

Over Three Hundred Shidduchim and Counting

OHEL SARALA'S
"אולי אבנה ממנה"

A Clarion Call of Hope for Singles and Couples

By: Frimet Blum

With the shidduch crisis hitting epic proportions and a growing number of families struggling with infertility, it's heartening to hear stories of people who experienced salvation. Ohel Sarala, a Bonei Olam program that pairs singles with couples waiting for children, is at the heart of many of those stories. The miracles began happening almost as soon as the program was launched.

An older single got engaged. A couple learned that they were expecting a baby. It was as if the heavens had opened and an outpouring of blessing was showering down upon those who had joined.

Today, two and a half years later, the miracles continue. As we go to print, the organization has been involved in at least 325 shidduchim and ninety-seven babies. The simchas are no coincidence. As per the directive of Hagaon Harav Aron Leib Shteinman, zatzal, Ohel Sarala harnesses the Torah's source for blessing.

What is Ohel Sarala?

It began when Rabbi Shlomo Bochner, founder of Bonei Olam, visited Rav Shteinman.

"There are two problems that give me no peace of mind," the elderly sage said. "Older singles and couples dealing with infertility." Both have no children.

The two are related, said the Rosh Yeshiva. We see that Sarah Imeinu gave Hagar to Avraham Avinu, saying "Ulei ibaneh mimenah, perhaps I will be built from her" (Beraishis 16:2). Immediately afterward, Hashem sent the angel to tell her that she would give birth. The Torah is teaching us middah k'neged middah—a person is repaid for his deeds measure for measure. When a person helps someone else have a child, he will open channels to also merit a child. Since marriage is the precursor to having children, helping a childless couple is a merit for a shidduch.

couple is a merit for a shidduch.

The two are related, said the Rosh Yeshiva. We see that Sarah Imeinu gave Hagar to Avraham Avinu, saying "Ulei ibaneh mimenah, perhaps I will be built from her" (Beraishis 16:2). Immediately afterward, Hashem sent the angel to tell her that she would give birth. The Torah is teaching us middah k'neged middah – a person is repaid for his deeds measure for measure. When a person helps someone else have a child, he will open channels to also merit a child. Since marriage is the precursor to having children, helping a childless couple is a merit for a shidduch.

Rav Shteinman asked Rabbi Bochner to connect singles with waiting couples, by having the singles donate to Bonei Olam. Such an arrangement, he said, would harness the power of middah k'neged middah and bring about salvation. Rabbi

When a person helps someone else have a child, he will open channels to also merit a child.

Bochner mentioned the idea to Rabbi Aryeh Ginzberg, who, together with his wife, had been looking for something to do in memory of their daughter Sarala, a"h. Sarala hadn't had the chance to get married or have children, and the project was a fitting memorial. They named it Ohel Sarala.

Ohel Sarala pairs singles with couples waiting for children. The singles make a donation to Bonei Olam. Then, following Chazal's dictum of "he who prays for his friend is answered first," the singles and couples pray for each other. The divine providence is unmistakable.

When a single asked Ohel Sarala to invite "her" couple to her wedding, they couldn't attend – because the wife was on pregnancy-related bedrest. When a different couple heard that "their" single was getting engaged, they had their own news to share. They had heard of their own impending simcha that very day!

At a Bonei Olam event in Bnei Brak, one woman shared a story that underscores the concept of singles and couples helping each other.

When this woman was a little girl, she was diagnosed with

cancer. She went through a terrible time, with chemo, radiation and more pain than any little girl could bear. Finally, she was declared cured. One day, when the doctor thought she was out of earshot, she overheard him drop a bombshell to her parents. He said that the drugs had damaged her body – and she would never have children.

For years, the secret hounded her.

"What kind of a life will I have?" she thought. "How can I go on?" But she couldn't bring herself to share her pain with her parents. Instead she confided in a friend. The two became very close. Later, her friend married and had a large family, while she remained single. She filled the emptiness in her life by spending time in her friend's home, helping her care for her growing brood.

Then the unthinkable happened. Just after the birth of her seventh child, her friend developed complications and became deathly ill. A few days later, she was gone.

It was crushing. This girl had lost the one person who had given meaning to her life. What was going to be with her now? What was going to happen with the seven orphans left behind; one just a few days old? But her grief turned to shock when, just after the shloshim, her friend's husband called.

"My wife had a dying wish," he said. "She begged me to ask you to marry me. She felt you would be the best person to raise our children." After much deliberation, she agreed. Shortly after the wedding, she approached Bonei Olam.

"I know that medically I can't have a child," she said. "I accepted the fact that I would never get married. But now I am married. Will you help me?" And although her files looked hopeless, and though the doctors thought there was no chance it

would work, Bonei Olam was touched enough by her story to give her a chance.

Against all odds, just a few months later, she was expecting – and now the cancer survivor who couldn't have a child has eight children: the seven orphans she is raising as her own, and her own precious little girl.

"I lived through both challenges helped by Ohel Sarala," she said. "I started as a single, and then I was childless. Yet my years of helping someone with children stood me in good stead. And here I am, the mother of eight children." Rabbi Bochner adds –

"The power of helping a fellow Jew, of aching with his pain, is so great; it opens channels of blessing." As Reb Isser Zalman Meltzer, zatzal, said, we live in a time of hester panim – when Hashem's mercy is hidden. Yet when we help each other, when there is midah k'neged midah, we open channels of blessing, and can see Hashem's magnificent hand. Joining Ohel Sarala opens those channels.

Ohel
sarala

Visit ohelsarala.org to sign up, view inspiring videos or learn more about his remarkable program.



Rabbi Bochner consulting with Gedolim