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Lessons from Henny Machlis

She embodied so many life-changing lessons that it would take a lifetime of aspiring to reach.

by [Tehiya Levine](#)

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I just heard the terrible news that Rebbetzin Henny Machlis passed away at the age of 58.

I am flooded with love and gratitude for this incredible woman who profoundly inspired me so many years ago when I spent a year in Jerusalem deepening my Jewish commitment and learning in a women's yeshiva. Each Friday morning I would get on the bus and head to their home to help them prepare for Shabbas and hosting 100 guests for each meal.

There is nothing like the [Machlis' Shabbat table](#). Each week, a flood of guests would arrive, some were invited, some asked to come, some were "regulars" and did not need to be asked or to ask. Students at yeshivas, seminaries and college, as well as some of their visiting parents who had heard about this incredible experience from their children and wanted to experience it themselves. Some were homeless. More than one was a recovering addict and was receiving almost all their meals from the Machlis kitchen, and occasionally even sleeping in the family's car. Many were tourists, Jewish and non-Jewish, who heard that they could just show up and have one of the most incredible experiences of their life.

I have no idea how there was enough food for all those guests that seem to magically come from this tiny kitchen. The Machlises did not know how many were coming. It could be 50, or 80, or 120. Each guest was welcomed with warmth and a huge smile from Rebbetzin Henny Machlis. Tables would shift, other tables and chairs would be brought in, and we would scurry to add more place settings. There was never a moment of hesitation or hints

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Quote

Oct 29 / 16 Cheshvan 5776



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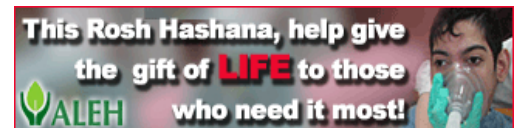
of concern that there would not be enough food. The older children and I would meet Rebbetzin Machlis in the kitchen and we would quickly pull more things out of the fridge that seemed to be just as magical as the wardrobe from “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” fame. How there was enough food for the throngs of people never will make sense to me.

Once the food was served, Rabbi Machlis would again welcome everyone warmly. Then he would ask us to go around the table and share a piece of wisdom. “It can be an idea from Torah or something else; we all have wisdom to share.” He meant this. While we went around the table, the Machlises would listen to each guest as if they were a scholar or a renowned poet. Each person was treated with warmth and curiosity. They expressed interest in and concern for everyone there.

More than an abundance of food, there was an abundance of joy, love, respect and wisdom. The amount of light that emanates from that small home is blinding.

Henny Machlis embodied so many life-changing lessons that it would take a lifetime of aspiring to reach. With tears streaming down my face, here are just a few that come to mind.

- 1. It is possible to live in a near constant state of joy: It’s a direct result of being a giver.**
- 2. It is possible to only see the good in others.**
- 3. Everyone is precious.** I was not alone in feeling like I was her favorite guest! She truly loved all of us and made it clear that each person should be beloved and welcomed, even those who make others uncomfortable.
- 4. Never stop learning and growing.** Even a woman who has 14 kids and is expecting more than 100 for dinner can find time to learn Torah and often be found with a book in her hands.
- 5. You can let your family know they come first even while teaching them to be incredible givers.** Each child was involved in the family’s abundant giving but Henny always made sure that they each were taken care of. Preparing the Rabbi’s plate before the food was put on the table or grabbing some cookies to be sure the kids would get. Through their unceasing kindness to people who were struggling and in need, like the recovering addicts who were mentally unstable and had nowhere to live, they showed their kids how far one could stretch themselves to give. By having them sleep in their car instead of inside their home, they taught that there are boundaries and that the safety of their children was paramount. They had close to 100 guests almost every Shabbas but only after they had a small private family meal and they made it known that they would not be hosting for



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the Passover Seder. They had it alone with their children in order to focus entirely on them, hear all of what they had learned at school, and fulfill the mitzvah of teaching one's children about the Exodus. (Rebbetzin Machlis made arrangements for anyone who needed a Seder to go to various friends and neighbors!)

6. Show respect and love to your spouse. No matter how many guests were there or how much had to be done, Rebbetzin Machlis always stopped and sat to listen to her husband share words of Torah.

7. Everyone has wisdom, everyone can give. A four-year-old can bake a cake. (Their 4-year-old daughter would single handedly make one of the best chocolate cakes I ever tasted.)

8. There is always room and enough food for one (or 20) more. Limits stretch when they need to.

9. Welcome everyone into your home. Every type of person is welcomed to the Machlis home. Religious, non-religious, even anti-religious, Jewish, non-Jewish – [Rebbetzin Machlis](#) was not afraid that the variety of guests would have a negative influence on her children. She understood that their home was “THE place to be.” Others flocked there in order to be inspired. People admired and sat in awe of this special couple. Even a skeptical guest would be won over by the second course! The children saw how their parents were admired, beloved and respected by people of every culture, background and political affiliation and saw firsthand the power Torah has on people's lives.

10. Each child is a world. The Machlis family was my first exposure to a large religious family. It was impossible not to be struck by how unique and altogether amazing each child was! It is easy to lump people together but the Machlis kids taught me that, if anything, having many siblings meant being even more of an individual! Rebbetzin Machlis was incredibly affectionate and truly adored all of her kids. She once told me that each child should have moments of feeling like the “only child;” that a parent should carve out time to make certain children felt that they were loved and understood individually.

There are no words to express my gratitude to Rabbi and [Rebbetzin Machlis](#) and their incredible family. Henny will be mourned by the entire Jewish people. May the family be comforted among the Mourners of Zion. And may we all aspire to emulate her ways.

Tax-deductible donations to the Machlis Shabbat project can be made at <http://www.machlis.org/donate.php>

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**Naomi Geffen Goss** · College of Law, Lancaster Gate, London

Beautiful tribute and much food for thought about one's ability to give and how.

Like · Reply · 3 · Oct 20, 2015 3:34am

**Chaya Weisberg** · Jerusalem, Israel

thank you for sharing these tremendous lessons so beautifully.

Like · Reply · 2 · Oct 20, 2015 1:55pm · Edited

**Harris S Cohen**

May her memory be a blessing

Like · Reply · 2 · Oct 20, 2015 6:36pm

**Reuven B. Frank** · Drexel University

Dear Techiya

What a fitting and loving tribute, as well as an excellent way to begin your "published on Aish" career.

At the shiva house there is an email address to send stories and tributes such as this to the family. I wouldn't be surprised if the plan was to publish a book. (Maybe YOU could help write it.)

Anyway, if you could please try to get that address (Google it, or call the home), and forward your article as well as the more general one (from Aish' staff-writer?) I would be very grateful AND it would be a big Mitzvah.

Kol HaKavod,

you really express and sum up the lessons well,

Thank you very much,

-Reuven Frank

Like · Reply · Oct 20, 2015 5:02am

**Techiya Levine** · Neve Yerushalayim

Thank you so much for your kind words. Someone had shared that on FB- I will be sure to contact them!

Like · Reply · Oct 25, 2015 11:58am

**Judith Tordoir**

What a beautiful and precious tribute of a very special and precious woman!! May her memory be a blessing! Such gems of wisdom!! Thank you for sharing!!

Like · Reply · 1 · Oct 22, 2015 12:08am

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(4) **D.K.Milgrim-Heath**, October 21, 2015 2:58 PM**Lifetime Lessons For the World According To Henny Machlin**

Lifetime Lessons For the World According To Henny Machlin

By D.K.Milgrim-Heath©2015

Lifetime lessons for the world according to Henny Machlin-

Are for all that want world peace to gather unconditionally in.

For Israel Henny WAS the Godly Ordained founder of the Shabbos Project-

The spiritual beauty being around herself,her family and years of attendees forever they'll never forget.

A blessed aura around Henny was directly lived really explained
 That her words of extreme wisdom the world today most dearly needs to be retained.
 Towards stopping terrorism around the globe of all sorts-
 So people especially vulnerable younger children can't do retorts.
 Really no other worldly advice is heavily led we find-
 As world peace cries from many a prayer needed mind.
 May Henny's memory be always for any future age-
 As she felt (modestly of course) an example of a modern Jewish sage.

 Reply

(3) Anonymous, October 20, 2015 8:09 PM

Thank you for sharing this.

I especially liked your comparing her fridge to a magical closet. I need to learn to have emunah that HaShem can provide for all.
 Also good to hear that she gave individual time to each of her ten kids.

 Reply

Jake, October 21, 2015 10:03 AM

slight correction, though an important one

*14 kids :)

 Reply

(2) Leah, October 20, 2015 7:38 PM

A beautiful and inspirational article! Thank you for sharing! May we have the zchut and the merit to follow in arebbetzin Machlis's righteous footsteps and bring a lot of light, honor and joy to her soul in the higher realms and make her truly proud of us! AMEN.

 Reply

(1) Sarit, October 20, 2015 5:02 PM

Henny Machlis lived the Shabbos project

So interesting that this week is the shabbos project, filling the void that she has left behind. May her neshama have many aliyoot from all the Shabbosos she made possible

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