

THE SOUL-STIRRING MELODY OF FAITH

WORLD-RENOWNED CLARINETIST CHILIK FRANK SPEAKS ABOUT MERON, LIFE CHALLENGES, AND HIS DAUGHTER WITH DISABILITIES

They come in singles, couples, and groups, wearing one type of kippah or another - masses of people stepping purposefully forward and climbing upward toward the Boyaner bonfire at the *tziyun* of Rabi Shimon Bar Yocha. It's not yet near dawn, but the atmosphere is vibrant like midday. Visitors continue to arrive in an unceasing flow, yet somehow there is room for everyone in Meron on Lag BaOmer.

Against the background of this energetic, colorful scene, a moving melody can be heard, soft at first and steadily gaining in strength: Music. Real music. Living music. A group of musicians has assembled. They're not just here to perform, to entertain. They're here for a higher purpose. Their music emanates from a place beyond notes and scales, clefs and chords. It comes from the soul. And their songs - they're not just songs. They're prayers.

Chilik Frank has been playing clarinet at Kever Rashbi on Lag BaOmer for over 20 years. For him, this night supersedes any other performance - and he plays at many special events throughout the year. But Lag BaOmer is unique, and Frank views playing in Meron as part of a *mesorah* dating back at least 500 years to the holy Ari. On this night in Meron, Frank's clarinet is an instrument for *avodas hakodesh* ...

As he looks into the crowd, he thinks of those in need of a *refuah*, a *shidduch*, a *yeshuah*, a child of their own. Then he chooses his melodies carefully, turning tunes into *tefillah*. The lofty atmosphere is one that Frank describes as having the ambience of *geulah*, with the bonfires, songs, and prayers purifying the hearts of those who come.

Frank has been through his own "fires," and that is perhaps the most poignant aspect of his performance. He knows pain, and he has risen above it.


Seeach Sod
 The Leading Center in Special Education
 Founded by Rabbi Dov Levy z"l

No Impossible

Sixteen years ago, the Franks rejoiced over the birth of their daughter, the first after three sons. But it soon

became clear that though little Miri appeared healthy, her development was severely delayed. She was experiencing major challenges - including autism spectrum disorder and complex intellectual disabilities.

The Franks were fortunate to find a school for Miri in one of Seeach Sod's school-age programs. But, as Frank recalls, it wasn't enough to have her in a framework during the day. "Our house was running around Miri. Her needs took over our family. We couldn't care for our other children," he says. And there were a lot of other children - as, ka"h, the Franks' family grew quickly, and they're blessed with many children. There was no way they could invest in their other kids when Miri was around.

Though it pained them to send away their 11-year-old daughter, they knew it would be best. Miri could get the care and attention she needed, and the family could give Miri the love she deserved when they saw her. But there was one major problem: there was nowhere to send her.

Having turned over every stone and finding no residential options for a girl her age, the Franks brought Miri to the office of Rabbi Shimon Levy, the CEO of Seeach Sod. "Can

you think of anything?" they begged. With a goal of rehabilitating students with disabilities and helping integrate them in the world, Seeach Sod seemed like the right address.

"With Rabbi Levy, there's no 'impossible,' or 'can't,'" Frank says with emotion. "With him, everything, and I mean everything, is possible."

"Most people have a specific job and they do it," he explains. "Most organizations have one goal, one target, and they work toward that. That's how the world operates. Not Seeach Sod. They do everything, for anyone who needs it, from babies to people in their 80s." Indeed, Seeach Sod aims to assist individuals across a spectrum of ages, capabilities, and challenges, with programs encompassing everything from daycare to vocational training and beyond.

Rabbi Levy told them not to worry. If there was no housing for kids Miri's age, he'd create it. "He opened a place just for her," Frank says emotionally. "He took care of everything, from permits and bureau-



cracy, to financing and finding a space.”

Frank stops his story for a moment. “You don’t understand,” he says. “These girls live in a villa, a private house, like a resort...” he enthuses. “Rabbi Levy took these girls, each one with her own challenges, some of whom couldn’t do anything by themselves, each living in her own world, and he brought them to an airy, open, wonderful place.” Frank adds that this home is open 365 days a year, even at the most stressful, hectic times, including Erev Pesach and snow days in Yerushalayim, when the city completely shuts down.

He describes Rabbi Levy’s sensitivity to each and every person, to every situation. “It hurts to see the challenges of some of these kids. It seems like no one can possibly take care of them,” Franks admits. “But Shimon Levy sees each one as an entire world – and treats them that way. From the smallest problem to the biggest challenge, he always has a solution. It’s amazing.”

Solutions and Stepping Stones

The house that Seeach Sod opened for Miri when she was eleven still houses her today, at almost seventeen, along with another five girls. They receive delicious, wholesome meals, a variety of therapies, and engage in stimulating activities. It’s just one of 40 such community living arrangements run by Seeach Sod. But how can one take a child who’s never been away from home and place her in special housing for the first time?

Rabbi Levy and Seeach Sod have a solution for that, too: the Nofshon respite center. Functioning like a mini-hotel, this 70-bed facility is a place parents can send their child with disabilities for a little break. Open every night of the year except Leil HaSeder, the Nofshon is there for parents whether they’re making a *simchah*, going through a *tzaar*, *lo aleinu*, or just in need of time off. The Nofshon hosts over 3,500 sleepovers a year.

The beautiful premises provide a getaway experience for the children. Each child finds his place in the homey atmosphere, and the caring counselors occupy the children with projects, activities, and

games. (And Seeach Sod doesn’t forget about the parents either – they organize annual vacations for parents of children with special needs, too.)

For Miri – and others like her – the Nofshon was the perfect stepping stone in her transition from home to the Seeach Sod apartment.

Those few weeks spent in a true home-away-from-home made the adjustment much smoother.

The Most Powerful Song

The clarinet’s sounds express the pain of a broken heart, a quiet cry of loneliness, and the most mournful emotions – while also serving as a mouthpiece for the greatest joy. Chilik Frank’s music carries those divergent feelings: the pain of galus, and the joy of celebrating Lag BaOmer in Meron; the pain of a Jewish family and their child with disabilities, and the joy of finding a wonderful shaliach in Seeach Sod.

Hundreds of thousands of Jews gather from around the world, dancing together in Meron each Lag BaOmer. The whole nation feels connected in that holy space, united by melodies from the loftiest places. Even if you can’t be there in person, you can still tune into that harmony and be inspired by its song. Chilik Frank is coming to Los Angeles to share his music, his story, and his gratitude to Seeach Sod.

As a musician, Frank sees himself as a tool of the people – using his songs to uplift, encourage, and unite. And as a father of a daughter with disabilities, he sees himself as an envoy to help those in a similar position. When asked how he’s dealt with the hard things in life, Frank is quick to respond, “I don’t have any-

thing hard in life. Everything is good.”

“A person needs to think everything is good, really good. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* only does good.”

And what could be a more beautiful song than that?

