

# A Summer to Remember

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Illustrated by Mordechai Zeffren

It was Thursday, the last day of school. Emunah and Elana were practicing Camp Menucha's cheer, Penina and Yael were singing Camp Shira's song, and even Shulamis, usually so quiet, was talking about all the friends she'd soon be seeing again in Camp Achva.

Miriam sat slumped at her desk, trying to ignore the happy sounds all around her. When the dismissal bell finally rang, she muttered "Have a nice summer," to some of the other girls, grabbed her schoolbag and almost ran out the door. Once outside, though, she walked home slowly, staring at the ground. She was surprised by a voice asking, "What are your summer plans, Miriam?"

It was Gavi Schwimmer, a girl in the next grade who lived around the corner from Miriam. Their schedules were different, but they sometimes walked home together.

"Plans? What do I have to plan?" Miriam burst out. "Another long, hot, boring summer alone, with nothing to do and nowhere to go! It's not fair. Why can't I go to camp, just once? The boys go every year. 'They need their learning,' Mommy says, but don't I need to learn something new?"

"Oh, you don't go to camp either? That's wonderful," Gavi cried. "Then maybe you can help me." She gave Miriam a happy smile. "I have a fantastic idea, but I need a partner. And you would be perfect!"

"Oh, really?" was all Miriam could say.

"Yes," Gavi continued, "this year our grade learned about the importance and power of saying Tehillim (Psalms). Our cries go straight up to Shamayim. Hashem looks down and listens." She stopped walking and smiled at Miriam again. "Wouldn't it be great if you and I went together to different people on our block and said a chapter or two of Tehillim with our neighbors? Imagine what a zechus it would be for everyone!"

"Why?" Miriam asked. "Don't you only say Tehillim if someone is really sick?"

"Oh, no," answered Gavi. "Tehillim is for everyone. And anyway, I have a whole list of people on our block who could use special help from Hashem. You know, Mrs. Finebach walks with a cane, and Mr. Burnsinger has terrible arthritis in his hands."

"I see," said Miriam slowly. "And I know some children with asthma, or food allergies, for example."

"Every morning after davening, we'll say Tehillim at a different home," Gavi explained. "Then we take a lunch break, and go to another neighbor in the afternoon. We'll blanket the block with extra zechusim!"

"Gavi," Miriam wondered, "how soon after davening? I mean, can I sleep late in the mornings? And what will you do until lunch?"

"Well," Gavi answered, "I told Mrs. Finebach I'd be at her house at 9:45 next Monday. I also planned to offer to stay for a while and just chat or help out in some other way, after we say Tehillim. I have people lined up for Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays." Gavi looked at Miriam. "So, what do you say?"

Miriam thought for a moment. "I'll try it for a week," she said, "and then I'll decide if I'll continue."

"Terrific," Gavi said. "My family is going away for Shabbos, so let's set a time now to meet on Monday. How about if I pick you up at your house at 9:30?"

"Sounds good," agreed Miriam. "Oh, we're almost home. See you Monday, then! Enjoy your Shabbos!" The girls waved goodbye to each other. Miriam walked into her house with a much lighter step.

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Mrs. Finebach was thrilled with the girls' visit. After saying Tehillim, she offered them fresh cake and lemonade. "The only way I can think of to repay your thoughtfulness," she murmured, "is perhaps to give you baking lessons. People have always liked my baking - in Hungary, my strudel was famous."

That afternoon, after they finished saying Tehillim with Mrs. Frank, she began to teach the girls how to prepare foods for special diets; they cooked spelt spaghetti and made ice cream from soymilk.

Tuesday, the girls visited Mr. Burnsinger. "Would you like to learn a new skill? I can teach you calligraphy," he told them.

"My husband is a sofer (one who writes Torahs, Tefillin and Mezuzahs)" explained Mrs. Burnsinger proudly, "and he also designs Jewish artwork. You can become your class experts."

After lunch, Mr. Mahalli introduced the girls to his pet parrot, Ida. "Maybe Ida can help you with your schoolwork - she speaks five languages!" he laughed.

On Wednesday the girls said Tehillim with little Chava Klein. "What a blessing you are," exclaimed Chava's mother. "Summer is so hard for Chava. With her asthma, she can't stay outside for too long. I practically bought out the entire craft store, but I don't have time to sit with her and do crafts. Could you stay on and do projects with Chava?"

Later that day, the girls took Mrs. Greenberger's two-year-old twins to the park while their mother rested.

"Maybe Thursdays will be our boring day," remarked Miriam as they knocked on Mrs. Hershberger's door. "It seems awfully quiet here."

"Welcome, girls," Mrs. Hershberger greeted them. "Come into the sunroom." Mrs. Hershberger led them to a room where sunshine danced on a gorgeous collection of flowers, plants, and miniature trees. She pointed to two small flowerpots in the center of the room. "After our Tehillim session, if you like, I'll teach you some gardening tricks," Mrs. Hershberger offered. "I've planted mystery seeds in these two flowerpots for you. Water them every day, and by the end of the summer you will have a pleasant surprise."

Thursday afternoons, they took turns typing the book Mr. Weinstein was writing about his journey from Poland to Holland to France to Switzerland and finally to America.

At the end of the first week, Gavi asked Miriam if she would like to keep on visiting with her. "Well, I don't have any other plans," Miriam said, smiling, "and its actually kind of fun and of course a great mitzvah."

It was Mrs. Hershberger who came up with the great idea. "I feel so zippy," she exclaimed with a twinkle in her eyes, "it must be the strength I get from saying Tehillim with you. I want to give something back. Let's have a Block Party the week before school starts again. All the neighbors can bring things to sell, and the money will go to tzedakah."

Gavi and Miriam agreed happily. Mr. Burnsinger designed flyers announcing the event, and contributed some beautiful Mezuzos; Mrs. Hershberger displayed her orchids. Mrs. Finebach brought babkas and strudel; Mrs. Frank offered healthful treats. Chava Klein set up a crafts tent for kids, and the Greenberger twins were her "helpers."

"Shalom, bonjour, buenos dias, gutten tag, hello," Ida the parrot squawked endlessly. Mr. Weinstein took out his old fiddle and played Jewish songs.

All too soon, the Fair was over. Over \$1,500 was raised for tzedakah! After everyone had gone home, Miriam turned to Gavi. "I owe you thanks, and an apology," she said.

"Why?" laughed Gavi. "You helped me."

"At first, your idea sounded more like school than vacation," Miriam replied. "But I learned to love Tehillim - and all the neighbors."

"I was a little nervous to suggest it," Gavi admitted. "But I remembered that my teacher said we sometimes have to jump into good projects, and they will

blossom - just like our mystery pots did! Mine is a sweet pepper plant, and yours grew into cherry tomatoes."

"It wasn't a boring summer at all. These last two months we harvested tomatoes, peppers, tzedakah, fun, and friendship," Miriam exclaimed. "We learned so many new things, too - and I didn't even have to go to camp to do it!"

