



Chavrusa Profile

Brandon Nissel

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Atlanta, Georgia **35**

OCCUPATION
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Dov Marshall

LOCATION AGE
Thornhill, Ontario **39**

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A Grandmother's Wish: How a Promise Led to a Journey of Spiritual Discovery

Brandon Nissl grew up in the physical and spiritual desert of Las Vegas. “As a kid, I went to Hebrew school once and attended a couple of Bar Mitzvahs. In college, after a bad breakup, I walked into a local synagogue and prayed for a few minutes. But that was pretty much the extent of Judaism in my life,” Brandon recalls.

When Brandon got engaged, his grandmother—a self-proclaimed atheist all her life—asked to speak to him and his fiancée. To the young couple’s shock, Brandon’s grandmother requested that they promise to send their future children to a Jewish school. Brandon’s grandmother was nearing the end of her life, so they reluctantly agreed to fulfill her request.

“Fast-forward several years, we were then living in Denver and our son was born. Even though we were totally secular, we began to look online for some sort of Jewish school. We Googled and found the Chabad preschool led by Rebbetzin Hindy Mintz, and we half-heartedly enrolled our son there. Slowly, despite our initial hesitation, we became integrated into the Chabad community and became more and more connected to authentic Judaism.”

Just as Brandon and his family were rediscovering their roots, and even

considering moving closer to their Chabad House so they shouldn’t drive on Shabbos, the pandemic hit. “Everything fell apart,” says Brandon. “I lost my job and we decided to move to North Carolina. In our mind, we were taking a step back from religion by leaving Denver. But Hashem had other things in store.”

We started learning Tanya together and it has become the most sacred part of my week.

Amidst the chaos of the pandemic, Brandon heard the moving story of Rabbi Yehuda Dukes OBM, whose valiant fight against Covid-19 inspired a chain of good deeds in his honor. Brandon decided to sign up to learn in Yudi’s memory. He was then matched with Dov Ber Marshall.

“We started learning Tanya together and it has become the most sacred part of my week. Absolutely without a doubt, learning Chassidus changed my life,” says Brandon. “Through our study sessions, I learned that every day has purpose and meaning. I learned to feel grateful for the many gifts Hashem gives me, including things that don’t look like gifts at first. I learned to trust Hashem’s plan and be open to it. JNet facilitated for me a connection with the Rebbe and a connection with Hashem.”

Dov Ber says, “It has been transformative for me too. We are learning Tanya on a deep level and gaining an intimate understanding of the chapters. Sometimes in thirty minutes we only cover a couple of lines, because we are constantly seeking the practical application on how it can impact our real lives.”

Through Dov Ber’s gentle encouragement, Brandon began to find his way back to practicing Judaism again. “We weren’t satisfied with our secular lives in North Carolina, so we moved to Atlanta where our son attends the Torah Day School. We are part of a Torah-observant community and are Shomer Shabbos and Kosher. Two years ago, I would never have imagined I would be where I am today.”

Britta, Brandon’s wife, has also begun learning with a JNet partner, and the entire family is on a path of growth and spiritual discovery.

After learning together for nearly three years, the study partners finally met in person earlier this year when Dov Ber and his wife were traveling through Atlanta. Sitting together at the local kosher pizza shop, the Nissls expressed their gratitude to Dov Ber for his dedication and influence in their journey. They reminisced about the countless discussions over complex topics and the valuable insights they had gained from each other’s perspectives.

Dov Ber expressed his own appreciation for the opportunity to study with Brandon, and how their friendship had enriched his life in so many ways.

Recently, Brandon decided to turn the tables and volunteer as a teacher for JNet, while of course continuing his weekly study sessions as a student with Dov Ber.

“The Rebbe said that even if a person only knows the letter Aleph, they can teach Aleph to another Jew,” Brandon explains. “I still have so much I want to learn, but I am grateful for the opportunity to give back and share some of the inspiration I have received from JNet with others.”



Accomplishments

Dr. Ahuva Gamliel from Hollywood, FL has been learning with Chaya Sasonkin from Casa Grande, AZ for 3 years. They have learned over 42 chapters of Tanya!

Ahuva also completed the six chapters of Pirkei Avot together with Hilary Hecht from Brooklyn, NY.

Ahuva shared how rewarding it is to see how all parts of Torah connect to each other. “Often, I will learn something in the weekly parsha that fits in perfectly with the Tanya I just learned with Chaya. The more I study, the more I see everything coming together.

“Every subject in the Torah has so many layers and such great depth. Learning Chassidus has shown me the deeper dimension of the Torah, and has made my life so much more meaningful.”



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JNet is a project of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch Suite 302 and was established with a grant from the Rohr Family Foundation.