



November 2008: Mirel Levitin's third birthday, *bentching* light for the first time at the Chabad House.

# Is It Shabbos Yet?

## IN THE BEGINNING...

PayPal Donation Details  
Date: Mon, Oct 13, 2014  
at 4:05 PM

Total amount: \$72.00 USD  
Currency: U.S. Dollars  
Confirmation number:  
20S79088324840635  
Purpose: Chabad Northern Palm Beach  
Island  
Contributor: Sophie Huber

*Hi and Chag Same'ach! I just wanted to make a small donation (I'm a student...) so I could let you know what a great gift you've given me with your "Is It Shabbos Yet? Chabad Palm Beach" video. I first watched it about a year and a half ago. I was so moved and charmed by your beautiful family that I watched it many, many times over—so many times that I inadvertently learned the candle-lighting brocha by heart. Once I knew the brocha, I decided I wanted to try making it—so I lit candles for Shabbat at home for the first time. The rest is history. Since then, I've lit candles and said the same blessing approximately 72 times. I've also kept Shabbat, to the best of my abilities, 72 times; I started making brochas on my food and eating kosher; I learned to read Hebrew and took up davening every day; I attended my first Pesach seder, lit my first Chanukah candles, and fasted for Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av for*

*the first time; I read the entire Chumash; I attended two Bais Chana retreats and a JLI course; I got a Hebrew name; and I became part of the community at my \*wonderful\* local Chabad house, where I now walk on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and drive on weekdays for the women's program. A few years ago, I barely knew I was Jewish; now I am so proud to be a Jew, and I have found tremendous fulfillment in being part of my local Jewish community, and in taking on the rites of the Jewish service of G-d. I owe credit to my Chabad on Campus (Eitan and Gitty Webb) for planting the seed, and to my local Chabad (Sender and Nechamie Geisinsky) for supporting and nurturing my observance, but it was your family's beautiful video that made me keep that first Shabbat. So please tell Mirel and Rivka that they made a huge difference in the life of one Jew, and no doubt many others, too. MoAdim l'Simcha! Sophie/Shifra*

## **“WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING DIFFERENT”**

*Hindel Levitin  
Chabad of Northern Palm Beach  
Island*

WE HAD NO IDEA that a video of our daughter Mirel bentsching licht would go viral. We created it for a Friday night event at our shul in honor of her turning three, hoping that a personal *simchah* (Mirel's birthday) would draw more Jews to shul and would be a good opportunity to teach women about lighting candles. Before then and since then we have made many videos and none has garnered more than a few hundred hits, mostly from the children's grandmothers. Only “Is it Shabbos Yet? Chabad Palm Beach” has had over a quarter of a million hits. Obviously,



Above: Mirel Levitin. Right: Sophie Huber.

this was Hashem's doing because we didn't do anything different than we did for all our videos.

After we received Sophie's extremely warm and generous email along with her paypal donation, we were so excited, and so grateful to her for getting in touch with us. We invited her to come visit us, and then we asked her if she would speak at the Chabad House. After a little begging on our part, she said yes to both.

When Sophie spoke in shul, you could have heard a pin drop. You could see they were really hearing her message, how she had slowly come to appreciate this weekly gift from Hashem. After Sophie's talk, everyone wanted to share what Shabbos means to them. My husband Zalman took the opportunity to encourage everyone to use the inspiration they felt at that moment to increase in their observance of Shabbos, even if just a baby step.

And people were simply touched and impressed by Sophie herself, who is smart, deep, warm, sincere. I have a feeling Sophie is one of those people who can get along with anyone which is exactly what happened in shul. She connected with everyone who managed to talk with her.

Sophie stayed with us for four wonderful days. Her visit was a huge treat. My kids were deliriously happy when they found her at the house when they

came home from school, and kept checking: Ma, where's Sophie? They fell in love with her and just followed her around, having long conversations, singing together at the piano. We were so sad when she left.

Come back soon, Sophie. Your presence in our lives is so precious to us.

## **THE GIFT OF SHABBOS**

*Sophie Huber*

IN EARLY 2013, I was searching for something to do on the Internet, when I found something that would change my life profoundly. I don't remember how or why, but somehow I began to search on Youtube for Jewish topics—me, who had only been to shul on Yom Kippur one time in my life.

It must have been some lucky algorithm that put in front of my eyes a thumbnail photo of the ebullient face of Mirel Levitin in the glow of her own Shabbat candle. I clicked the link. I saw a video of a Chassidic family carefully and lovingly preparing for Shabbat. The star was Mirel, with her big sister Rivka narrating each move in the simple but powerful words of Ellen Emerman's classic book for children, *Is It Shabbos Yet?* They went shopping. They baked the challah. They made the Shabbat meal. They set the table. They gave *tzedakah*.





Sophie Huber with Rivka (L) and Mirel Levitin in their home.

And finally, they lit the Shabbat candles.

Until they lit the candles, every time Mirel asked her mother if it was Shabbat yet, her mother would tell her, “Not yet.” But once the candles were lit and Mirel and Rivka had said the blessing, the expression on Mirel’s face turned from one of anticipation to one of overflowing joy as her mother said, “Yes, Mirel. Now it is Shabbat.” As the Levitin women stood praying in front of the Shabbat candles, as they wished each other and their family “Good Shabbos,” I could see even across the country and over the Internet how everything was shining and glowing in a different, special, and especially beautiful way—not least, the faces of Mirel, Rivka, and Hindel. The first time I saw it, I was moved to tears.

I quickly became obsessed with this video, and watched it countless times over the next few months. When I checked last Friday (April 24, 2015), the video had 285,300 views. I would guess that a good 285,000 of them were mine.

One day, I was eating an afternoon snack while watching the video when I realized that at this point I probably knew every word of it... including the words of the blessing on candles. I decided I would try to say it with Mirel, Rivka, and Hindel. But before I did, it crossed my mind that it would maybe be better to try it with real candles. As I got out some candles I had bought once at Bath and Body Works, I realized that it was, in fact, Friday afternoon. I decided I would light the candles for Shabbat. I like to think that I got them lit before sunset that very first Shabbat, but it was in G-d’s hands.

As soon as the candles were lit, something extraordinary happened, something which has happened many times since, on the many Fridays during my first year of observance when I told myself, “I’m too overwhelmed. I need the extra day. Just this once, I’m going to skip Shabbat.” When I lit the candles and gathered the light of the flame to my eyes to say the blessing, something

moved in my soul. I saw that the candles were lit, and that now I carried a tremendous responsibility to say the blessing, to remember and sanctify the Sabbath, and that once I said that blessing, I had brought in something new—something which I didn’t wish to leave behind.

That very first Friday, in the middle of candle-lighting, I decided I would keep Friday evening according to the traditional laws of Shabbat. I knew enough to know that that meant no electricity, no computer, no writing, no driving, and no money. I remember I slept with the lights on with a pillow over my eyes. I spent my time enjoying a novelty that I had probably not experienced for 15 years: wondering what to do with myself. It felt different, but strangely enjoyable enough that the next morning, I decided not to stop. I remember bringing some books outside and sitting on a towel in the grass, reading and looking at the sky and thinking, “This is so weird. This is so different from anything I’ve done before. I have no idea if I’ll ever do this again, but it doesn’t matter for today, because today is Shabbat.”

Since then, thanks to the Levitins, and especially Mirel and Rivka, I have kept every Shabbat. What at the beginning was a weekly struggle between forces of good and evil (that was often resolved only at the very last minute in the light of my candles) has become a weekly pleasure that I anticipate every day with a smile.

I read more now than I have ever read. My best insights about the biggest problems I face always come to me in the quiet of Shabbat. Nothing has been lost. But so much has been gained. I feel, now, that my life is tremendously full and meaningful because every week, I give it meaning. I rediscover G-d, and all the quiet pleasures that surface only when we deliberately create space for them. To be among friends. To walk outdoors. To read. To pray and contemplate the universe. To count my blessings. To be intensely grateful for the fact that I am here on earth for a precious moment in time.

Thank you, Mirel and Rivka. Thank you, Levitins, Webbs, and Geisinskys. Thank you to all. And Good Shabbos! ■