

From Tragedy to Triumph

Ohel Sarala Grants Hope to Singles

BY RABBI SHMUEL
KAMENETZKY

Tu B'Av is a *Yom Tov* that has always been a day of celebration of *shidduchim*. The last *Mishnah* in *Maseches Taanis* tells us how the young girls would go out to the fields and talk about the virtues they possessed, deeming them worthy of marriage to *Klal Yisroel's* finest. They would say, "Young man, do not place your eyes on beauty, but place your eyes on family," quoting the *posuk*, "*Sheker hachein v'hevel hayofi*." For thousands of years, this *Mishnah* has been the standard bearer for young men and women of the *am kadosh*, guiding them to the true virtues to look for in a spouse.

Yet, over the past decade, many young and perfectly qualified girls have been having a hard time finding their matches. Many have explored different theories as to why this particular situation came about, and many have offered solutions. *Rabbonim*, *askanim*, teachers and community leaders have spent hundreds of hours privately with their *talmidos* and congregants, and in discussion with other leaders, trying to find viable solutions to this difficult *parsha*.

Occasionally, hope can sprout from an unexpected source. Approximately two years

ago, Rabbi Shlomo Bochner, founder of Bonei Olam, the global organization that offers support to couples struggling with infertility, visited Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, who lamented that there are two major *tzaros* facing *Klal Yisroel* that keep him up at night: older girls who have not yet found their *zivugim* and couples struggling to bear children. Rav Shteinman explained that these two *tzaros* are connected to each other, so Sarah Imeinu only merited to give birth to Yitzchok after she gave Hagar to Avrohom to marry, stating, "*Ulai eibanah mimenah* - Maybe I will build from her." Rav Shteinman explained that enabling one to get married is a *zechus* to have a child. He said that if singles would share in the pain of the childless couples by providing much-needed funds for their treatments and by *davening* for them, they will surely merit a *yeshuah*.

Rabbi Bochner met Rabbi Aryeh Zev Ginzberg, *rov* of the Chofetz Chaim Torah Center in Cedarhurst, in the Catskills, where they were both spending the summer, and relayed Rav Shteinman's *vort* to him. When Rabbi Ginzberg heard it, he realized that this was what he was looking for to be an eternal *zikaron* and *zechus* for his beloved daughter, Sarala *a"h*. After losing their 17-year-old daughter Sarala to an illness, Rabbi and Mrs.

Ginzberg searched for a meaningful initiative to memorialize her.

As a *rov*, Rabbi Ginzberg has spent much time and effort comforting singles still searching for their *bashertes*, with the silent message of the *Mishnah* always on their lips. This idea was the perfect initiative to form a new partnership. Bonei Olam has a database of couples who are their beneficiaries. Besides money and services that Bonei Olam can provide, they entered into a holy alliance with Ohel Sarala to help provide *tefillah*. Foremost among the many programs and ideas they have implemented since Sarala's *petirah* is the establishment of this movement, enabling both older singles and childless couples to realize a *yeshuah* through the proven *segulah* of the *Gemara*. Ohel Sarala represents a renewed hope to young couples and singles, and is a fulfillment of the sacred mission of Rav Shteinman.

Rav Shteinman did not only state the problem. He gave us an opportunity. He saw the potential to bring out the greatness of the Jewish nation, an ability to use the *koach* of *tzedakah* and *tefillah* together with what makes our people unique - that we are *rachmonim* and *gomlei chassodim*, sharing each other's burdens and ultimately sharing each other's celebrations.

To date, with the *koach* of *tzedakah* and *tefillah*, Ohel Sarala has led to the engagements of numerous young men and women, empowering them to not only think about their own hardships, but to channel their energy, hope and aspirations toward others who suffer. The results of this initiative speak for themselves. The combined efforts and *tefillos* of these two seemingly disparate groups have yielded miraculous results. Over 135 single men and women have met their *bashertes*, and 41 children have been born to couples who were struggling with the pain of infertility. Many others still awaiting their own *simcha* have experienced renewed hope and see a possibility for rejoicing, which has in the past seemed unattainable.

Ohel Sarala serves as the "*shadchan*" between older singles and childless couples. In a discreet way, they provide the Hebrew names of husband and wife yearning for a child of their own to a single, and, in return, the couple receives the name of the single yearning to build a home. They *daven* for each other and channel their heartfelt pleas to the *Ribono Shel Olam* - not for themselves, but for each other.

In addition, the single donates any amount that they are capable of to Bonei Olam to be used towards medical expenses needed by the



Rav Shlomo Bochner with Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman.



Rav Aryeh Zev Ginzberg with Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman.

couple. This arrangement not only gives each member of the Ohel Sarala community the *tefillos* and the *brocha* of Rav Shteinman, but the support and encouragement they need, knowing that there is another Jew out there who cares for them and is *davening* for them.

“The most painful aspect for any parent upon the loss of a child is that their child will be forgotten by everyone else except for them,” explains Rabbi Ginzberg. “Ohel Sarala changed that dynamic.”

All the identities are greatly respected. At first, obviously some single girls were skeptical about joining.

“I was in *shidduchim* for a while,” said Rachel, a participant, “And I was always looking for a *segulah*. When I joined Ohel Sarala, I received the names of a childless couple. I made a donation to Bonei Olam in their *zechus* and then I *davened* for them every day. I kept these names in my *tefillos* every day, and they became part of my family and part of my life. Of course, *tefillah* is greater than any *segulah*. I did not who they were, but I felt a deep connection to them. Over the next few months, I received many group emails from Ohel Sarala updating all the members on the *simchos*. One day, I received a personal email. I opened it up, and to my surprise and excitement, I read that the woman I was *davening* for daily was expecting! I couldn’t believe that it was actually real and that I was part of it! I told everyone who wanted to listen to me that this program is amazing. I saw the results myself! It was an indescribable feeling. I was actually a part of someone’s *yeshuah*.”

Ohel Sarala has been a lifeline for those women being counseled by Bonei Olam as well.

“I found out about Ohel Sarala from my counselor at Bonei Olam,” Aliza, Rachel’s “partner,” relates. “She presented it as an opportunity for me to *daven* for someone else, and she in return would *daven* for me, so we can help each other out. A few months later, when I found out that I was expecting, I asked my counselor to share the good news with my ‘partner.’ She asked me if I still want to be part of the recitation of *Tehillim*, and of course I agreed. Ohel Sarala helped me so much to come to this point and I surely wanted to continue.”

“I hope that the *zechus* of my *tzedakah* and my *tefillos* carried her through all the difficult times she endured,” Rachel said. “I know that when I was praying for her, I prayed the same way that I would pray for my own family and friends. I hope that my *tefillos* were part of her *yeshuah*.”

A few months later, Rachel became a *kallah*. “I couldn’t wait to tell my friends at Ohel Sarala that I was a *kallah*. They were surely an integral part of my journey!”

Ohel Sarala was rapidly expanding and bearing fruit. At first, the emails trickled in. A few weeks in, someone was expecting. A few weeks later, someone became a *kallah*. Then the emails started becoming more frequent. One *kallah* after another. A few more babies



A shul being built on Har Hazeisim to be called Ohel Sara.

were born. A few more pregnancies reported. The results were unbelievable.

“We feel that our beloved Sarala *a’h* is our partner in this endeavor,” said Rabbi Ginzberg.

After the first year of the program, 22 single girls who participated in the program were engaged or married, and eleven couples were expecting or had a child. Ohel Sarala was a success.

“It’s a *zechus*, it’s a *mitzvah*, it’s a *segulah*, and it’s the *ratzon* of a *tzaddik*, Rav Shteinman,” said Rabbi Bochner. “And when a *tzaddik* undertakes something, success is assured.”

After the first year, there was no slowing down. Slowly, but surely, singles were seeing *yeshuos* and more children were brought into this world. Rabbi and Mrs. Ginzberg knew that this was the perfect eternal memorial for their daughter, Sarala, who, while not *zoche* to build her own family, has been the inspiration for many to be *zoche* to just that. The Ohel Sarala members became like family to each other, even though their identities were unknown.

“From our initial discussion with Rabbi Bochner when the idea for Ohel Sarala was born through today, we have seen such *siyata diShmaya*,” Mrs. Ginzberg shares. “Everything just fell into place. Family members and friends who either have couples struggling with infertility or singles waiting to find their *bashertes* have joined together with Ohel Sarala, helping each other financially and with *tefillos*. Many of them call us after experiencing *yeshuos* to express their grati-

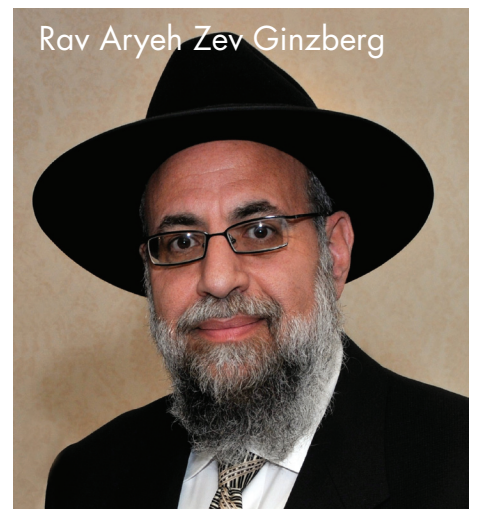
tude and emotions at how grateful they are to us for providing them with the impetus for this *segulah* from Rav Shteinman.”

Word got out about Ohel Sarala. Bonei Olam set up a website and email address for Ohel Sarala where potential members can sign up and receive updates. Many singles who were already in despair, having tried *segulah* after *segulah*, heard about this program and realized that this was something different. There is nothing as powerful as *tefillah*, and nothing as unstoppable as *tefillos* on behalf of another.

In May of this year, Ohel Sarala celebrated a milestone. Since its inception, 100 girls have become *kallahs* through the *tefillos* of its members. “Seeing the fruits of our labor has increased our motivation to not only continue this program, but to expand it as well,” Rabbi Ginzberg said.

The vision for the future is clear. This initiative is not only life-changing and life-creating, but it is a groundbreaking concept based on words of Chazal. The *tefillos davened* through this program are heartfelt, and Hashem is listening.

“We were searching to find something to provide us a *nechomah* and to bring eternal *zechusim* to our daughter,” Rabbi Ginzberg said. “The *Ribono Shel Olam* has given us the *zechus* to be a catalyst to realize the dreams of young members of *Klal Yisroel*, while providing us with this tremendous ‘learning experience,’ that no matter how bleak a situation may seem, we must *daven* and have *bitachon* and Hashem will surely answer.”



Rav Aryeh Zev Ginzberg

