



By Jennifer M. Paquette

**W**riting in Hebrew comes slowly and with difficulty.

“Dear *Morah*,” I write, as I begin the first *mitzvah* note. *Morah*, in Hebrew, slowly and with difficulty.

I am supposed to write a *mitzvah* note, but I have never seen a *mitzvah* note. How will I know what to write; how will I know what this *mitzvah* note is supposed to look like?

“Dear *Morah*,” I begin, and then wonder whether I’ve spelled *morah* correctly, and then wonder what I should put after that. There’s a little thing with initials (*ayin mem vav shin*\*) that I have seen other people use — this acronym, after they write the name of a person. And Yerachmiel has two teachers, so should I write “Dear *Morot*,” or whatever the plural of *morah* might be? And then do I still write the “*ayin mem vav shin*” thingy at the top?

I make a decision and go ahead and write it, even though I have no idea what it means. And it feels false. Completely insincere, this writing at the top that I do not understand.

While writing this *mitzvah* note, I am trying to think about my son. He has asked me to write this *mitzvah* note, to praise his achievements to

these new teachers whom he wants to impress. So I am also trying to impress the teachers, so they will like my son; so they will understand me and appreciate the way I am raising him. It’s a lot to cram into one note.

But when I look at the words, they are askew; the letters are askew and childish-looking, somehow. They look like they were penned by a person learning how to write, which is what I am.

I remember when I went to the rabbi for the first time to sell my *chometz*. He asked me to sign my Hebrew name on the form, and I felt so foolish, standing there thinking about the letters, thinking about each letter as I pressed it onto the page with my pen.

This time, too, the writing in Hebrew comes slowly. Too slowly. So I tear up that page, and another and another. I feel humiliated that I’m not able to write better. I’m proud of my handwriting in English; yet in Hebrew, I’m reduced to this childlike scrawl.

Finally, the note is begun to my satisfaction. “Dear *Morah*” looks okay, and it is time to go on and write the actual note. So I do, I write the actual note, but when I come to my son’s name, I realize I should write it in Hebrew. The name of my son, who is proud of his Jewish name.

This time, I practice on another piece of paper, because I’ve already got

the “Dear *Morah*” part down right and I don’t want to ruin it. So I practice on another sheet of paper.

On another sheet of paper, I write over and over, “Yerachmiel Meir,” in Hebrew. “Yerachmiel Meir.” And finally, I get it looking a little bit right. Still childish, but a little bit right.

I cannot help but wonder, as I transcribe his name onto the note, how he would feel, if he were watching me, now or five years, ten years down the line. Watching my writing come slowly in Hebrew, letters pouring painstakingly, like cold maple syrup that doesn’t want to flow, out onto these *mitzvah* notes.

And I pray that Hashem will give me the strength to learn somehow to form these letters more fluidly before that day comes, before he can watch me writing them.

Perhaps he will be disillusioned, for he knows more than me, in some ways, already, just with what he’s learned in kindergarten. But I go on, writing my inadequate *mitzvah* notes, and slowly, slowly, the words will begin to flow more easily. **JA**

\* *Ayin mem vav shin*: I finally worked up the nerve to ask somebody. She told me this stands for “*ad meah v’esrim shanah*” — “[may the person live] to 120.” I knew this expression already, but with Hebrew acronyms, it’s always hard to put two and two together.

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