

Little by Little, Yiddle by Yiddle:

‘Imagine!’ - Chabad Malvern Family’s 20th Birthday Party

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Let your imagination go wild, still it would not capture the reality that came true 20 years after. In the beginning, there is a man, a man whose mission is to revitalize Torah-true Yiddishkeit. Fine words, but how do you do it? The Rebbe set the example. The Rebbe lived, breathed and inspired others to share his unique vision. Rabbi and Mrs Yurkowicz, (a.k.a. Shimshon and Rivkah) are two such exceptional souls who live the Rebbe’s words, transforming dreams into reality. Imagine what life was like before the Chabad Malvern family, before 1987.

And now stop for a moment. Imagine what it would be like to share a Birthday Party with 450 people celebrating as one family, a family who share a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging we could not imagine 20 years before.

For a moment, reflect on the possibility, as I do, that we are living a modern day miracle. And if that sounds a bit over the top, consider the steps that each of us has taken to be at this amazing Birthday Party. The secret was revealed as Shimshon shared some of his and Rivkah’s highlights from the last two decades. He noted that each day, they went forward a ‘little by little, a Yiddle by Yiddle’. My own memory confirms his outlook, how we achieve deep changes, little by little.

Years ago, after attending Chabad for some months, I confessed to Shimshon that I had decided to make a big change in my life. At that time I did a lot of work on Saturdays. I said that from then on I had decided that I would carry 2 less pens in my pocket on Shabbos. He appeared to be so delighted that I thought, ‘imagine how excited he’ll get if I don’t carry any pens!’ Little by little.

I’m sure each of us has our own story how step by step, little by little, we were changed by knowing Shimshon and Rivkah, Mendi and Esther Malka, Avrohom and Elke, Reuvi and Menucha and of course the bocharim, like Shmuli, who made a surprise guest appearance to join us

from the US, how each of them, and many others, led us by the hand. Little by little.

Each great journey starts with one step. And most of us, part of the Chabad Family have our personal stories of our amazing journey. This is the miracle we celebrated this week in the magnificent setting of Leonda by the Yarra Receptions.

Befitting the informal, cosy family Birthday Party, the formalities were orchestrated by the family: Ronnie Lewis (you're d'man!) as MC kept the program to time with consummate skills; Richard (Spielberg) Lew's video archived through personal testimonies the scope and depth of hearts being touched in amazing ways over the 20 years, all in less than 20 minutes; Brett Kaye's Central Shule Choir opened our hearts to hear our guest of honour, Israel's Ambassador to Australia, H.E. Mr Yuval Rotem, with Roy Tashi extending a vote of thanks before some members of Fiddler on the Roof cast found their way onto our dance floor, with test-tubes of innocent looking yellow and orange coloured liquid – which turned out to be a good imitation of our locally concocted 'rocket juice brew'.

Shimshon reflected on the 20 years - special moments of joys and struggles, humour and commitment, like in the early days when he went door knocking, only to overhear on one intercom 'tell'em no one's home!' In true Shimshon style he decided he would not go home after a door was shut in his face...and we are glad he persisted. After three years, on a plane flight he wondered to Rivkah 'do you think they would notice if we did not come back?' We sure would! And the grandfather who phoned in great distress, ready to withdraw his grandson from the crèche after the little boy spent too much time looking under tables and beds, and when asked what he was doing replied 'Looking for Hashem, we were told he is everywhere.' Shimshon assured the concerned grandparents 'don't worry, he'll grow out of it.' I wonder.

The achievement over the first 20 years are many: shule services; senior citizen's weekly meetings; community services and festival programs; special youth programs with Bar and Bat Mitzvah classes, birthday clubs and holiday camps; adult education; Chabad crèche; library; regular Jewish Institute Courses; women's Mikvah opened only a few months ago and more. This is quite an achievement, but as the brief video of the Rebbe highlighted, like he, so his shluchim should always strive to do more. True to that spirit, Shimshon unveiled plans for the future, to

rebuild the crèche, with an expanded early learning centre with new youth facilities.

We all shared these and other extraordinary moments, part of our ongoing extraordinary journey – some messages, photos and a copy of the DVD including the Video and Slideshow provided a fitting memento of our special Birthday Party. Rabbi Y D Groner’s message included in the special edition souvenir journal appropriately reflects our feelings for the Birthday Party:

“I congratulate you (Shimshon and Rivkah) and all those who assisted you in these great efforts, and I extend my blessings and that of my wife to all the participants of this dinner. May you go from strength to strength and merit the coming of Moshiach immediately in our times.

Mazeltov! Mazeltov!”

And our blessings go also to Rabbi and Rebbetzin Groner.