



Make a brachah before you eat! Don't forget to daven. Did you bentch? How many times have we heard someone tell us these words? Sometimes we might even wonder why we are doing these mitzvos in the first place. And after a while, do you sometimes find yourself less excited about mitzvos?

Binyan caught up with educator Rabbi Maimon Elbaz, who created an exciting program called Torah Shows – a “fun-damental” slideshow for kids from ages six to thirteen (pun intended) that inspires us to perform the mitzvos with enthusiasm and joy. Let's hear about it!

Rabbi Elbaz, what are your famous Torah Shows?

Torah Shows are slideshows for kids, with incredible short stories, interactive Torah riddles and amusing pictures.

Can you tell us about the shows?

I started traveling with the shows in 1999. Each year I polished one show, so by now there are thirteen shows in all. Some of the topics include: “The Gift of Shabbos,” with real-life photos of the dos and don'ts of Shabbos, and stories about the *heilige* day of Shabbos.

Another show, “*Bentch Like a Mentch*,” helps us see Hashem's kindness in granting us delicious food in

miraculous ways. For the words, “*hazan es ha'olam kul b'tuvo b'chein b'chessed uv'rachamim*,” we show how Hashem makes dark clouds, thunder and lightning and rain. You see how the rain makes the grass grow, the cows eat the grass and then you see them being milked. That milk goes into our ice cream and the cheese on pizza. Now we understand what it means that Hashem feeds the cows so we can have such appealing treats, like ice cream in so many flavors, and pizza with so many toppings. Hashem does this all with mercy and compassion. After we see that, we can certainly hope for a better *bentching*!

Can you tell us about your favorite shows?

Sure! The best show I ever made is on *davening*. I use five hundred real-life pictures to show my viewers what we should be thinking about as we *daven*. People are amazed at the impact they can have on the whole world and their future! Even adults tell me how this show has enhanced their *davening* permanently. Another favorite is the Animal Show. It's about the many *mitzvos* we do with animals, how animals help humans every day, and what *Chazal* said we should learn from animals. These shows were so popular that we translated them into Yiddish as well.

When I do a private show, I like to incorporate photos of my customer into the images. So if the show is in honor of a *bas mitzvah*, the guests see the *bas mitzvah* girl as the star of the show at happy milestones in her life. This is more exciting than seeing your name on a birthday cake! I love to put a smile on a person's face!

How did you start doing these shows?

I always loved to mesmerize audiences with storytelling. (Maybe that's because Rav Shalom Shwadron, the Yerushalmi Maggid, was my *sandak!*) When I was twelve, on Shabbos afternoons in the summer, I ran a Pirchei Agudath Yisrael group in Baltimore. My father, Reb Avrohom Elbaz, *a'h*, gave me permission to give out popsicles to the children of Yeshivah Lane who came to hear my stories. In a short time, I became like the Pied Piper, with throngs of children following



Exciting! MITZVOS

By Danielle Sarah Storch





me to hear my tale and enjoy my treats.

At my bar mitzvah, Harav (Mordechai) Gifter, *zt"l*, told my mother, "One day, Maimon is going to do great things for Jewish education!"

With the help of Hashem, about twenty years ago, I started a Children's Torah Center in Flatbush, welcoming kids from all backgrounds to come learn "after hours." Kids would come every Shabbos, sometimes for six hours! Can you imagine, they didn't want to stop learning Torah! I started recording my stories on tapes, and I gave out the tapes as prizes. I was very happy to see the kids valued them. But in my heart, I always wished that one day I would be able to give them more – maybe Torah videos or educational game shows.

Later, when I got older, I ran a candy store in Telshe Yeshivah in Cleveland, Ohio. Every so often, I would offer a daily question or riddle and the winner would get a prize of popcorn or soda. People looked forward to coming in and trying to win a treat. I felt great because I brought Torah into my business.

Over the years, many entertainers were invited to my shul to perform for the children. Many jugglers, clowns and other performers came through our doors. But I always wished that the performances could have *tochen* (content) – after all, why should I spend hundreds of dollars on *devarim beteilim*? I searched for entertainment with a *Yiddishe taam* – and that's when I found Rabbi Helfand.

Tell us about that.

Rabbi Helfand ran a stunning slideshow with a beautiful collage of what's what in Eretz Yisrael. I started hiring him every year to come to my program. Each time he came, I wanted to go to Eretz Yisrael!

One year, he couldn't come – so I decided to prepare my own slideshow about Eretz Yisrael. It was a success!

Where did you get so many pictures for your show?

I started a contest in Brooklyn, N.Y. I told the kids to take pictures of themselves doing any *mitzvah*. They would get a dollar as a reward for every quality photo. Then the kids were told to bring in any picture of Jewish interest. I was amazed at the creativity of the kids. One boy brought in a picture of "Lot's wife" in stone. Another boy brought in a picture of himself sleeping in the *sukkah*, and a third boy brought in a picture of a *Gadol Hador* testing him on *Mishnayos baal peh*. I turned the photos into slides and showed them to the boys. Everyone felt good, since they were the stars in the show.

Where do you go with the Torah shows?

To every shul, school, camp or party that hires me. With Hashem's help, we've been to over fifty cities to date, including Los Angeles, Florida, Detroit, London, Toronto, Boston, Baltimore and many more places.

Are there places where you haven't had a show yet?

Yes. Mexico is one place I haven't brought the show yet, and I would like to go there. The only problem is that I would need to have it translated into Spanish first!

Do you have any stories for us?

One time I had a show in a school for kids from the former Soviet Union. As I got ready to put on my show, the students told me that they had already seen it! I was shocked and didn't know what to do. I *davened* to Hashem for help, and this is what happened next: Hashem gave me new things to say about each slide. With every single

slide that I showed, I told a completely different story. The children were entertained, and it went over very well. That was very scary, but I did learn that my shows can be the same pictures, but different shows each time. That's because I am able to use the same pictures and tell new and interesting stories each time. There is so much to be said about the *mitzvos*.

Where do you want to present your slide shows?

My dream goal is to get into every shul and school. This is because there is so much *achdus* in my shows. I try to represent every type of *Yid* in my shows, which is really heartwarming. My shows portray *Am Yisrael* as one big, happy family! It's exciting to show *chassidim*, *Sephardim*, *Ashkenazim*, and more, in each production.

Has it been easy to get into shuls?

Sometimes people want me to come, and it's easy. But other times I've had more difficulty. One funny story comes to mind. I was trying to get a shul one block away from me to host a showing. They weren't sure. Then I was asked to perform six thousand miles away in Los Angeles. Lo and behold – *hashgachah pratis*: They loved the show, and my client asked me if I ever showed it at her brother's shul. She called her brother – my neighbor – and was so enthusiastic. Well, the rest is history – they had a show. The Rabbi told me it was so enchanting and enjoyable. I said, "Look at that, I had to travel across the entire United States to get appreciated down the block!"

For more information about Torah Shows or to enhance your next event with Torah that will touch your soul, contact DearRebbi@gmail.com or 347-967-9138 for references and information.