

# The Road



# לכתוב ונלכת

Tobi Einhorn



## A conversation with Rebbetzin Dinah Fink

*My interview with Rebbetzin Dinah Fink brought back many memories, as I worked with her many years ago in Machon Bais Yaakov. We taught on the same floor for eight years, which gave me the opportunity to develop a lasting friendship with her. What struck me when we spoke now was that her commitment to her standards and values has remained as obvious as it was many years ago. Since we first met, Dinah has gone on to become a household name beloved by women and girls throughout the world. Who hasn't heard of Rebbetzin Dinah Fink?*

## Rebbetzin Fink, you have achieved widespread recognition for your work in *chinuch*. How did it all start?

I grew up in England, and after attending sem in Gateshead, I just assumed I would marry and live a happy life in my beloved country. One day, my father, Harav Ben Tzion Blau, *zt"l*, met a wonderful boy who was exceptional in learning. He was very impressed with him and came home beaming.

"Dinah," he said, "I found a *shidduch* for you!" When I heard that the boy was from America, I was mortified. I absolutely refused to hear of it. I was not going to live in America! You have to understand that the English impression of America in the '80s was not very favorable. Americans were considered spoiled, materialistic, rude people, and I was terrified that I would change for the worse.

I told my father, "I can't go there. I'm going to be ruined!"

My father assured me, "They won't teach you, Dinah; you'll teach them. They won't influence you; you'll influence them." He had trust in me and believed in me. He told me, "You go where Hashem sends you. You don't know what's *bashert* for you. The world does not begin and end with where you live."

I'll admit I cried a lot, but I knew he was right. I knew my parents wanted what would be best for my future, not necessarily what I wanted or thought was good. And that's an important lesson — you have to look toward the future.

So right after my wedding, I crossed the pond and came to the shores of America. In England,

I had an identity: I was Rav Blau's daughter. I was a successful teacher. I knew everyone. I went from being an established person to

feeling like a nobody with no identity. I had no one, except for my husband's wonderful family. I would walk the streets and think about how many people I didn't know.

My first two years were about survival. It was a total culture shock — the clothes, the homes, the speech, the lifestyle. It was so hard for me to understand the American mentality. I was so different, and I was miserable. Then I thought, "I will either sink or swim." I just made up my mind that I was going to make it.

My late mother-in-law gets a lot of credit for helping me through those difficult times. She encouraged me constantly to keep my standards and values. When I was offered a job in Manhattan where I would make \$400 a week (a very nice salary then), she told me, "You were a teacher in London and you'll be a teacher here." She promised my father that she would watch out for me and she did.

So, I taught math in elementary school, which I did not enjoy. I then went to Gur to teach *limudei kodesh* in high school. I taught in Gur and then added Machon, Sarah Schenirer and Manhattan High School and went on to teach for twelve years. I am now teaching in Bais Yaakov Intensive Seminary, for the past twenty years, Bobov Seminary and Shaarei Bina Seminary. Teaching was my anchor in America. I finally felt at home and that I belonged. I look back and see that Hashem did have a better plan for me than I had.

## You are the founder of Lechu V'Nelcha, a worldwide learning program for girls. How did it get started?

My high school graduates asked me to give a class for post-high-school girls. Initially I hesitated, but then in 1995, my father was delivering the keynote address as *nasi* of Agudas Yisroel at the Agudah Convention in Bournemouth, England, and about 20 minutes into his speech, he had a massive heart attack and was *niftar*. He was saying Torah until the last minute of his life.

I wanted to do something *l'iluy nishmaso*, so at the suggestion of the Pnei Menachem's Rebbetzin, we started a *shiur* on *Mesillas Yesharim* every Monday night. In the beginning, it was very small — sometimes six girls, sometimes ten. As word got out, the *shiur* grew and grew. Because I taught in Bais Yaakov



Australia  
Melbourn



South  
Africa



SPAIN  
Gibraltar



Seminary, I had the opportunity to meet many girls from all over. My former students wanted to have learning classes in their respective cities as well. So, I said, “Okay, we’ll open up a branch where you live.”

The official Lechu V’Nelcha program started 12 years ago, in 2006, and it has just mushroomed. We now have 40 branches all over the world; Paris, Australia, England, Montreal, Eretz Yisrael, Lakewood, New Square, Monsey, Los Angeles, Queens, just to mention a few.

## As told to Reizy Itzkowitz

*S.R., a current student at Lechu V’Nelcha, speaks:*

When I landed from sem on Wednesday, I had very clear direction that joining a *shiur* at least once a week was imperative. On Thursday, I heard about Rebbetzin Fink’s classes from a friend who had attended one of Rebbetzin Fink’s *shiurim*. She pushed me to come on Monday. I was there, and I’ve been committed to those Monday *shiurim* ever since.

It’s just what I do on Monday. It can be pouring or freezing or boiling hot, yet we all come. Even though many of us woke up early, ran to our afternoon jobs, might have tutored somewhere in between — those who make it their goal are always there and don’t stop coming. Even though some of us are still here a few years later, it seems we never tire of learning together and shmoozing with the fresh-faced girls just back from sem. I love the mix of Sephardic girls (I think Rebbetzin Fink teaches their mothers during the day at the Sephardic Center), chassidishe girls, and yeshivishe girls.

What I love about the *shiurim* is the *ruchniyus* aspect — staying connected to *Yiddishkeit* — and the *morah/talmidah* relationship. But the socializing part is a fantastic bonus! Even if I don’t always get to shmooze with the girls, just being in the same room and feeling like we all have the same goal of sticking to our standards is *mechazek* me.

The accessibility to Rebbetzin Fink is another boon we all enjoy, as there are always girls going over to her with questions and she’s happy to elaborate on any topics with us. We’re all in stitches one minute, all delving into a deep thought in another — it’s a very special atmosphere that is homey and open and centered on growing together!





Toronto  
CANADA  
Montreal

Manchester  
U.K.  
London  
Gateshead

### So, your father was the impetus for this journey?

Yes, absolutely. My father was my everything, my life, my inspiration. My whole life I turned to him, silently, subconsciously. I revered him not only because of everything he taught me, but because of everything he was as a person. He was a person of strength and commitment, and he transmitted that to everyone around him. His messages speak to me every day and I often mention him in my speeches.

One lesson in particular that stays with me always is, "It doesn't matter how you feel about something; if it's the right thing to do, no matter how difficult, you do it." That has guided me throughout my life when making all my decisions.

My parents' home was always open. Streams of people would come to see my father to pour their hearts out, for advice, for a listening ear. He lived his whole life for others. He had a heart the size of his mind, a giant personality with no ego. Nothing was too small for him if it meant helping someone. When a *shliach mitzvah* would ask him where to go collecting, my father would actually go with him, collecting door to door, because he knew

that if he went, people would give more.

Our small, modest house was the hub of the community. That's what my parents wanted, a house that breathed Torah and *chessed*. Every night my father gave a *shiur* in our dining room from 6:00–8:00. We children knew we had to be quiet for those two hours every night.

To my mother's credit, we never resented the lack of privacy or a conventional home life. "But your father is a *talmid chacham*," she would say softly with pride in her voice. We were so proud of my father and the life we lived.

As I grew older and socialized more, I saw that other people lived differently. I once asked my mother why we couldn't live like others did. She said, "We are here for the *klal* and for Torah, and this is a beautiful life." We never felt deprived or resentful of our open house because my mother was very happy living this life.

As we all know, if a mother is happy, the family is happy. It was the biggest honor for her and so it was for us. That was the environment that I was raised in, and my mother's mindset had a tremendous effect on all of us children.

Brazil

“ ... *Shiurim* that should be regular and keep you in contact with your friends from Bais Yaakov, keep you in contact with the *mashpi'im* from Bais Yaakov and have an opportunity to grow and grow further based on everything that you have learned in the Bais Yaakov. It's important. It's vital. Without which I don't think any girl can survive. ”

In the words of Harav Mattisyahu Salomon, *shlita*, Mashgiach of Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood:

"Lechu V'Nelcha is a wonderful project. From the first time it was suggested to me I was extremely enthusiastic that this is a program on which the future success of every Bais Yaakov (girl) will depend. Bais Yaakov was an original program for girls to be provided with the tools that they need to combat the environment, which is not always conducive to Torah life. And it was meant to set up girls with the right *hashkafah* and the ability and the possibility to marry *bonei Torah* and be wives to *talmidei chachamim, emese eishes chaver k'chaver*. ... of course [there is often] a situation where there's ... a gap between the time when one is learning in Bais Yaakov and the time when one is *zocheh* to marry a *ben Torah*. In that period many influences are met up with which one has to combat and [for] which one has to be able to remain strong to keep all the ideals that one has learned in Bais Yaakov. '*Beis Yaakov, lechu v'nelcha b'ohr Hashem*.' It's very interesting. We're not telling the *beis Yaakov* to 'come'; we're telling the *beis Yaakov* to 'go.' '*Beis Yaakov, lechu v'nelcha b'ohr Hashem*.' A girl who has had the *chinuch* of Bais Yaakov and leaves the Bais Yaakov, '*lechu*' — she's going out of Bais Yaakov, she has to have continuously in front of her the light of Hashem. '*Lechu v'nelcha b'ohr Hashem*.'" And this concept (Lechu V'nelcha) was born in order to afford you the opportunity to never lose sight of the *ohr Hashem* that you received in Bais Yaakov. To leave the Bais Yaakov, to go ahead and progress and have always as your guiding light the *ohr Hashem*. With *shiurim*. Continuous *shiurim, shiurim* that should be regular and keep you in contact with your friends from Bais Yaakov, keep you in contact with the *mashpi'im* from Bais Yaakov, and have an opportunity to grow and grow further based on everything that you have learned in the Bais Yaakov. It's important. It's vital. Without which I don't think any girl can survive. And without which a family of *bonei Torah* will not be able to develop the way that the Bais Yaakov really wants them to develop. So I wish you all a lot of *hatzlachah* in understanding to appreciate what one is offering you with this one-time opportunity to keep up contact with the Bais Yaakov and everything that it stands for."



## What exactly is Lechu V'Nelcha?

People have a misconception of what the program is. I have heard people say that it is a place for girls who are not married and have no place to go. This is absolutely wrong. It is a sophisticated learning program for girls who are out of school in order to stay connected to their roots and to Torah. We have workshops and *shiurim*; there is an open exchange between lecturer and students, and camaraderie among the girls. Harav Mattisyahu Salomon, *shlita*, greatly encouraged me to develop and promote this program. He was adamant that girls have to continue learning after graduation, saying, "Once a girl finishes school, it's not over."

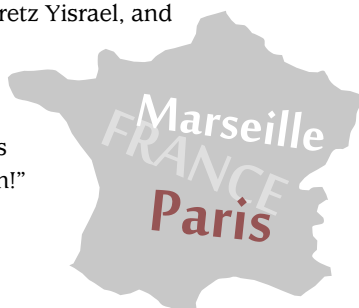
Girls leaving school have a lot of pressures, without the security and Torah environment they had in school to keep them rooted and connected. Many go to college in order to secure a *parnassah*, which presents unanticipated challenges and temptations. Their social circle changes, their friends change, their whole environment changes. The same holds true for girls who go to work.

So there is a tremendous gap between the two worlds. Lechu V'Nelcha bridges that gap for a girl, to keep her close to herself, to her roots, her whole *chinuch*. Yes, some say you can listen to *shiurim* or read books, but nothing compares to sitting together and learning with girls who share the same values and goals. It is a continuation of the benefits of school, but without the tests. The girls come to Lechu V'Nelcha just like they go to a seminary; there is a warm vibe and the girls are proud that they belong to a special group of elite girls. Wherever they go in the world, they can find Lechu V'Nelcha girls to connect with.

There is no age limit or academic requirements. Girls come from Boro Park, Manhattan, Monsey, Monroe, Williamsburg, Flatbush, Rhode Island, Baltimore, etc. The only requirement is a commitment to Torah values and standards; our girls are serious girls who are interested in growing and learning. I am indebted to their parents for entrusting me with their daughters and to the girls for their insightful questions that add so much to the program.

I was fortunate to get the *haskomos* of Hagaon Harav Chaim Kanievsky, *shlita*; Harav Mattisyahu Salomon, *shlita*; Harav Elya Ber Wachtfogel, *shlita*, and *l'havdil bein chaim l'chaim*, Harav Aharon Leib Shteinman, *zt"l*.

We just had a huge event in the Tamir with close to 1,000 girls from all the seminaries in Eretz Yisrael to make them aware of what is available to them after they finish seminary. The response was overwhelming. It is heartwarming to see the enthusiasm. It's basically an Open House to introduce the program for the girls leaving Eretz Yisrael, and to give them the opportunity to sign up in their area for when they are back home in September. In the words of the girls: "It is much easier to leave sem!"



## How does the program work? How do girls join?

We ask seminary girls to fill out a form if they want to start a branch in their city. I read the forms and do research to find a respected *mechaneches* I trust to be in charge. The *mechaneches* has to approve everything and is in contact with me regularly. The girls who become the coordinators have to compile a list of speakers they would like, find a place, set up a schedule, and publicize the classes. There is a nominal fee to cover the payment for the speakers. There are limited funds; I raise the money. This is a real grassroots effort.

If the girls ask me to come to open a branch or to give *chizuk*, I go. Once a branch is established, more girls come by word of mouth. High schools throughout the U.S. are aware of the program and encourage their graduates to be a part of it. My two coordinators, Mrs. Miriam Marks in Yerushalayim and Mrs. Dassi Ernst in Melbourne, Australia, do a phenomenal job at orchestrating it all.

But Lechu V'Nelcha is more than just a weekly *shiur*; we identify and cater to the girls' social needs as well. Twelve years ago, the girls who were teachers came to me and said they had a problem with the summer — they had nowhere to go. So, we organized a retreat in the French Alps for a week. They were ecstatic. We had over 40 girls from all over the world.

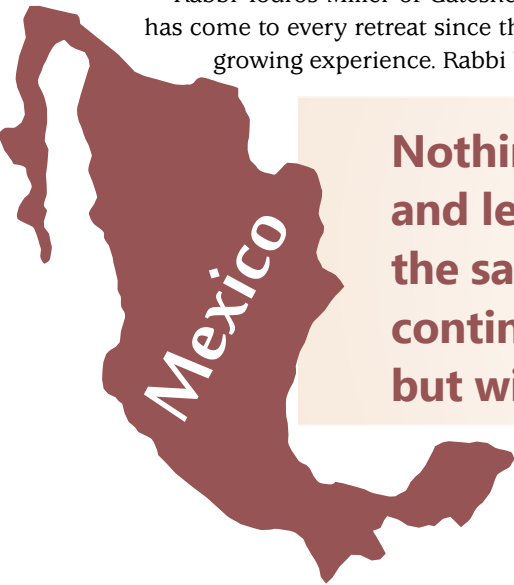
Rabbi Todros Miller of Gateshead was our speaker and has come to every retreat since then. It is not a tour but a growing experience. Rabbi Miller gives a *shiur* twice

a day on the *Yud-Gimmel Ikarim* and I give an informal *shiur* at lunch. We do a lot of hiking, boating, workshops, campfires, socializing, and of course — eating!

We conduct *Shabbatons* in places as far out as Australia, Eretz Yisrael and Europe, but also have a unified *Shabbaton* twice a year in a hotel in New York or New Jersey. It is a beautiful, catered event that brings like-minded girls together from all over the world to enjoy a Shabbos of learning, socializing, sports, activities and fun. Often, the people the girls work with are not as growth-oriented as they are, but they have the opportunity to forge meaningful friendships at our events.

We have a theme and topics range from *emunah*, *tefillah*, to personal relationships, whatever the girls feel is important. Each year the *Shabbaton* is attended by Rabbi Todros Miller, who sets the standards for a Lechu V'Nelcha *shiur*. We have many popular speakers and workshop presenters. Malky Giniger, the singer, and Marion Fine, the entertainer, are regulars as well. We also invite some *shadchanim* to the *Shabbaton*. Learning is important but getting married is the goal.

I must say, the *Shabbaton* is very classy. It's important that Torah be presented in a beautiful way. In fact, *gashmiyus* is important to *ruchniyus*, as was illustrated by the Bais Yaakov building in Cracow, which was beautiful, with great meals and running water (a novelty at that time).



**Nothing compares to sitting and learning with girls who share the same values and goals. It is a continuation of the benefits of school, but without the tests.**

### Can married girls come?

The program is not for married girls. I feel that our girls need something that caters specifically to them. For married girls, we have a 20-minute *shiur* on the phone once a week, called Lechu Banim, about the next stage in their lives as they build a home.

### What about the girls who are not able to attend these classes? Do you suggest learning *sefarim* or listening to tapes?

Of course, but it is supplementary, not a replacement. There is nothing like being at a *shiur* together with others and learning from a speaker. But if you are reading or listening to tapes, I say: Proceed with caution. Ask yourself who is speaking, who is the author. You must be selective and discriminating. Always check and ask. And most importantly, who is giving the *haskamah*? It must be authenticated. Rav Mattisyahu Salomon's *shiurim* are a favorite of mine. And I also never tire of listening to my old tapes of Rav Mordechai Miller, *zt"l*, from Gateshead. I actually sit with pen and paper when I listen to him. It's the only way I can absorb it, because of their depth.



## As told to Reizy Itzkowitz

I still smile when I spot the pile of folding chairs on the front porch every time I pass the house on 60th Street between 16th and 17th Avenues. That's where I went every Monday night in my post-sem days (and on Thursdays, later on, as a *kallah*) to catch some inspiration while working in an office and yearning for the good old school days (shocking even myself).

Time might have marched on, but the post-sem girls still stream to the house on 60th Street, crowding up every inch of space of the Fink family' dining room...

*Moving the table aside, every girl takes a folding chair from the stack on the front porch and finds a spot. I make sure to come early enough so I won't have to sit in the hallway, the door just barely closing behind me. The stairs leading up to the second floor are quickly filled too. The little Fink children can be heard giggling upstairs in bed. A dozen tape recorders surround Rebbetzin Fink as she stands in the middle, a queen spooning out inspiration to last a lifetime. Her unique shiurim are a breath of fresh air for all of us who, after leaving our twelve-plus years of school behind, find ourselves in the work field, suddenly thirsty for some Torah thoughts once again.*

*The most tangible feeling in the room is an eagerness and underlying excitement that I am sure is not found anywhere else. It's the liberating and empowering recognition every girl has that no one is demanding that we be here, and we will not have to sit detention if we don't. We want to be here, we choose to be here!*

*And we know we will not be disappointed. Rebbetzin Fink's lessons are laced with a true understanding of human nature, sprinkled with humor, and based on the timeless messages of Rabbi Mordechai Miller, zt"l. Her gentle, soft-spoken way and British accent make it all the more pleasant.*

*Best of all is the connection we form with Rebbetzin Fink. After the shiur, many girls stay to talk privately with her. We are at a turning point in life, so many decisions to make — from shidduchim to jobs to general hashkafah. Rebbetzin Fink shows such warmth to each girl and listens patiently, as if she has all the time in the world — even though we all know she runs a busy household. (The hour is late — all giggling children are now fast asleep upstairs.)*

*When I call Rebbetzin Fink to invite her to my vort, she doesn't stop at "mazel tov" and spends time talking to me about the shidduch, asking me what made me say "yes." I end our conversation, feeling happy and secure in my maturity and insight.*

I write these words twelve years later, but I still remember many of her lessons and anecdotes. Her humorous account of how women want to know the baby's name after her husband attends a *bris* and all he remembers is who got which honor. How many arguments did her helpful insights prevent? ("You were at the *bris* and you don't know the baby's name?")

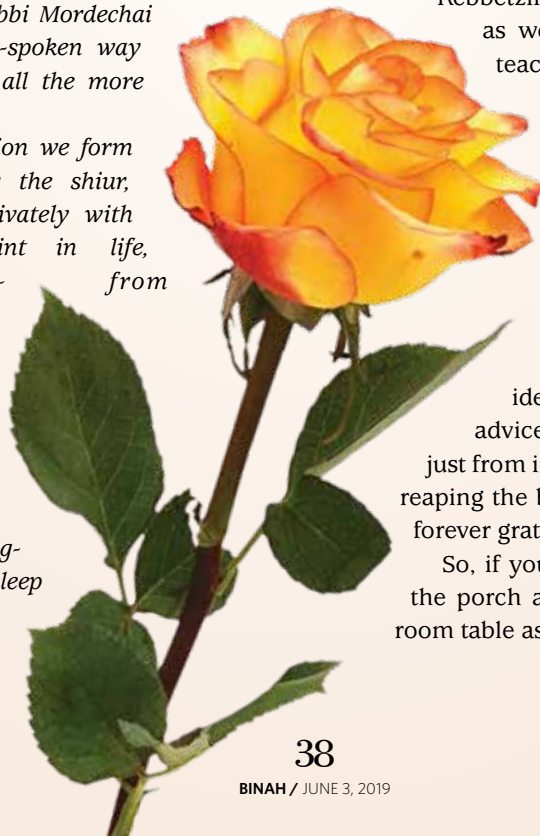
Why do women cry at every opportunity even when we're happy? Because we cry whenever there is a change. Graduation, leaving camp, getting engaged, *yom hachuppah*, sending your oldest child to school. "We are happy at all these occasions, but it's a change, so we cry," Rebbetzin Fink points out. "Who did not cry at one point while her *shidduch* was happening?" There are many nods and relieved faces around the table. Everyone glad to hear it's normal and not an indicator that something is amiss. This timeless lesson is remembered at various occasions, as we recall her words and smile in the midst of our tears: at the *upsherins*, *Chumash seudos*, and when blessedly moving to a larger apartment.

"Relationships can be compared to a bowl of fruit," is another important lesson we learned. When you get married, your husband is a "new fruit" added to the "bowl." The other fruits — your friends — don't need to be removed entirely, they just need to move over to make room for this new, important fruit. This is a very helpful point for the newly married as well as their friends.

Rebbetzin Fink was my *Navi* teacher in seminary as well. I clearly remember sitting in the teachers' room with her, weighing the pros and cons of the job I'd been offered. When I ran into a halachic question at my next job a year or two later, a phone call to Rebbetzin Fink was all it took to clarify the issue. I breathed a huge sigh of relief. I could go to work the next day and know exactly what I needed to do.

Over the years, I've toyed with the idea of calling Rebbetzin Fink again for advice. Most of the times, I had my answer just from imagining how she would reply. I'm still reaping the benefits of those nightly visits and I'm forever grateful I had the opportunity.

So, if you're a sem graduate, take a chair from the porch and find a spot as close to the dining room table as you can.





## What are the challenges of this generation?

Subconsciously, people feel they can have it both ways. They are trying to straddle both worlds. But you can't do *Yiddishkeit* halfway and pick and choose what you want. It doesn't work that way. We may feel that we have to appease this generation in order to make them feel good and love *Yiddishkeit*. But giving in to everything is not real love. True *Yiddishkeit* has a price but the benefits are priceless.

Another problem is the issue of sharing information. Everything is out there today. Girls talk to other girls about *shidduchim*, mothers talk to their children about their spouses, wives talk to their friends about their husbands. Years ago, it was not like that.

*Tznius* includes knowing what boundaries are, what to say, what to share and when to be quiet. My advice is to simply keep quiet. A lot of problems and heartache would be eliminated if privacy was more popular!

AUSTRIA  
Vienna

**You have an exhaustingly full schedule, between teaching in seminary, Lechu V'Nelcha, your various classes for married women and kallos, traveling to Shabbatons, branch openings, and for chizuk, providing dating mentoring, running an email program with approximately 5,000 subscribers, and attending your talmidos's simchos. Do you ever just relax?**

There is a lot to do in this world, and I'm grateful Hashem gave me the opportunity. To relax, I play word games, Sudoku, word puzzles, anagrams, and math puzzles. I also love studying maps. I know it sounds odd, but I just enjoy it. Forget the GPS and Waze! When we go to the French Alps, the thrill for me is mapping out the hikes.

I love reading informational material, *halachah sefarim*, history, Jewish biographies — anything from which I can learn something. I'm now reading *Halachos of Brochos for All Seasons* by Rabbi

Yisroel Pinchas Bodner, and I just learned that on Rosh Chodesh you have to wear something special, which is why I am wearing my pearls on a Monday morning.

Yerushalayim

## Do you have any regrets?

We all make mistakes along the way. As long as we try our best and know that our decisions were *l'shem Shamayim*, we have to believe that what happens is *bashert*. I do worry that I shortchanged my children. I know I took time away from them, but I always involved them in what I was doing, just as my parents involved all of us.

Almost everything I do is home-centered, and I really feel my children have gained from that. My *shiurim* are in my house, so they are a part of them. I take my girls with me whenever I can, especially on *Shabbatons* and retreats and when I travel to cities. They love it, so that comforts me. Hashem promises us that "If you take care of Mine, I will take care of yours." *Baruch Hashem*, He did.

SWITZERLAND  
Zurich



## Any parting messages?

It's all about our commitment to Hashem's will and the determination to uphold it. Follow the *hashgachah* of Hashem. Go wherever He takes you. Whatever we do, it has to be good for Hashem, it has to be His *ratzon*, and ultimately, it will be good for you. I believe that deep down, every Jew wants to do the right thing, but there is a lot that blocks that *ratzon* today. It is up to each of us to search our hearts, to find His *ratzon*, to be strong and focused and know our boundaries. Only then will you come to truly love *Yiddishkeit* and be happy. As Rabbi Miller would sign off, 'B'chol deracheha da'eihu.' ●