



ELEVATOR PITCH

A few years ago, in an elevator of all places, I witnessed a remarkably effective “elevator pitch” for a Torah lifestyle.

It was Thursday evening and I was visiting a family member on the eighth floor of Maimonides Hospital in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn, New York. In the lobby, I boarded the elevator, which was filled with individuals comprising a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. One floor up, several people disembarked from the elevator, and two women walked in – an Oriental nurse and an Orthodox woman, a regular volunteer for the local *Bikur Cholim*. They walked in mid-conversation, with the nurse finishing a description of her plans for Saturday and Sunday. She then turned to the volunteer and asked her, “So, what are you doing this weekend?”

The frum woman responded with a 100-watt smile and said, “You know, the nicest thing about being Jewish is our Shabbat. For 25 hours, I get to turn off my cell phone and email. I just enjoy my husband and children, unwind from the week – and try my best to get closer to G-d.” The elevator bell rang for her floor and she exited with the nurse. As she walked out, all of us still on the elevator heard her say to her friend, “You can’t imagine how much I look forward to Shabbat all week long.”

Silence reigned as we rode up the next few floors, but it was quite evident that her words had had a powerful impact on all those who heard it. In fact, as the

only Orthodox Jew remaining in the elevator, I got a few meaningful glances from the other passengers who were obviously mulling over her words.

My friends, that was about as close to a perfect elevator pitch for a Torah lifestyle as I have ever seen or heard. Judging from the looks of my fellow elevator-riders, they were envious of the serenity in the woman’s voice as she described her Shabbat experience.

If I may take a page from the elevator pitch philosophy, my 30-second response to the question of how to effectively deal with the colossal challenges of the Internet and technology would be that we need to improve the quality of our home life. If our children had feelings for Shabbat similar to those of the woman in the elevator, fewer of them would be populating hangouts and abusing substances.

About 12 years ago, a frum woman living in Yerushalayim sent me a fascinating dissertation she had prepared for her post-graduate schooling. In it, she explored her theory that there was a direct correlation between how children enjoyed Shabbat in their homes and how connected they felt to G-d.

Over the course of a school year, she interviewed many dozens of girls who were attending seminaries in her community. As part of the study, she asked each of them to describe the environment of their parents’ homes in four time periods: Thursday night, Friday afternoon, Friday night and Shabbat morning. Many of the girls wrote beautiful comments about how relaxed

they felt coming home Thursday night and smelling Shabbat cooking, how peaceful their homes were on Shabbat, and how much they enjoyed the time spent with their siblings and parents. Sadly, there were a significant number who wrote about the stress and anxiety, about tense Shabbat tables filled with discord and negative energy. The woman conducting the survey then asked these same girls to self-assess regarding their feelings about *Yiddishkeit* and G-d.

Analysis of the data collected in her study revealed a stunning correlation between the two components of her study. Those with positive Shabbat experiences were more spiritual and observed *mitzvot* more regularly. Most of them reported that they planned on sending their children to the types of schools they attended and wanted to parent their children the way they were raised. Conversely, the girls who reported stress at home were far more disconnected spiritually and more inclined to reject the values of their parents. And these patterns were consistent in girls attending *v* and modern Orthodox seminaries.

So while our attention may be focused on the external challenges we face in today’s environment, we may be better served turning inward and improving the quality of our home lives. In fact, I strongly feel that ... sorry, it’s the eighth floor. Gotta go.

Rabbi Yakov Horowitz, Founding Dean of Yeshiva Darchei Noam of Monsey, is an educator, author and child safety advocate