



## MACHSHAVOT

### Sukkot 5781

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### Quality over Quantity

**Rabbi Andrew Shaw**  
*Chief Executive, Mizrahi UK*

I know many people who over the years have been on business or holiday in some far flung location and have been hosted by the local Chabad house. Stories abound of Shabbat meals for hundreds, Seder nights for 1000's and a non-stop catering facility for all who come. It is a remarkable service to the Jewish world.

This year, that has changed. An article by Sivan Rahav-Meir quoted an interview with Dina Freundlich, the Chabad Rebbitzin in Beijing where she notes:

"At first I almost cried. I compared this year's High Holy Days to last year's, how last year we searched high and low for more tables and chairs for all the celebrants. But then I understood that my current mission is different: I need to focus on the few people who are here. To establish a closer, deeper, and more familial connection with them. This is the time for "one to one" relationships. Life is no longer a matter of quantity, but of quality. Heart to heart talks and forging friendships – these are things for which I did not have time before the corona."

A place like a Chabad house in Beijing, with hundreds passing through, has no choice normally to focus on quantity – that is the nature of the house. However, in a regular educational context what should be our emphasis?

Jewish outreach has become a massive industry, begun by Chabad in the 1940's, it expanded massively in the 80's and 90's with groups such as Ohr Sameach and Aish Ha Torah and today the global operations of the outreach organisations are vast, especially in the USA where assimilation is rife.

Much of the strategy there, including the Birthright programme, has been about quantity – get the numbers. This of course has been influenced by the funders of the various programmes.

I consider myself a product of Jewish outreach here in the UK, but I was inspired not by any organisation but by people who, without thinking inspired me to live a more observant way of life. They were role models who by watching them on a daily and weekly basis made a huge impression on a young man when I was 10 – 15 years old. Whether it was my brother and his dedication to shul, or the Rabbi's sons and their love for learning, or families for Shabbat afternoon with their embrace of

hilchot Shabbat, or my Bnei Akiva madrichim who demonstrated a modern religious way of life every Shabbat. For me it was absolutely about quality relationships, that in turn created a living Torah that I could relate to and connect to.

Fast forward to my Rabbinic career. I tried to mirror what had inspired me growing up in Kingsbury when I began my work at Stanmore, forging relationships, hoping to create a love of shul and a love of learning and a strong Jewish home. Once again it was quality that was stressed. Yes, we may have had big events with hundreds of people, but we knew everyone who had come. The reason they were coming to the event is because of the communal connection that had been engendered over a number of years. My Kingsbury and Stanmore experiences may have been 25 years apart – but the strategies and successes were almost identical.

Tonight is 1<sup>st</sup> night Succot, our ushpiz is Avraham Avinu, the father of our nation. We know that he was also tremendously concerned about outreach, both him and Sarah attempted to influence and inspire the idol worshippers around them. His strategy, from what we see in the Torah was to approach individuals and show them the truth of Hashem's existence. A one on one strategy. When they left for Israel the Torah states that they took 'the souls they had acquired in Haran' (Bereishit 12:5). Rashi explains this strange phrase to mean the local population whom they had brought under the wings of the Shechinah had come with them. Abraham would convert the men, and Sarah would convert the women, and the Torah ascribes to them as if they had made them (Bereishit Rabbah 39:14).

Tonight is also the first Succot that we have had the rule of six! Succot will be about quality of time with family rather than quantity of guests that we normally invite. It once again allows us to focus on areas we may not usually have recognized.

The whole Corona crisis, I hope, will allow us to take a step back to realise what should be the focus of our educational outreach strategy going forward. How we must focus on quality as well as quantity. We need both.

As Sivan finishes, 'It seems to me that this message is relevant to all of us. This is a time to look inside and not outside. To understand that this difficult period creates opportunities to develop deeper connections with those around us, to become better acquainted with our nuclear family as never before. The mission for all of us has changed for now.'

Maybe not just for now....

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach

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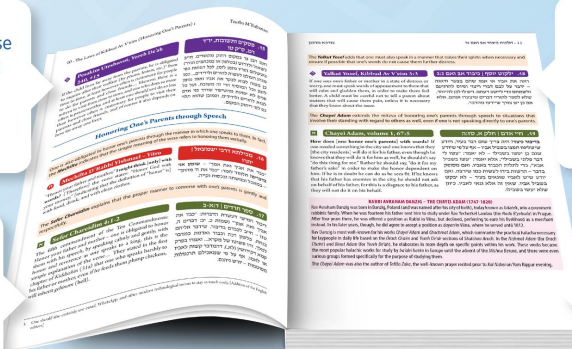
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