

THE JERUSALEM POST

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American Friends of  
**Meir Panim**  
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FIGHTING POVERTY IN ISRAEL

Fighting Poverty in Israel



**MEIR PANIM  
PROVIDING HOPE**

# THE JERUSALEM POST

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## Greetings from William Franklin President, the Jewish Federation of Reading, PA



I first visited Meir Panim in Jerusalem ten years ago while working for the Columbus Jewish Federation. The more I went to Meir Panim's sites throughout Israel, the more I appreciated the important role it plays by providing not only food, but also a wide array of social service programs devoted to enhancing the lives of all Israelis in need.

After visiting IDF soldiers at their base on the Gaza border, my wife and I traveled a mere 8 miles to the Ben Gurion Youth Center Meir Panim runs for at-risk teens in Sderot. What a contrast it was to see teens enjoying cooking and other fun activities, and being supported with trips, group socialization, preparation for their Bagrut exams and for entering the IDF. It was gratifying to learn these centers were bomb shelters converted into facilities to house after-school programs to meet the needs of Sderot's at-risk teen populations.

I commend Meir Panim for their dedication not only for providing food security, but for continually being there for Israel during crises. Meir Panim's current coronavirus response is exemplary in that it surpassed its own record by delivering three times the number of Meals-on-Wheels and added many newly unemployed and furloughed Israelis to their rolls. Additionally, the elderly, homebound and disabled population continued to receive Meals-on-Wheels.

Meir Panim also provides tools to help all Israeli disadvantaged populations break out of the cycle of poverty with critical services to boost their morale, encourage inspiration for a better life and support their achievement of favorable outcomes.

And what makes Meir Panim special to me is that it partners with me and our donors in doing Tikkun Olam.  
Toda Raba!!

## Greetings from Michael Biton Minister in the Ministry of Defense



It is my great pleasure to share with you the amazing work of Meir Panim, which I have been involved with for many years. Meir Panim's vital work around the country saves lives by feeding the hungry and those vulnerable citizens who are in distress. Everyone is welcome and is treated warmly when they walk into one of the Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchens. Additionally, each client is served a meal and is treated with dignity and respect.

I have had the most personal experience with the Dimona Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchen, where I have volunteered and visited many times as it is close to where I live. Each person who enters a Meir Panim Branch knows

that this is a special place - where those in need are greeted with a warm smile and taken care of as if they are family. In fact, this is what sets Meir Panim apart from other organizations. Meir Panim becomes a second home to its clients and serves as a refuge for people going through the hardest of times.

As the former Mayor of Yerucham and a current minister in the ministry of defense, I have been able to see Meir Panim's work both on the local and national fronts and remain so impressed with how much they do for so many. In recognition of how Meir Panim treats its clients in the warm atmosphere the soup kitchens provide, it is amazing to see statistics and numbers transform into people with real life stories and challenges. I am grateful that Meir Panim's efforts help lift up so many individuals and families across Israel.

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# Meir Panim – Operating in the Shadow of Corona

## An Interview with Mimi Rozmaryn, Director of Global Development for Meir Panim

By Alan Rosenbaum

“The coronavirus pandemic has upended our work and has pushed us in every way possible,” says Mimi Rozmaryn, director of Global Development for Meir Panim, Israel’s largest assistance network for the needy. Meir Panim operates five Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchens – in Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, Or Akiva, and Dimona – that provide 490,000 quality meals annually, as well as Neighborhood Youth Centers, a Holocaust Survivor Day-Center, and various holiday initiatives.

During the height of the coronavirus lockdown, Rozmaryn says, Meir Panim was providing meals for triple the number of people it usually assisted. Even with the reopening of the economy, there has been a 25% increase in the number of people who require help.

**‘The core mission of Meir Panim is about serving and meeting community needs and treating our clientele with dignity’**

The pandemic has not only led to an increase in the number of people needing assistance but has also changed the way in which Meir Panim acquires its food supplies. Before the onset of

the pandemic, Meir Panim relied on using food retrieved from hotels and event halls for its Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchens. With many hotels and venues having curtailed their activities due to the lockdown and the slow pace of the economy, Meir Panim has had to prepare food directly or purchase catered food for its clientele.

“We’re not only feeding more people, but we are also doing so at an increased expense,” says Rozmaryn. Meal delivery to people in quarantine due to COVID-19 and preparation of meals for pickup during the lockdown have added to the operational costs.

Nevertheless, says Rozmaryn, Meir Panim has thrived during this period due to an unprecedented number of contributions received from generous

donors and assistance from Israel’s Home Front Command, which provided some catered meals, as well as staff to help deliver the food to people in quarantine.

But perhaps most important, says Rozmaryn, is the dedicated team that has been resilient and creative during these most difficult times. “Our branch managers are always doing something extra when they see someone who is in need. They are extremely resourceful and well-connected people in their communities, so that those who are in need know where to turn, and businesses that want to contribute know where to go.”

Rozmaryn tells the story of a woman in Tiberias whose child was entering first grade. The mother could not afford to buy a computer for her daughter’s distance learning. The manager of the Meir Panim branch arranged with a local business to donate a computer for the girl. Another manager learned that a family didn’t have any beds in their home and were sleeping on the floor. He contacted a furniture store to arrange a donation of beds for the needy family.

“The core mission of Meir Panim,” says Rozmaryn, “is about serving and meeting community needs and treating our clientele with dignity.”

It is for this reason that Meir Panim serves food restaurant-style. Patrons arrive, sit down, and are approached by a volunteer or staff person, who immediately brings them a tray of food. When they finish their meal, another volunteer appears and removes the tray.

**‘The Meir Panim team has been resilient and creative during these most difficult times’**



Mimi Rozmaryn, Photo: Marc Israel Sellem

“We want to go one step above giving – we want to give with dignity and respect. We want our clients not to feel needy but like members of our family,” Rozmaryn explains.

Meir Panim has another goal, which is to help break the cycle of poverty in Israel. “We not only want to meet the immediate requirements of people who are in need but also to help prevent some of the root causes of poverty,” Rozmaryn says.

Meir Panim has embarked on a number of projects large and small. These are some examples:

- Providing school supplies for first graders to start them on the right foot in their academic life
- Conducting after-school programs

in Or Akiva and Dimona for children in kindergarten through third grade to help them with their schoolwork

- Operating After School Neighborhood Youth Centers in Sderot to teach teens to use their time productively now and in the future. “We teach teens in grades 7-12 about their future IDF service, the importance of getting a good job in the army, and how having a good job in the army can set them on a successful trajectory for life,” says Rozmaryn.

- Managing budgeting workshops in Safed to help people remain financially stable.

Meir Panim also operates the Mortimer B. Zuckerman, Abigail Zuckerman & Renee Zuckerman Israel Nutrition Center in Kiryat Gat. This state-of-

the-art facility works in partnership with Shevet Achim, Israel’s premier catering company, provides high-quality meals and Holiday Packages at a low cost, enabling Meir Panim to expand its services to feed more disadvantaged Israelis. The Israel Nutrition Center provides area residents with much-needed employment, thus helping to break the cycle of poverty.

Rozmaryn is proud of the way Meir Panim has functioned during the coronavirus crisis and is happy with how the organization is regarded within the community. “We are the go-to resource for people in need. We have become the centralized resource for having a pulse on the community in a way that we always had but is acknowledged now in this time of crisis,” she says. ■

# Nutritional and Emotional Security

## How Meir Panim nourishes the body and soul

By Alan Rosenbaum

“Nutrition security,” says Dr. Dorit Adler, “exists when everyone can obtain the entire ‘basket’ of food that supplies all the nutritional ingredients for a healthy life so that people can use their potential to the fullest.”

Adler, who serves as president of the Israeli Forum for Sustainable Nutrition and is head dietitian of the Israeli Council for Nutrition Security, is deeply involved in nutrition, public health, nutrition security, and health promotion and its relation to social issues. She cites an alarming statistic provided by Israel’s Health Ministry, which states that 10,000 Israelis die every year from obesity and diseases related to malnutrition.

“Most diseases today,” Adler explains, “are the result of malnutrition – not only because people don’t get enough energy but because much of the food that we eat in Israel is ultra-processed food that is harmful and contributes to non-communicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and even Alzheimer’s.”

She says that sugary beverages, salty snacks, and baked goods that combine white flour with salt, sugar, and margarine are examples of ultra-processed foods that should be avoided. “We need to eat real foods that protect us,” she declares. She suggests that people should adopt a healthy and sustainable regimen, such as the Mediterranean diet, which is centered on plant-based foods, with a small amount of food of animal origin.

While Israel grows most of its fruits and vegetables and can support a healthy, basic food basket, Adler says that recent studies have shown that many people in lower socioeconomic brackets cannot afford to buy those items.

“If you don’t eat enough vegetables and fruits, then your risk of disease increases dramatically,” she states. Poor nutrition, she adds, will have significant implications for the Israeli health system and the next generation. “We know that women who are pregnant and suffer from malnutrition or obesity have a greater risk of having children who will develop obesity, heart disease, and other ailments. We are now feeding the diseases of the next generation.”



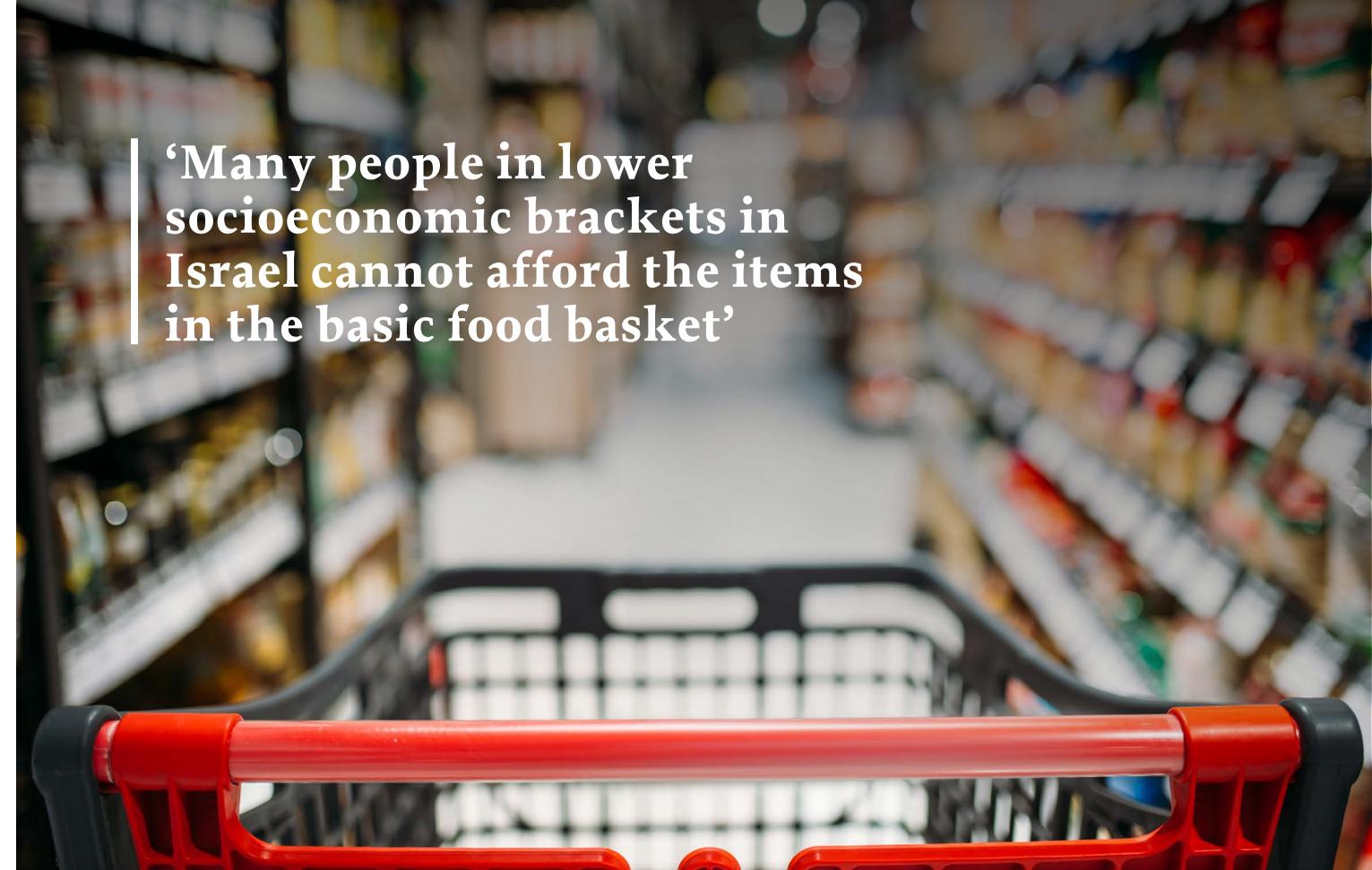
Dr. Dorit Adler, Photo: Courtesy

Adler notes that it is vital not to provide sweet beverages, salty snacks, and other harmful foods to sectors of the population whose nutritional needs are not being met. “It is crucial not to give harmful food to poor people,” she says. “Whoever wants to help should donate only healthy food.”

Ilanit Hafuta, head of the Meir Panim branch in Or Akiva, adheres to Adler’s dictum. In conjunction with a nutritionist, Hafuta cooks and prepares healthful meals daily for her clientele.

“It is important to provide the healthiest meals possible, especially now when many people aren’t working, and older people, Holocaust Survivors, and children don’t have the ability to go out to help themselves,” she says.

Hafuta prepares fish, chicken, or meatballs, along with an ample supply of vegetables and fruits. She notes that the assistance that Meir Panim provides nourishes not only the body but also the soul. She cites the case of a woman



‘Many people in lower socioeconomic brackets in Israel cannot afford the items in the basic food basket’

Photo: Getty images

whose grandson is disabled and was unable to leave his home. A volunteer from Meir Panim comes every day to take the child outside for some fresh air.

“Children with special needs,” Hafuta says, can be challenging when they are in the house all day, and the parents don’t know what to do.” She adds that Meir Panim volunteers visit seniors, water their plants, and take their pets out for a walk.

Yehudit Elimelech, head of the Tiberias branch of Meir Panim, also prepares food every day for those who come to the soup kitchen and offers a similar menu of tasty, satisfying, healthful selections. Like Hatufa, her assistance goes beyond serving nutritious meals.

Elimelech talks about a family of six that was unable to pay their bills. One of the daughters suffers from Crohn’s disease and was not aware that Bituach Leumi (the National Insurance Institute) provides financial assistance to those with Crohn’s. Meir Panim put the girl in touch with the staff at Bituach Leumi, which arranged to make payments to the family. Another child in the family needed a computer for distance learning due to school cancellations during the corona crisis. Meir Panim arranged for a computer to be donated to the family.

Tiberias, located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, is normally a popular tourist attraction. The cessation of international tourism to the city has been felt economically by its residents. Elimelech mentions a Tiberias resident who made his living piloting his boat on the Kinneret for visitors. Due to the economic slowdown, he now frequents the Meir Panim branch often, where he receives food and assistance.

Whether it is preparing healthful food for clients or helping those in need in a myriad of different ways, the staff of Meir Panim is always available. “Whatever we can do for them, we do. It’s not just about food,” Elimelech asserts. ■

‘10,000 Israelis die every year from obesity and diseases related to malnutrition’



# Meir Panim – Providing food and assistance to counter COVID-19



Photo: Meir Panim

# Do not cast me away during my old age

## How Meir Panim helps the aged and infirm

By Alan Rosenbaum

‘Meir Panim doesn’t work as an organization, it works as a family,’ says Cherie Albucher. In November 2018, Albucher of Modi’in discovered Meir Panim. She is a member of Mothers with Meaning, a national initiative of mothers in Israel building spirituality and community, helping others, and trying to make Israel a better place.

In 2019, Mothers with Meaning joined with Masa Israel Journey, taking the group on a five-day mission of self-discovery throughout the country. As part of the Masa itinerary, the group visited the Meir Panim branch in the Negev town of Dimona.

The Dimona branch features a Holocaust Survivor Day-Center, which provides physical and emotional support for Holocaust Survivors living in the city. Working in partnership with the Dimona Municipality, the program serves as a crucial support system for the area’s remaining Holocaust Survivors. In pre-corona times, the group, consisting of more than 35 Holocaust Survivors, would meet three days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The seniors enjoyed a hot breakfast, followed by activities and time in the community, with a nutritious lunch to end the day’s programming.

‘We totally fell in love with the place,’ says Albucher. ‘We were exposed to all the work that Meir Panim does for the people in Dimona, whether it be providing hot meals or taking care of them on a daily basis.’

Inspired by their initial visit, Albucher and the Mothers with Meaning decided to volunteer for Meir Panim. They returned to Dimona a few months later and organized a Shuk Purim fair in time for Purim 2019. Albucher and

her friends brought Purim costumes and second-hand clothes for the entire Dimona community.

‘We went down to Dimona with carloads of clothes,’ Albucher reports. ‘It was amazing. It was an opportunity to give back. That was our main message – that we are one family, giving back to the community, and we received something

from them as well. There is a lot of fulfillment when you can give to someone else and make someone smile.’

All the proceeds from the clothing sales at Shuk Purim went to fund Meir Panim’s programs.

‘The whole point of Mothers with Meaning is to think of ways to support



‘There is a lot of fulfillment when you can give to someone else and make someone smile’

the community and to support Meir Panim,’ says Albucher. She adds that participating in the Purim project gave the women a sense of fulfillment and connection not only with the Holocaust Survivors but also with the entire Dimona community. ‘I haven’t had grandparents for many years,’ she says. ‘Volunteering while having fun with them and making them happy is a huge gift for me.’

Albucher and the Mothers with Meaning have not been able to return to Dimona due to the coronavirus pandemic. ‘During corona, a lot of us were wondering who is making them happy. As a group, we are always trying to think of what we can do and how to help and support them,’ says Albucher,

## ‘The Holocaust Survivors are part of my heritage, and they are part of our people’

Throughout the pandemic, Meir Panim has been helping the elderly who have been confined to their homes. Volunteers have been bringing food packages and providing assistance. Albucher says that her group wants to continue their involvement with Meir Panim in Dimona and help provide new initiatives and ways to support the organization.

For Albucher, the drive to Dimona takes less than two hours. But for Constance and Robert Tolbert of Fosters, Alabama, the distance is considerably greater.

‘We wanted to make a significant donation to an organization that helped Holocaust Survivors, specifically in Israel,’ says Constance.

After seeing an ad for Meir Panim on the Internet, the couple learned about the organization’s work and decided to donate. ‘I felt that their transparency was really good, how much they helped this population and other populations as well...My heart connected with it, and we wanted to make a donation.’

The Tolberts contributed to Meir Panim and have continued to support

the organization. They traveled to Israel in April 2019, visiting the Meir Panim Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem and helping to serve patrons there during the visit.

‘I wish that I could actually be in Israel and provide hands-on help, but at least I have a job that I work hard at so that I can send money to Meir Panim,’ says Constance. ‘I’m excited to be a part of the organization. I’m proud of the work they do.’

The Tolberts receive emails regularly from Meir Panim, updating them on its activities. ‘I am a Jew,’ says Constance. ‘The Holocaust Survivors are part of my heritage, and they are part of our people. Meir Panim has a lot of social services, and they reach out to them and provide them with basic needs.’

Through its Holocaust Survivor Day-Center and other social programs, Meir Panim ensures that Israel’s elderly can enjoy each day with compassion and dignity. ■



Constance and Robert Tolbert together with Mimi Rozmaryn, at Meir Panim Jerusalem headquarters

# The Little Things

## How Meir Panim is changing lives in Sderot

By Alan Rosenbaum

‘It’s the little things that make the difference,’ says Naftali Naftalayev. Now 18 years old, Naftalayev grew up in a tough neighborhood in the western Negev town of Sderot, where drugs, crime, and violence are rampant.

Sderot is a low-income community where the poverty rate stands at 25%, and the unemployment rate of 13.5% is higher than the national average. Youth who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes are considered high-risk. Yet Naftalayev stayed out of trouble, graduated high school, studied at a military preparatory academy (mechina), and recently joined the Israel Defense Forces, where he is in training to be a paramedic.

The “little things” that made the difference for Naftalayev are found in Meir Panim’s Neighborhood Youth Center in Sderot, where he spent most afternoons and evenings



Naftali Naftalayevn, Photo: Courtesy

### ‘Meir Panim’s Neighborhood Youth Center offers a safe haven, where young people can learn to lead healthy and productive lives’

doing homework, engaging in activities, participating in discussions, and learning about life.

Naftalayev began frequenting the youth center with his friends before seventh grade. By the time he reached high school, the youth center had between 80 and 90 members, with a steady attendance of 30 to 40 teens every day. Naftalayev was an active member of the center for seven years. He attended programs at the youth center during the school year and every summer.

Meir Panim’s Neighborhood Youth Center offers a safe haven – a home away from home where, in partnership with caring staff and peer-to-peer mentoring, young people can learn to lead healthy and productive lives as responsible individuals and community members. Teenagers gain clarity, develop their potential, and work toward their personal, academic, and professional goals. This comfortable space also allows the youngsters to enjoy recreational facilities and spend meaningful time with friends, enabling them to live as normal a life as possible under abnormal circumstances.

“The staff helped me with whatever I needed,” says Naftalayev. “We had computer classes and art lessons and discussed current affairs.”

Discussions about current affairs in Israel, he says, were particularly important. “In the youth center, twice a week we had conversations about Israeli society. For kids living in Sderot who don’t see the outside world, when you talk about what is happening in the world, something is aroused



Photo: Getty images

### ‘If there is something for which I must thank Meir Panim, it is the support they gave me’

within you. It stimulated me to want to learn more and to continue learning.”

Many of the counselors at the youth center were students in various mechina programs in Israel, which inspired Naftalayev to enrol in a mechina after high school. He attended Nofei Prat, a 10-month pre-military leadership academy in the Judean Desert. The program is part of Ein Prat, a prestigious organization whose goal is to develop leadership skills and strengthen Jewish identity in Israeli youth.

“If there is something for which I must thank Meir Panim, it is the support they gave me,” he says.

When Naftalayev was a child, his parents warned him to avoid crime, drugs, alcohol, and violence. He began to look for answers. He says that the youth center in Sderot, with its wide range of activities, provided the answers to his questions, enabling him to spend his time productively and planning for his future.

Naftalayev entered the army just a few weeks ago. While he says it is difficult, he finds it exciting and enjoyable. He takes his responsibilities seriously and wants everyone in his paramedic course to complete the program. “Even if one student fails, that means that the rest of us are not good enough. If everyone thinks about only what he will take

and not what he can give, we won’t get very far,” he says.

Three years from now, when his army service is completed, Naftalayev is considering studying informal education and wants to return to Sderot. “I want to leave Sderot, learn things, and then return,” he says. “Just as Meir Panim did for me – they came and brought me things that I didn’t have at hand. They invested in me, and I want to go back and give back to them. If I do good for society, it will come back and help me.”

During his mechina service, Naftalayev frequently walked past Meir Panim’s Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchen near the Central Bus Station. “Whenever I saw Meir Panim in Jerusalem, I looked at it with admiration for all the work that they do. I don’t know what would have happened to me without Meir Panim,” he says. Smiling, he adds, “Please say ‘Thank you, thank you,’ from me in big letters!” ■

# A Hardship for Generations

## Escaping the cycle of poverty

By Chaim Walder

Translated by Alan Rosenbaum

My story begins with my grandmother.

She came to Israel at the age of eight, and her family lived in a bad neighborhood. Her parents suffered a mental breakdown, and she was left alone. At the age of thirteen, my grandmother was taken to an institution for foster girls. At the age of sixteen, she married someone, also from a broken family. At the age of seventeen, she had a child, and her young husband left her.

The baby grew up with a mother who was barely literate. She attended school when she felt like it, and she didn't often feel like it. She experienced her mother's lifestyle up close – and it was a terrible lifestyle – with no discipline or boundaries. She did not receive love and attention. Her mother had no strength for her. She did not know, for example, that a baby should crawl on the floor. She did not know that it is possible to talk to a child, even if he does not understand you. She fed her daughter from a bottle on the days when she had money to buy her food. There were days when there was no money. They lived in one room, and even if she wanted to crawl, she had nowhere to go. The result was a girl whose physical appearance was normal – perhaps even better than average – but mentally and academically, was deficient.

The girl finished elementary school, with more school absences than days of attendance. She started walking the streets, and at the age of fourteen, like her mother, entered an institution, the very same institution that her mother had attended. The psychologist in charge talked to her and told her what she already knew, that her mother had also spent time in this institution, for the same reasons she had come there. He suggested that she escape from the cycle of poverty, and try to rehabilitate herself, learn, and develop. This institution had all the resources necessary for her development, but what she had lost

for the past fourteen years, cannot always be returned. Although the institution gave her a warm home, educational and social opportunities, she did not take advantage of everything that had been given to her. She married at an early age, and the age of eighteen, just like her mother, gave birth to a daughter. I am that daughter.

It is a shame to repeat the story for the third time, but it repeated itself; a childhood without emotional giving, abject poverty, malnutrition, terrible neglect, beatings, humiliation, distress, and depression. This is what I remember from my childhood.

Luckily, my mother was even worse than her mother, and when, for the umpteenth time, they found me neglected and hungry, they took me to the very same institution. Fortunately, I was just eight years old. I was spared five further years of deterioration.

I was received by the same psychologist who had known my mother and grandmother. He had the same conversation with me that he had conducted with my mother. I could see that he himself did not believe what he said, but he was very kind and considerate.

Years of ups and downs followed. Luckily, I always had a warm place to return to, and people who listened to me, provided for me, set boundaries, punished me, and gave me gifts and praise. At the age of eighteen, I married a simple fellow from an even simpler family.

After we got married and he met my 'nice' family, I told him that it was time we escaped from the circle we had entered. We began to work hard and earned some money. A year after my marriage, I gave birth to a son, and we went through a challenging time because neither of our families supported us. I did not take maternity leave. I worked hard to provide food for my child, and I

also bought him toys. At first, I purchased toys that were not appropriate for a three-year-old, such as Lego and bicycles. The nurse at the Tipat Halav clinic became interested in me and provided me with games to stimulate my child's development. I was uneducated, but I decided to listen to all types of educational programs. I read books so that my son would get better opportunities than I had. I derived such pleasure from my son, and I loved him dearly, I talked to him even though I felt foolish, and I played games with him.

When he was eight months old, I received an invitation from the institution where I studied, to bring him along for a social gathering. They said there would be a session, and we would receive a children's game as a gift. I did not want to go, but my husband convinced me, and I went.

I was happy to meet all my friends with whom I had grown up. They were young mothers, and most did not look well. They discussed their troubles. They lived in poverty and deprivation, and only a few of them had husbands still living at home. The others raised the children alone. Single-parent families, just like my mother and grandmother. Even those who were still married recounted difficulties and quarrels that were a result of poverty. I was silent.

We were given a game to play with our children – plastic rings to stack in the shape of a pyramid. Each mother was asked to have her child build the pyramid. I was thrilled. I finally have a chance to prove how successful my child is. I was sure that my son would be more capable than the others.

I sat down next to him, and he began to build. As always, when you want to make a positive impression, your child does the exact opposite. At first, he scattered and

tossed the rings, laughing, and rolling with them. It made me laugh, and I laughed with him. Then I said to him, "Let's build this." First, he put down the smallest ring, placing the mid-sized ring on top, and then took it apart.

I told him, "Let's try again." I was under pressure because we had not built anything yet. He began to build with no set order. He placed one ring next to the other, instead of on top of each other, and then made a circle of rings around it, and when I told him to put them on top of each other, he took it apart again. I was angry. I said to my son, "That's a shame. I really want you to build now."

He was not used to me talking to him like that, and he began to cry. I was immediately angry with myself. How could I do such a thing to him? I hugged and kissed him, and said, "Do what you want. You don't have to build anything. Just play. I'm a bad mother, and I'm sorry." He saw that I was trying to calm him down, and he resumed playing. He did not build the tower but put placed one ring in the middle, and more rings around it, and in the end, he placed a small stick he had found on the middle ring.

I liked it, and I applauded him. They then announced, "Please stop the game and leave it as it is." Until then, I had been focused on playing with him. I looked around, and what I saw filled me with shame.

All the children had completed the task. Every pyramid had been perfectly constructed. While mine ...

What an embarrassment! A circle of rings with a stick facing up, not in order, and certainly not a pyramid. All the mothers all looked at me with pity, and one even said tactlessly: "Perhaps you should take your child to work on his motor development...."

The others just looked at me with compassion, and I started to cry. Where had I gone wrong? Then the psychologist spoke: "We created a competition between the children, and to follow the winners, we filmed you all. Now you can all watch the game you played." A big screen was brought in, and before I had time to think about it, we saw ourselves playing with the kids.

It turns out that all the kids started scattering and flipping the rings everywhere. Then we saw one mother say to her child, "Take this ring. Not the big one, the medium one. Here, take it." The mother pulls the large ring out of the boy's hands and gives him the medium-sized ring. The boy wants the big ring, and he insists on looking for it. The mother is hiding it from him. "You can't have it," she says. "Put the medium one on first, and only then will you get the big one."

The audience is embarrassed. The camera moves to another pair.

The second mother explains to her child what he needs to do, and even before he starts, she builds the tower herself, and says, "Do you see? Like this." The boy dismantles the tower, and his mother gets upset and says to him, "Bad boy, is that what you do to your mother? Now I am going to build it, and don't you dare take it apart!" Everyone is laughing. The camera reaches the third pair.

This mother is more sophisticated. She takes the baby's hand and builds the tower with it. The problem is, his hand is not long enough to reach all the rings, so she stretches his hand, and without noticing, drags the child to the correct ring. He screams in pain, and she doesn't even look in his direction. With the help of her hand, she drags him back to the game, and puts the ring in place, using the child's hand. The boy screams, and she slaps him on the cheek and says, "Enough, you crybaby. You're not letting me build it." The baby cries, and the crowd gasps. This is the same mother, by the way, who suggested that I take my son for lessons in motor development.

By the end, when everyone has understood the 'principle,' the camera comes to me. Everyone sees how I sit on the floor, letting my cute kid flip the rings everywhere, and I bring them back, and he begins to build, and then tears it down, and rolls with laughter. I laugh with him and ask him to build a tower, but instead, he builds what he wants and dismantles it. I tell him, "Now I want you to build," and he begins to cry, and I apologize and say, "Build what you want," and in the end, my child slowly builds what he wants to make, not what his mother was

told. He builds his own creation.

Cut. Everyone in the audience applauds.

I win the prize. It was a prize for the mother, not the child. The psychologist said that all the children would receive the game as a prize, while the winning mother would receive an additional reward. He then gave a lecture about mothers who see the child as part of them – as if the child has no will of his own – as opposed to mothers who understand that each child has a different nature and desires, and do not try to impose themselves on him. I did not listen to the lecture because I was delighted. I finally had proof that I was a good mother. I think this was enough reinforcement to get out of the cycle of poverty that started with my grandmother.

Ten years have passed. I have three children. We are not rich – we could even be called poor – but my children are well-raised and nurtured children, and they get everything that children need from parents: love, love, and more love.

We did not get out of the cycle of poverty, because 'Cinderella' is only found in fairy tales, but we got out of the cycle of distress.

My mother is still bouncing from place to place, occasionally coming to visit, crying, and kissing me. She is happy to see my family, and it is hard for her to grasp how I managed to get out of the terrible cycle of distress.

In these days of economic crisis, poverty and deprivation, I urge parents, and especially mothers, not to succumb to poverty and not to let it cause distress. Do not let the economic situation affect your mind, or your ability to give children love and strength. I succeeded, with God's help, and only because of Him. He gave me the strength to get out of a cycle of hardship that existed in my family for three generations. It's easier not to get into it in the first place. ■

# Giving thanks to Meir Panim

Posts from Meir Panim's Facebook page



How does a couple that has three children, plus two from a previous marriage, manage financially? What does one do when the money runs out, and one of the girls needs medication immediately?

Thanks to your donations, Yehudit from the Tiberias branch could help Vika and her husband with property taxes, electricity, and water, as well as food and medicine. Your contributions are the wings of our angels!

It is touching to read Vika's warm words: "Without Yehudit from Meir Panim, I

felt like a dead person. She gives me hot food every day. She provides me with essential products for preparing breakfast and dinner at home. She gives me vegetables so that I can raise healthy children, and recently, she even obtained a computer for my daughter.

No matter what the problem, I know that someone at Meir Panim Tiberias will listen and will try to help me. I am grateful to Meir Panim for helping me get through this period in peace. I cannot imagine where I would be without Yehudit."

1.3K 🙏❤️👍



The following story has no names – just people, dreams, and families. It's a love story about a young couple, both from large families, who dreamed of celebrating a proper Jewish wedding with their entire extended families. Once corona arrived and shattered the dream, there was no money left to celebrate.

We at Meir Panim are not ready to let

dreams fade, and a dream engagement party was held, in collaboration with Chef Harvey and conducted by our one and only Ilanit. It was an event that everyone who took part will never forget, with a variety of delicacies, gifts, and most important of all, the right to celebrate love and declare it with great joy, despite the difficulties of this time, and the challenging economic situation.

47 ❤️🙏👍



With all due respect to corona, loneliness is perhaps the most incurable epidemic of today. Yarden, who works at the Meir Panim Youth Center in Sderot, helps students with schoolwork even during these difficult days, and, more importantly, lends a sympathetic ear.

Thanks to your donations, Yarden can give of himself to the children who need a shoulder to lean on, to be the one who

is there for them, and who will give of himself for the benefit of others. In the picture, you can see him together with a child who is having difficulty returning to school and needs support.

221 ❤️👍

We help the living and pay our respects to those who are no longer alive. On Yom HaZikaron (Memorial Day) our volunteers went to lay wreaths at the graves of IDF soldiers. We held a ceremony that included placing plants, an Israeli flag and a memorial candle bearing the name of the deceased. This year – more than ever – we needed to honor them, because we were the

emissaries of the relatives who wanted to be there but were unable to attend.

We pay our respects not only on Remembrance Day but all year round. Meir Panim provides cheer and travels to the farthest military bases to pamper and provide food and basic products to those who enable us to live safely.



2.2K 🙏❤️👍



It's incredible how much one can accomplish when one has the will. This is the story of Y., 58, from the United States, the father of two lovely children, ages 14 and 10. Y., his wife and two children moved to Israel 10 years ago from San Francisco. His law degree did not guarantee a job, but after two years, he was able to find work in the Holy Land. Of course, the salary was nothing close to what he would have received in the United States, but it was enough to support his family with dignity.

Then corona came and re-shuffled the cards.

Like many families in this country, Y.'s

family was unable to set money aside for a rainy day, and one morning, they found themselves without income and savings and with two small children to care for.

With no money to buy products for Passover and with a heavy heart, Y. sent an email as a last resort to Meir Panim and the picture changed. We were able to re-ignite the spark in the eyes of Y. and his family.

The family was able to conduct a suitable Passover Seder. Since then, Y. found a new job. It is possible that all of this might not have happened without a little help at the right time from the right place.

1.9K 🙏❤️👍

We hope you have something with which to wipe your tears because this time, it's a particularly moving story. Yair Klein, 17, wrote and recorded a song called "The Round Apartment" about

parting from his beloved grandmother, and he writes on the song's web page that he supports Meir Panim because it strengthens all our grandparents.



47 ❤️🙏👍

# A World of Support for Meir Panim

## Supporters speak out

By Alan Rosenbaum

From Queensland to Texas, from Baltimore to London, the name of Meir Panim evokes respect from supporters of all stripes who believe in helping and providing for those in need.

Katie and Greg Holloway live in the central Texas city of Temple and have visited Israel and Meir Panim branches numerous times. They first visited Meir Panim's Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem in 2011 and, inspired by the organization's activities, became loyal supporters.

In 2019, during their visit to the Or Akiva branch, they noticed that the distribution center was covered with a tarpaulin that had become worn. In conjunction with their church, the couple initiated a fundraising drive to replace the tarp with a metal pergola, which now graces the Or Akiva center.

"Meir Panim is a strong building block in creating relationships between Christians and Jews," says Katie. "It's important to bond with the Jewish people, and Meir Panim gives us that opportunity."

Greg Holloway views the responsibility to care for the poor as a religious obligation, citing the verse from Proverbs (17:5) "Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker." "That says it all for me," he asserts.

Cantor Avraham Albrecht of Congregation Beth Tefiloh in Baltimore, Maryland, a member of the board of directors of American Friends of Meir Panim, was introduced to the organization by a friend 15 years ago on a visit to Israel. "I saw families that Meir Panim supports in Kiryat Malachi, and when I saw the

way that they lived, I was shocked. I had not been exposed to the idea that hunger exists in Israel and that people are living in poverty," he recounts.

Upon returning to the United States, Albrecht was determined to help the organization. Over the years, he has

given many benefit concerts on behalf of Meir Panim. Three years ago, he visited Meir Panim in Or Akiva, and he enthuses, "I had an amazing meeting there. They are doing tremendous work."

Albrecht speaks highly of the way Meir Panim regards its clientele. "They always

treat people with a lot of dignity. The person could be very poor, but they relate to the person as if he were the wealthiest person in the world."

Sarina Dwek of London, chairperson of Meir Panim's UK board of directors, like Albrecht, did not know that hunger and poverty existed in Israel until

she witnessed it with her own eyes. "Normally, she says, "people like to support fancy projects. It is easier to support hospitals, science, and the arts than to help an organization that combats poverty. One has to have a special character."

Dwek is fully involved in Meir Panim's

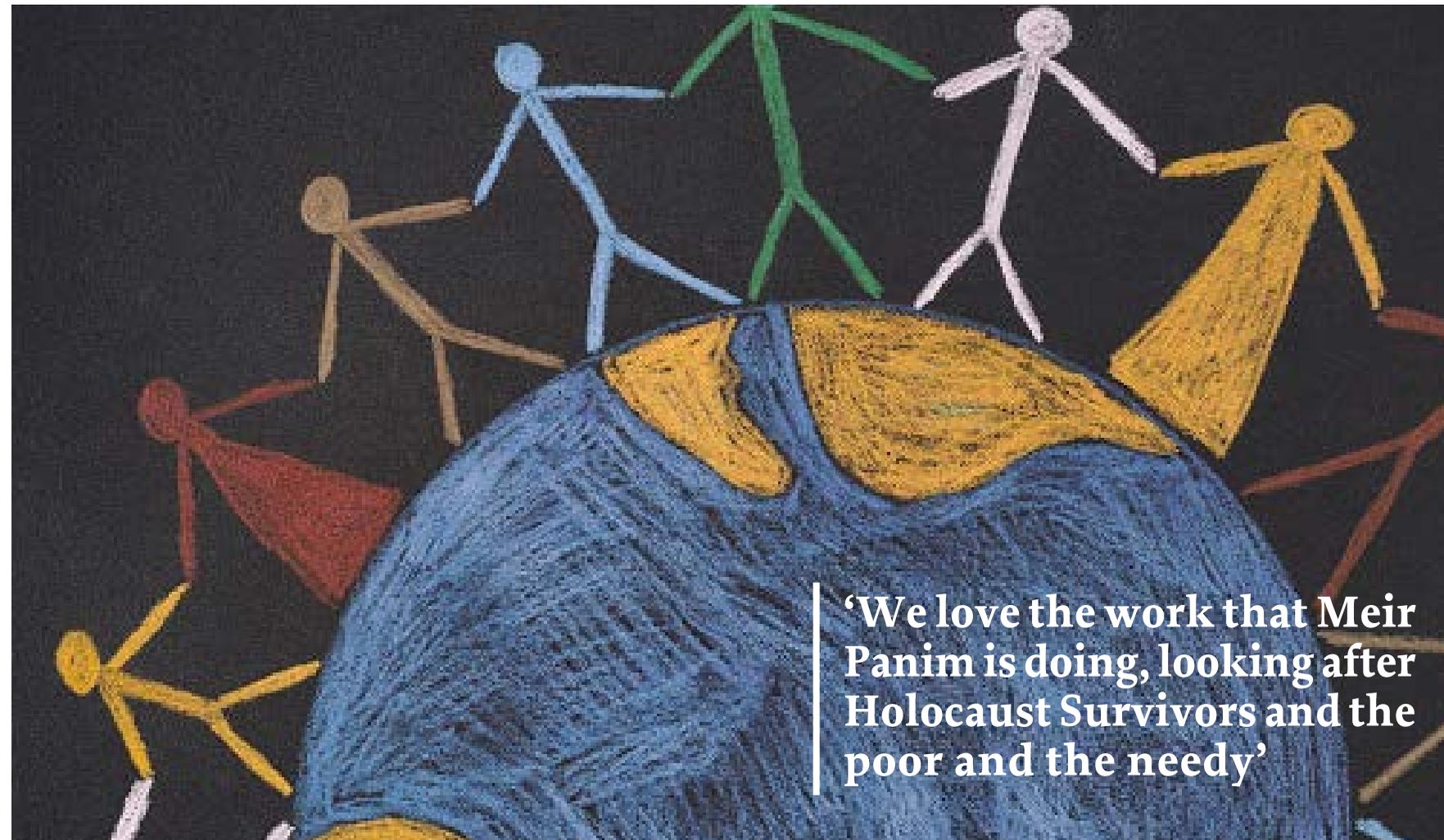
activities in England and helps to raise money for its annual dinner. "I like the 'multiply effect' of Meir Panim," she says, referring to the fact that funds which Meir Panim receives are used to help its charity infrastructure, which the organization then uses to raise additional funds from other groups. "The money that we give Meir Panim enables it to get local people to approach others to obtain more donations," she explains.

Howard and Glynnis Heath, of Hope Island, located on Australia's Gold Coast, are Christian pastors. "The Bible is quite clear about our responsibility for helping the people of Israel and, in particular, the poor people of Israel," says Howard. "Many years ago, we were looking for a suitable organization to support. We found Meir Panim, and we have been supporting it ever since. We love the work that Meir Panim is doing, such as looking after Holocaust Survivors and the poor and the needy and feeding them."

Although the Heaths have never been to Israel, they follow current events closely and receive regular updates about the organization's activities. "Meir Panim does its work extremely well, to the best of its ability. They have many wonderful supporters and volunteers, working with dignity and respect," says Howard.

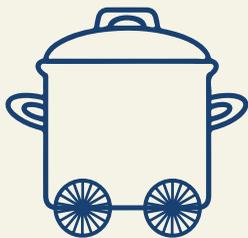
Four families located in four different points around the globe are supporting the work of Meir Panim with enthusiasm and appreciation. As Katie Holloway says, "If we would all treat each other with the dignity and respect that Meir Panim treats its clientele, the world would be a better place." ■

**'It's important to bond with the Jewish people, and Meir Panim gives us that opportunity'**



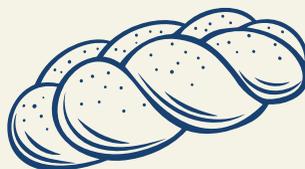
**'We love the work that Meir Panim is doing, looking after Holocaust Survivors and the poor and the needy'**

Photo: Getty images



**110,000**

Meals-on-Wheels and  
Takeout Meals distributed  
each month during COVID



**20,000**

challahs each month



**20,000**

Prepaid shopping cards in  
advance of Rosh Hashanah  
and Passover



**3,000**

volunteers a year!



**31,200**

Holiday Meal Packages:  
Shavuot, Passover  
and Rosh Hashanah

## Statistics



**1 in 7** Israelis are skipping meals



**50%** of Israelis are worried  
they can't pay rent



Over **20%** unemployment rate