazzan of Congregation Shearith Israel of New York from 1816 to 1828. His father was Dr. Daniel Levy Maduro Peixotto (1800 – 1843), a well-known physician.

There were other contenders for the position and few expected Rabbi Schneerson's efforts to be successful. However, on July 8, 1870, the *Jewish Messenger* reported Peixotto's confirmation by the Senate in this unsalaried post.

Peixotto left San Francisco on November 2, 1870, and sailed from New York seven weeks later. He finally arrived in Bucharest on February 11, 1871. Rabbi Aaron J. Messing of San Francisco trumpeted the diplomatic feat achieved in Washington in the European Hebrew and Yiddish press. His words must have been music to Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Schneerson's ears, for he had again accomplished what many thought impossible! Rabbi Schneerson was given full credit for the historic appointment.

The First Proto-Israeli Diplomat

Rabbi Schneerson eventually returned to Jerusalem, becoming an American citizen before his departure from the United States. He died in South Africa in 1881 or 1882 while on a mission to collect funds for the needy in Israel. He had one son, Moshe, and two daughters. There is no record of any grandchildren.

In most of his talks, Rabbi Schneerson stressed the idea that the Jews would soon be given control of Eretz Yisrael. He proposed plans for the return of the Jews in large numbers to Eretz Yisrael and for the building of viable Jewish agricultural communities there.

At the time, many felt that his proposals were mere dreams, but we know from a historical perspective that his proposals were indeed achievable.

Rabbi Schneerson became convinced that “the Stars and Stripes would be a banner protecting the oppressed people of Israel.”

His success in influencing the appointment of a new consul to Jerusalem and a Jewish consul in Bucharest, Romania, made him the first proto-Israeli diplomat.

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Yeshivah Bonim Lamokom Brings in Prominent Doctors

By Mindy Schlafrig

This year, Rabbi Moshe Klein, a secular studies teacher at Yeshivah Bonim Lamokom, launched an exciting science project called “About the Human Body” with his special-education students. Hoping to give his students a new awareness of the wonders of their own bodies, Rabbi Klein also intended to provide important lessons about safe and healthy living. Little did he know just how far this project would take them!

The project started off with classroom posters and review sheets. It then took a huge leap when Rabbi Klein began contacting a number of prominent physicians, asking them to find time in their heavy schedules to visit the students and bring their studies to life. To his delight, these generous doctors were eager to participate in the project.

Ear, nose, and throat specialist Dr. Anthony Vastola of Maimonides Medical Center visited Bonim Lamokom and gave the students a general review of the functions of these organs, along with safety precautions. The doctor established a wonderful rapport with the boys and enjoyed showing them some



Students from Rabbi Klein's Class at Yeshivah Bonim Lamokom with Chief Pediatric Pulmonologist, Dr. Gerald Loughlin.

tools of the trade, such as an endoscope, a lighted instrument that is used to look into the nose and throat.

Psychotherapist Moshe Zwolinski, a recognized mental health and addictions expert, explained the role of the nervous system in a person's daily functioning and demonstrated how the brain sends messages to all parts of the body. Dr. Zwolinski was noticeably impressed with the boys' attention and absorption of the material.

Another special guest was Dr. Gerald Loughlin, a leading authority on children's respira-

tory disorders and chief pediatrician at New York Weill Cornell Children's Hospital of New York-Presbyterian Hospital. The boys learned a lot about the respiratory system that day, and the esteemed pulmonologist remarked that he was inspired by their interest and infectious enthusiasm.

Rabbi Klein plans to call in other physicians when the boys finish their study of the heart and digestive systems. He and his students are very grateful to the kindhearted medical professionals who took the time to make a significant contribution to their curriculum.