montana's jewish voice

B"H Issue #55
Happy Chanukah!
Chanukah 5787 / December 2026

5-MINUTE DOUGHNUTS

by Rivky Markossian

A THERAPIST, WHAT FOR?

by Rabbi Chaim Bruk

THE MODERN SUPER-MOM

by Chavie Bruk





DEAR FRIENDS,

In 2017, a Jew named David who was visiting the area sent me a Facebook message that read, "Hi Rabbi. Nice to e-meet you. I was happy to see there is a small but thriving Jewish community in Bozeman. I saw the nice Menorah during Hanukkah on Main Street."

It warmed my heart.

Each year during Chanukah, we get lovely regards from locals and visitors alike who appreciate the menorah on Main Street, at the Bozeman Airport, at the Livingston Depot, on the roof of my car and, of course, from our colleagues around the state who have menorahs at the airports in Missoula and Kalispell, as well as in Whitefish, Billings, Hamilton, Great Falls and elsewhere.

There is a warmth that fills the Jewish soul when they see the candles ignited in public, but it's not just Jews. So many gentiles are infused with hope and optimism when they see Jews celebrating their faith in public and when the eternal candles of the menorah brighten the dark nights of winter.

David is now a friend and supports the growth of Jewish light across Montana; it all started with a walk on Main Street.

At a time when we are witnessing the spread of darkness, it's vital that we spread more light. Place a menorah at the window of your home, at your workplace, or bring one to your kid's class; more and more light. More and more Jewish pride.

We don't duck and hide; we rise and shine!

A *lichtigen* Chanukah to you and yours,

Rabbi Chaim Bruk

MONTANA'S JEWISH VOICE

Quarterly Publication by Chabad-Lubavitch of Montana

A mashup of thoughts, ideas, news, and stories from this unique outpost of Jewish life in the West. Remote Jewish communities are as old as time, but this remote Jewish community is young, vibrant, and growing. Our saga draws on age-old Jewish values, quintessential Western grit, and the idealistic fire of five Chabad families. Curious, complex, and committed, they model the highs and lows of being human, the relevance of being Jewish, and a simmering, lasting courage to persevere.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Your issue of Montana's Jewish Voice for Rosh Hashanah was, in my view, one of your best. I was especially impressed with Chavie's story about her visit to Nova in Israel, her courage, and her heartfelt thoughts. Rabbi Chaim's reminder to us about the importance of "Time Management" was timely and to the point. It was hard to not empathize with Estee's life journey, and how she found peace in Bozeman. Dr. Shani's remembrance of his conversations with the Rebbe was fascinating, especially the Rebbe's insight concerning naming a hospital 'The house of healing' rather than 'The house of the sick.' Keep up the good work. Chazak and Shanah tovah!

Uri Barnea, Billings



HOLIDAY GUIDE

Chanukah 5787/2026

Friday, December 4, 2026 -
Saturday, December 12, 2026

What Is Chanukah?

Chanukah is an eight-day "festival of lights," celebrated with nightly menorah lighting, special prayers, and fried foods. The Hebrew word Chanukah means "dedication," because it celebrates the rededication of the Holy Temple.

History of Chanukah

In the second century BCE, the Holy Land of Israel was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks), who tried to force the people of Israel to accept Greek culture and beliefs instead of mitzvah observance and belief in G-d. Against all odds, a small band of faithful but poorly armed Jews, led by Judah the Maccabee, defeated one of the mightiest armies on earth, drove the Greeks from the land, reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and rededicated it to the service of G-d.

When they sought to light the Temple's menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum), they found only a single cruse of olive oil that escaped contamination by the Greeks. Miraculously, the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity. To commemorate and publicize these miracles, the sages instituted the festival of Chanukah.

The Menorah Lighting

At the heart of the festival is the nightly menorah lighting. Both men and women are obligated to light the Chanukah menorah or to participate in the household menorah lighting. Children should be encouraged to light their own menorahs.

The menorah holds nine flames, one of which is the shamash ("attendant"), which is used to kindle the other eight lights. On the first night, we light just one flame. On the second night, an additional flame is lit. By the eighth night of Chanukah, all eight lights are kindled.

On Friday afternoon, care must be taken to light the menorah before Shabbos candles are lit. This applies both to the first night of Chanukah, Friday, December 4, and the eighth night, Friday, December 11. Additional oil or larger candles should be used for the Chanukah lights to make sure they will last a full half hour after nightfall. On Saturday evening, December 5, one must wait until Shabbos has ended before preparing and lighting the menorah for the second night of Chanukah.

Where to Place the Menorah

Many have the custom to place the menorah in a doorway opposite the mezuzah (such is the custom of Chabad-Lubavitch) so that the two mitzvos of mezuzah and Chanukah surround the person. Others place it on a windowsill facing a public thoroughfare.

Setting Up the Menorah

The Chanukah lights should consist of lamps or candles. The ideal way to fulfill the mitzvah is with cotton wicks in olive oil or beeswax candles; paraffin candles or other types of candles or lamps are acceptable, but not gas lights or electric lights.

The lamps or candles should be arranged in a straight row and should be of equal height. The shamash, the "servant" candle that kindles the other lights, should be placed apart from the rest, either by placing it higher or outside the row of the other candles.

When to Light Your Menorah

The Chanukah lights are kindled in the evening preceding each of the eight days of Chanukah. The custom of many communities is to light the menorah shortly after sunset; other communities light it at nightfall. In either case, the menorah must contain enough fuel at the time of the lighting to burn until thirty minutes after nightfall.

Sitting by the Lights

For the first half hour when the candles are burning, it is customary to sit by the candles and tell stories relating to the holiday. Work should not be done in the proximity of the burning candles. Women have a custom to refrain from household work during the half hour that the lights are burning, to honor the brave Jewish women who played a significant role in the Chanukah story.

THE KABBALAH OF FIRE

In Chassidic thought, fire is more than a source of light. It is one of the deepest symbols of the soul. King Solomon writes, "*Ner Hashem Nishmas Adam*," "The soul of man is the candle of G-d." Just as a flame is never still, the soul is never truly satisfied with simply remaining where it is. Something within it is always reaching higher.

Look closely at a flame. Most things in the physical world are drawn downward, toward the earth. Fire is different. A flame constantly strains upward, as though seeking to escape the very wick that sustains it. Even when the candle is tilted, the flame turns toward the heavens. *Chassidus* explains that this reflects the deepest desire of the *neshamah*: to rise beyond the limitations of the physical world and reconnect with its Divine source.

Yet a flame cannot live on yearning alone. If it separates completely from its wick and fuel, it disappears. The soul, too, was not placed in this world merely to escape it. Chassidic teachings describe this tension as *ratzo v'shov,* "running and returning." *Ratzo* is the soul's desire to rise, to transcend, to come closer to G-d. *Shov* is its return to the world, recognizing that its purpose is to bring holiness precisely here, into everyday life.

This is the rhythm of Jewish life: to rise in prayer and return through action; to be inspired and then transform that inspiration into a mitzvah; to reach toward heaven while bringing heaven down to earth. The goal is not to abandon the physical world, but to illuminate it.

Fire also has a remarkable quality: one flame can ignite another without losing any of its own light. *Chassidus* sees in this a lesson about spiritual influence. When we share Torah, kindness, faith, or inspiration with another person, our own light is not diminished. One flame becomes two, then ten, then a hundred, while the original flame continues to burn.

This idea takes on special meaning on Chanukah. We begin with a single flame, but we never remain there. Each night we add another, reminding us that spiritual growth is not meant to stand still. What was enough yesterday becomes the starting point for today.

This is the movement of Chanukah: to rise, to return, and to kindle. Night after night, the light grows, until one small flame has become a menorah filled with light.





5-Minute Doughnuts

An original recipe by Rivky Markossian

Growing up in Brazil, these "bolinhos de chuva" were our version of instant doughnuts. On Chanukah, we had no patience to wait for yeast and rising time, so this is what we made at home. Crisp and golden outside, soft and fluffy inside, they come together in just minutes.



Ingredients

- 2 large eggs
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- Pinch of salt
- ½ cup milk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- Oil, for frying
- Sugar and cinnamon, for coating
- Caramel or chocolate sauce, for serving

Instructions

1. Whisk together the eggs, sugar, and salt. Add the milk and mix well.
2. Gradually add the flour, stirring until smooth. Fold in the baking powder. The batter should be thick and creamy, falling slowly from a spoon.
3. Heat the oil over medium heat to about 340°F.
4. Using two teaspoons, drop small portions of batter into the oil, frying only a few at a time.
5. Fry until puffed and evenly golden, turning as needed.
6. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain briefly on paper towels.
7. While still warm, roll generously in cinnamon sugar.
8. Serve immediately with caramel or chocolate sauce on the side for dipping.

Happy cooking!

Rivky



Dreidel: A Chanukah Game

On Chanukah, it is customary to play with a dreidel, a four-sided spinning top bearing the Hebrew letters nun, gimmel, hei and shin, standing for *nes gadol hayah sham*, "a great miracle happened there." The custom recalls the time when the Greeks forbade Jews from studying Torah. Jewish children would study secretly and, when Greek soldiers approached, play dreidel to disguise their learning.



Holiday Foods

Because of the great significance of oil in the Chanukah story, it is traditional to serve foods cooked in oil. Among the most popular Chanukah dishes are potato latkes (pancakes) and *sufganiot* (doughnuts). It is also customary to eat dairy foods on Chanukah, honoring the bravery of Yehudis, who killed the Greek general Holofernes by serving him wine and cheese. Once he fell into a drunken stupor, she beheaded him, thus ending the threat to her people.



Chanukah Gelt

It is traditional to give children Chanukah gelt (money), adding to the joy and festive spirit of the holiday. This custom also provides an opportunity to encourage children in acts of charity, teaching them the importance of giving some of their own gelt to tzedakah. Chanukah gelt should not be given on Shabbos.



Additional Chanukah Prayers

During the eight days of Chanukah, we add the Al HaNissim liturgy to the Amidah, the daily silent prayer, and the Grace After Meals. The complete Hallel prayer is also said in the morning service. A portion of the Torah is read daily in the synagogue during morning prayers.

HOW TO LIGHT THE MENORAH

1. Light the shamash candle and hold it in your dominant hand.
2. While standing, recite the appropriate blessings.
3. Light the newest (leftmost) candle first and continue lighting from left to right.
4. After kindling the lights, the Haneiros Halalu prayer is recited.

Blessings for Lighting the Menorah

On the first night of Chanukah, Friday, December 4, recite all three blessings.
On all subsequent nights, recite blessings 1 and 2.

1. Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ha-olam A-sher Ki-de-sha-nu Be-mitz-vo-tav Ve-tzi-va-nu Le-had-lik Ner Cha-nu-kah.

   Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.

2. Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ha-olam She-a-sa Ni-sim La-avo-tei-nu Ba-ya-mim Ha-hem Bi-z'man Ha-zeh.

   Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

3. Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ha-olam She-he-che-ya-nu Ve-ki-ye-ma-nu Ve-hi-gi-a-nu Liz-man Ha-zeh.

   Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.



Friday, December 4	Saturday, December 5	Sunday, December 6
Monday, December 7	Tuesday, December 8	Wednesday, December 9
Thursday, December 10	Friday, December 11	

totally unexpected!

THE MODERN SUPER-MOM

By Chavie Bruk
Adapted from Totally Unexpected!
Originally published April 28, 2026

It's 20 degrees, snowing and windy, and I'm standing outside watching Chana Laya's first ever soccer game.

A few hours earlier, Menny had a soccer game (while I was teaching Tanya), so we divided and conquered: Chaim Shaul went to Menny's game, and I went to Chana Laya's.



It's the first year that we have two kids in soccer, so I have no idea how this is going to play out.

While I was standing there in the cold, freezing my TUCHUS off, I was thinking about the conversation I had with my book buddy, Elin Cohen, on my podcast. We talked about attending sports games and the narrative around that. What does it mean to be a good mom? Oh boy, does society have ideas about that.

It's really nice and dandy before we have kids to have an idea of what kind of mother we want to be, and what constitutes a mom who is present and involved.

I'm never going to yell.

We are going to eat healthy and limit sugar.

I'll be at every sports game.

I'm only going to breastfeed.

No screens.

You get the idea. The list goes on.

In truth, it rarely goes how we imagine.

Over the years, while Menny played every sport available and I wasn't at every game, I had to reckon with how I feel about it, and the judgment we face or put on ourselves. I am a good, supportive, and involved mom. I facilitate all my kids' extracurricular activities by holding down the fort at home with the other kids, making dinner, filling water bottles, etc.

Moms are inundated with so much information. Do this, don't do this. Parent this way, don't parent that way... it's a lot of noise.

The expectations put on mothers (and fathers) these days are immense.

Be a friend.

Be a parent.

Make sure you spend time with them (one-on-one, no less).

Make sure they have the skills to be independent.

Make sure that they respect you.

Free expression is vital.

Be at every game.

Have a home-cooked dinner ready and waiting on schedule.

We are expected to do it all, and it's overwhelming; it was meant to take a village.

And yes, all this was going through my head at the soccer game. What can I say? Philosophy is in my blood.

Bottom line: if you're asking yourself whether you are a good mom or not, then congratulations, you're on the right track. You care, you think about it, and you're doing your best.

You'll know in your heart of hearts if you're a good parent (and you'll also know if you're being honest with yourself). Don't let anyone else's ideas determine that for you.

Will I be at every soccer game? No, I will not. But you know what I do have? I have a village, and they show up. The community we have in Bozeman is family, and there is always someone showing up for the games and so much more. They will always have someone cheering for them on the sidelines, and they will always have me, their biggest cheerleader, whether I'm at the game or at home.

Love,
Chavie

Subscribe for free at www.totallyunexpected.blog to get Chavie's musings in your inbox every Tuesday.

ONLY IN MONTANA
































ON BEING HUMAN

A Therapist, What for?

By Rabbi Chaim Bruk

It just wasn't a thing.

I don't think I ever heard the word "therapist" or "psychologist" during my childhood. If it did exist in our beloved Jewish-Orthodox bubble, it wasn't commonplace. We went to doctors for medical issues, accountants for financial issues, rabbis for spiritual issues, especially in our community, where we could receive guidance directly from the Rebbe, of blessed memory (he passed away in 1994), yet skipped out on the emotional and mental care that was needed, and in some cases, needed desperately.



Until I was thirty-five years old, I never worked with a therapist. Chavie would graciously encourage me to perhaps seek counseling and guidance, but I would pooh-pooh it with a narrative that went something like this: "Me? A therapist? What can they do for me? What a waste of time! Why would I listen to some person babbling random ideas as if they know what I am going through on the inside?" I was convinced that therapy was for "others," not for me. Yet in 2017, it all changed. At that point, we had adopted four children and were about to adopt our fifth; life was starting to feel super chaotic; I was trying to balance an incredible workload and my family responsibilities; the kids needed me to show up in many areas of life with which I was unfamiliar; and I needed an objective source to help me be the best father and husband possible.

Almost ten years ago, I made the choice: I walked into my therapist's office, and, as a result, my life has improved exponentially. No, they don't do magic or give me pills to pop. No, they don't mix into anything religious because at my first meeting I made it clear that I will not tolerate any commentary or questioning of my Jewish faith. No, they don't just listen and make me feel good by affirming my thoughts, which at times are totally imaginative and anxiety-induced. They hold me accountable, tell me when I am misguided, hold my feet to the fire, and help me see things from Chavie's viewpoint and from the kids' viewpoint. It helps me create work/home boundaries, congregant/rabbi boundaries, and to dig deep into my subconscious to find answers to why I am feeling what I am feeling and seeing things the way I do.

Chavie and I have spiritual mentors, what we call a *Mashpia*. We also have a *Rav*. A *Mashpia* is the person we call when we have a question that pertains to the spirituality of our home and marriage, questions associated with the individual spiritual journeys of our children, and for the things that demand clarity and that we would've asked the Rebbe about if he were alive. A *Rav*, our Rabbi, is the Halachic authority whom we call when we have a Halachic question pertaining to Jewish law. Does this bowl need to be re-Koshered? Based on a variety of circumstances, is tonight the "Mikvah night" or tomorrow? Should we have a *Mechitzah*, a partition, between men and women at Menny's Bar Mitzvah? What can Zeesy eat on Passover with her medical condition?

Yet, we also have questions about emotions. How does trauma play a role in a person's life and their outlook/decision-making? What does attachment look like in a parent/child relationship and how does that play out with adopted children? How

should we interact with a child that is doing something out of whack with our Torah values? What should we do with an unpleasant congregant who wants to suck all the oxygen out of the community? Is it okay to mourn losing my mom sixteen years after she passed?

I wake up every single morning and study Torah. I study *Chassidus* in Toras Menachem, study Talmud (currently wrapping up Sanhedrin), study Rambam (three chapters each day), study Chumash/Tanya/Hayom Yom (known as *Chitas*), recite Psalms (Tehilim), and I love every minute of it. I don't think a Jew can survive in today's world without heavy doses of Chassidic thought and Talmudic wisdom, which guide us to be spiritually anchored and live with Divine serenity. I have been teaching a Tanya class since January, and, for me, it's been life-altering. Though I taught it back in 2009–2012, it's not the same, because I am not the same. Therapy has forced me to do a lot of work, inner pondering and searching, assessing what matters in life and what doesn't, reminding me why I see things a certain way, and focusing on the genetics/epigenetics and on childhood nurture. So, learning Tanya now is being experienced with a clearer mind and heart, a heart that isn't burdened by past perspective, a mind that was warped with a black-and-white understanding of the human condition; it's impacting me strongly.

Some people claim that they don't need therapy; they say that spirituality takes care of all their inner challenges. I applaud them, I am slightly envious of them, and I hope, for their sake, that it's true and not delusional. For me, I have found therapy to be a great blessing in my life and it teaches me to take the ideas of *Bittul* (transcendence of self), *Chinuch* (education of our children) and *Avodas HaKlal* (public service) to a place that is practical, healthier and infused with compassion, sensitivity and structure.

I am glad that my therapist isn't a yes person, telling me what I want to hear. I don't want a *Mashpia, Rav*, trainer or therapist who makes me feel good at the expense of my growth. If a doctor told me that I wasn't overweight, I'd be offended by their lie. If a travel agent told me that Newark never has delays and that Spirit is a good airline, I'd be offended by their lie. If Chavie said that I was never annoying or insensitive, I'd be offended by her lie. So, if a therapist tells me, "You're 100% right, Chaim," I would run for the hills. I need people in my life who will hold me accountable and allow me to constantly grow into a better version of myself.

I am grateful to Chavie for the push, and I am grateful to my therapist for the journey.

Higher and higher.

P.S. If you haven't yet, purchase "Letters for Life" from Rabbi Levi Shmotkin to learn more from the Rebbe's approach to this valuable topic.

CHOSEN COMIC





JEWS OF THE WEST

Compassion Is Our Heritage

An interview with Janet Tatz
by Elie Benhiyoun

Home at the Synagogue & On the Lake

For the first eight or nine years of my life, I lived right on the lake in Chicago, in one of those beautiful three-story brick buildings. People think of Chicago as a city, but the lakefront makes it feel unbounded. I loved it.

My grandfather came from a large family in Lithuania and helped bring relatives to America. Most settled in Chicago, where he worked in real estate. In the early 1950s, when Jews were barred from certain buildings, he bought property in East Rogers Park so Jewish families could live near B'nai Zion, the synagogue he had helped establish.

Eventually, my family moved a few blocks away, and B'nai Zion became like a second home. My dad was its president and my mom started the Golden Agers program for seniors. I remember being there as a preschooler. There was a sign on the wall that read, "Compassion is our heritage." That really stuck with me.

Most of the kids at my public school were Jewish, and the schools closed for the Jewish holidays. We spent summers with family at my great-grandparents' house in Michiana, across from the lake, and my siblings and I went to Camp Maccabee in northern Wisconsin, the same camp my father had attended. Unless it was stormy, we held services outdoors led by a man we called Uncle Ben. He taught us that being Jewish wasn't only something you learned about, it was fun.

Later, I spent a summer in Israel with USY, often praying outdoors. I found a wonderful way of relating to G-d and to nature at the same time. When I think about the long, roundabout way I reached Montana, I give those experiences a lot of credit.

In the Forest & Mountains

When I was in kindergarten, a little boy came up to hug me and accidentally tore my dress. I knew he meant no harm, but the next thing I knew, he was no longer coming to school. I could see how quickly a child who was different could be pushed aside. I think that's part of why I was always drawn to people on the outskirts.



Janet Tatz on a forest trail.

I studied special education at Boston University, and found a Jewish community at Hillel. After graduating in 1971, I moved to the Bay Area to work with children with disabilities, many of whom were still being kept at home rather than educated in public schools. I loved going to their homes because I got to know the whole family.

Then one day, an educational research assignment for the University of California, Berkeley, sent me to Moscow, Idaho. When I got there, I thought, "Wow, if I lived here, I could be in the forest and the mountains all the time."

So I moved.

I continued teaching and earned a master's degree in adaptive physical education and therapeutic recreation, bringing together two things I cared about deeply: helping people and being active outdoors.

That training brought me to Boulder, Montana, in 1979, where I taught and did recreation therapy at the state institution. Eventually, a longer position opened and I stayed. I was working full time, but it felt like I was on vacation all the time. I could cross-country ski to work in the morning, then carry my skis home after the snow melted.



Janet Tatz with her friend Chaya Semple at Chabad's tenth-anniversary dinner.

During those years, I met my husband, Dave, and we lived on twelve acres outside Boulder. The owner of a Hot Springs in town that I loved was Jewish so we gathered there for Seders and even a Jewish wedding. Once, Chabad yeshiva students traveling through Montana visited us, and I remember how amazed they were by all the stars.

One Town with a Long Main Street

When Dave went back to school, we moved to Missoula. By then I had a son, and Jewish community mattered in a new way. I went to meet the local synagogue president, and it was like, "Hello, how are you? Do you want to become president?" Before long, that's exactly what happened.

Later, when we moved to Helena, people were gathering for Shabbat dinners, a Seder and a Chanukah party, but not much else. I began adding holiday programs, gatherings for seniors and Jewish education for children. I had grown up with so much Jewish knowledge that I barely thought of it as unique, but in Montana, it became something I could offer.

I helped establish two statewide Hadassah chapters, one for Montana and one for Wyoming, and helped form the Montana Association of Jewish Communities, MAJCO. We gathered for *Shabbatons* and created opportunities for Jews scattered across the state to find one another.

I first met Rabbi Chaim in the early 2000s, when he was still a young yeshiva student visiting Jewish communities around the state. After he and Chavie settled in Bozeman, our paths continued to cross in different parts of Jewish life in Montana. One of those places was Intermountain Children's Home.

I spent ten years there as the Jewish educator. It brought together two parts of my life that had always mattered deeply to me: working with children and families, and sharing the Judaism I loved. I taught children from around the country, celebrated holidays with them and prepared them for bar and bat mitzvahs. Rabbi Chaim would also come to meet with the children, and even organized this one boy, Michael's bar mitzvah celebration in Helena.

When my parents could no longer live alone in Chicago, I brought them to Helena. Their whole lives had revolved around Jewish people and the synagogue, so Rabbi Chaim's visits meant a great deal to them. He has a special place in his heart for older people and made a point of stopping whenever he came through town, even if only for a short visit. He visited my dad, Irving, in the nursing home, and my mother, Beverly, loved being able to speak Yiddish with him.

My mother had remained involved with B'nai Zion through its closing and helped decide what would happen to the synagogue's Judaica. We brought one of its Torahs to Montana and used it occasionally for bar and bat mitzvahs in Helena. Most of the time, though, it sat unused on a shelf. When Rabbi Chaim mentioned that Chabad could use another Torah, it felt right to give it a home where it would be read regularly. A Torah from the synagogue my grandfather had helped establish, and where my family had spent so much of its life, would continue serving Jewish people in Montana.

I also love connecting with Chabad across the state. I'm so grateful for the connection I have with Rabbi Chezky and Rochi Vogel in Missoula and love watching their community grow. And I really enjoy studying with Rabbi Mendel and Devorah Leah Spiero in Great Falls.

What I appreciate about Chabad being in Montana is that it shows that Jewish life does not have to be confined to New York, Chicago or California. I love how Rabbi Chaim, Chavie and their children embrace the beautiful nature in Montana. They ski, ride horses and bicycles, and enjoy the outdoors without compromising their observance.

I've always thought of myself as a simple Jew, almost postdenominational. I'm open to different ways of being Jewish and feel the same way about politics. I don't think everything fits neatly into a binary of black and white. I am a strong supporter of Israel, not only of its right to exist, but of its right to flourish and defend itself. I appreciate that Rabbi Chaim is willing to speak openly and proudly about both Israel and Jewish identity.



Rochel Bruk-Banon with Beverly and Irving, 2005.

Since retiring, I have been trying to pass more of my Jewish community responsibilities to younger people. Partly I want more time to walk in the woods, study Torah and spend time with my granddaughter, but it is also important for the next generation to take over. I still maintain a statewide Jewish email list because, as we say, Montana is one town with a long Main Street.

I grew up where Jewish life was all around me. In Montana, I learned that sometimes you have to build it, carry it with you and pass it on.



OUR REBBE

Knowing Chicago's Ropes

Adapted from an interview with Mr. Frank Moscowitz on JEM's My Encounter Project

In 1969, after qualifying to become an elementary school principal, I was given my assignment, and it proved to be in a high-crime neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago.

I didn't know whether I should take it or not. I was apprehensive because it was the year after half of Chicago was burned down in the riots following Martin Luther King's assassination. There was a lot of anger in the air, and a lot of anti-white anger. And here I would be replacing a black principal in a predominantly black school, at a time when only 8 out of 400 principals in the Chicago school system were African-American.

Was this a wise thing to do? I wasn't sure, and so I decided to go to New York and get the Rebbe's advice.

What happened in that audience with the Rebbe only intensified the awe and admiration I already had for him. It was a very special audience.



The Lubavitcher Rebbe, OBM

I asked the Rebbe a very serious question pertaining to my future: "Shall I accept this assignment in the heart of an African-American neighborhood or not?" But instead of answering me, the Rebbe responded with a question of his own: "Will Mayor Daley run for reelection?"

I didn't understand what he meant. I didn't see the connection to my question, but when he asked me this question a second time, I answered, "Yes, he will probably be mayor for the rest of his life." I was speaking about Mayor Richard J. Daley, the father of the recent mayor of Chicago, who did in fact die in office after serving as mayor of the city for 21 years.

Then the Rebbe came back to my original question and gave me this advice: "Ask the second-in-command."

I didn't understand what he meant, but that was the end of the subject. I went outside and my head was spinning. I had come all the way from Chicago for advice, and this was the advice the Rebbe gave me!

I went back home as puzzled as I had come. And so I decided to go up to central headquarters and talk the issue over with an old colleague, a non-Jew by the name of Guy Brunetti, who was the Director of Employee Relations. I said, "Guy, I don't know what I should do. What do you think?"

He told me, "Well, you will be replacing one of the few black principals in the whole system, but he is not being let go; he is being promoted. So it seems to me that it's okay for you to take that job. You won't be perceived as a white man having pushed out a black principal."

No sooner had he finished the sentence, when someone poked his head into the office and said, "Congratulations, Guy! The Board of Education in executive session downstairs has just voted to make you Assistant to the General Superintendent."

And, as I heard these words being spoken, a bright light went on in my head. At that moment I understood the Rebbe. Here I was asking advice of the second in command. And everything was absolutely clear.

The key factor was that Mayor Daley controlled everything. He was a law-and-order mayor, and he appointed the Board of Education. Of course, the superintendent and the assistant to the superintendent were all part and parcel of the same power structure. And then I realized that the Rebbe knew a lot more about Chicago than most Chicagoans. It all came together. So I did take that job, and I was there for 19 years until I retired.

Mr. Frank (Efrayim) Moscowitz worked in the Chicago public school system for 38 years. He was interviewed in January, 2009.

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