

# Chabad faces challenge of far-away places

Women emissaries ask:  
'Can we still raise  
hasidische children?'

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It's hard enough raising Jewish children within Jewish communities. But what happens when you are perhaps the only observant Jews in town?

For Chabad Lubavitch women who help staff the hasidic movement's outreach centers, sometimes in far-flung communities, the challenge can be daunting.

Even if they live near a vibrant Jewish community, often few of the members of that community keep kosher or observe Shabbat to the extent they do, and even fewer participate in rituals like immersion in the *mikva*, the ritual bath.

Over 200 Chabad *shlihot*, or women emissaries, gathered Feb. 28-March 2 at the Hilton Doubletree Hotel in Somerset for the 52nd annual Nshei Ubnos Chabad convention.

The topic of raising observant Jewish children was high on the agenda. A Saturday session was titled, "Can We Still Raise Hasidische Children?"

On March 2, as the convention was winding down, NJIN talked with attendees about the issue. For most, it all came down to keeping the ultimate goal in focus and providing an atmosphere of love and strong communication. The biggest challenge, it turns out, is formal schooling, especially in the absence of nearby hasidic schools and when the only option is to send children away to yeshivot far from home.

Despite their best efforts, some *shlihot*, like everyone else, are not always successful.

The annual gathering of Chabad Lubavitch women, Nshei, was orga-

nized this year by two Morristown residents, Sarah Hein and Teibke Spalter.

Frumie Bogomilsky, who helps run Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center with her husband, Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky, is raising seven children ranging in age from two to 19. Like many Chabad centers, theirs caters to a diverse community who may or may not be Orthodox.

Meeting the challenge is about "strengthening your inner self and strengthening your mission," she said, sitting on a sofa in the hotel lobby, explaining the need to stay focused on the goal. "The children then take on their parents' attitudes," she said. "They will interact with kids in what relates, explaining and



Teibke Spalter, left, and Sarah Hein organized the 52nd Annual Nshei Ubnos Chabad Convention for Chabad women, held in Somerset Feb. 28-March 2.

Photos by Johanna Ginsberg

between the ages of five and 23. "If you have a good relationship with the child, and the child sees that what you do comes from a place of love for Hashem, for Torah, and for the rebbe, they are really imbued with the love of giving to others and the love of every Jew, no matter what."

Chava Schmidt of Philadelphia, who raised five children, said, "Our home was always filled with people, and the kids were always in the position of being on our team, creating a Jewish environment." She added, "We were the rebbe's representatives. Wherever we are, that's the goal, and it empowers us, and if you try to focus on the goal and remain connected to the source, you can feel confident."

Bogomilsky likened her task to that of raising an athlete.

"If you always focus on the end result, you'll get there," she said. "You can't wake up when your son



Pearl Lebovic of Maplewood worried about sending her children away to yeshivot at a young age.

turns 19 and say, 'Oh, I wanted him to be a soccer player.' You have to live, breathe, and dream soccer from when he is very little to make that happen.

"That's the foundation, and there's no deviating. We don't have the luxury of distractions. We live and breathe Torah."

'You worry every day'

Hein, who raised her five children in Mountain Lakes before moving to Morristown, acknowledged that for her, living in Mountain Lakes was a challenge, particularly "not having friends close by, especially on Shabbat."

"There was nobody like us there, and we didn't even have a shul to go to on Shabbat," she said. "But

the focus of our life was on helping others." Hein, who started Pomp 'n Platters, a glatt kosher catering company now run by her daughter, was on informal *shlichut* in Mountain Lakes with her husband after they became *ba'alei teshuva*.

As for schooling, Bogomilsky's 19-year-old son is now studying in France, and another child is away from home, though a little closer in Staten Island. "You worry about them every day," she said. "You check their friends. You *daven*."

Pearl Lebovic, now at Congregation Ahavath Zion in Maplewood, raised her six children in Morristown. "At that time, we didn't have the kind of schools needed for a hasidic education," she said. "So we had to send our children away. That was very hard."

Her daughter went to school in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and her five sons each went to a different yeshiva. "We tried to find the appropriate school for each child," she said. But, she added, "You are at a terrible disadvantage to send away children so young. You are missing the daily interaction that they sometimes still need, and you cannot give them the guidance that can only come from parents. You are hoping and praying that Hashem will provide what we couldn't do."

Another woman, who asked not to be named, also raised six children and sent them away to yeshivot. For four of them, things worked out fine. They grew up, settled down, married, and had families. But one son, she said, "did not get the daily supervision he needed. He got away with things. And the more he got away with, the worse it got. Somehow we were not made aware. The school told us he was doing fine."

He has followed a very different path from the one his parents had imagined for him. No longer an observant Jew, he is a musician living and teaching in Europe. He comes home once a year, and his parents always arrange a stopover to see him whenever they go to Israel to visit their children who have made aliya.

"He knows we love and accept him, and we trust he'll come back," she said. "Meanwhile, he sends us beautiful music videos. And he has made something of himself, on his own. I'm sure he touches people in ways that are positive. And maybe they wouldn't accept him if he were an Orthodox Jew."

"I believe that his journey from above is this way. He can get to people and make them happy this way. He will come back to the *derech* [the