

Bringing Joy to the Hearts of Almanos (lyov)

Impressions from heartfelt thank you notes received from almanos

Among the emotional thank you letters and notes which flood the desk of “Keren Almanos V’yesomim,” we have observed several themes which come up repeatedly, which uniquely describe the pain and the difficult situations of these almanos.

It is impossible to remain untouched reading hundreds of letters, which provide a partial glimpse into the broken hearts of these shattered families, the way they continue running their homes, and mainly, how the support of the Keren helps them cope not only financially, but also physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Truth Speaks for Itself – Between the lines of letters which have been penned with blood and tears, the actual accomplishments of the Keren are powerfully highlighted. It is time for Kllal Yisroel everywhere to be aware of these outstanding achievements while maintaining respect for the recipients and protecting their dignity.

Following is a partial list of observations, sometimes gleaned from one letter, often from several. But each one stands out like a sparkling gem in the crown of this priceless Mitzvah.

- **Respect and Dignity.** Our families get to shop just like ordinary families do. This particular aspect makes it easier for many of them to accept assistance. If the

system of operation weren't so dignified, many almanos would not participate.

For people used to live on a very comfortable standard all their lives, the concept of accepting help is very foreign, and it's a difficult decision for them. The founders of the Keren personally reach out to almanos, encourage them to receive assistance, often actually begging them to avail themselves of the support they offer.

The most significant factor that ends up winning the trust of so many families is the dignified and honorable way the support is provided. While the Keren's founders convince some almanos, others are persuaded by friends who share their personal experience and the feeling of maintaining their self-respect.

- **A Mindset of Plenty.** Almanos are constantly reassured that they can purchase as much as they need for their families. They are also encouraged to invite their married children for Shabbos and Yom Tov, which significantly enhances the atmosphere in their homes. Running an abundant kitchen and inviting married children gives them the feeling of being a "regular family" without having to think twice about the additional expenses this will incur. Although **the father – the previous head** of their household, is no longer present, the **mother – the current head** of the

household – is not only present but can run a fully functioning home.

While this holds true for every Shabbos, it is even more evident and powerful during Yom Tov. When an almana can provide plentiful Yom Tov meals, not only for her young children but also for her married couples and grandchildren, the positive effect can be felt for months afterward.

- **From Hardship to Happiness.** Some almanos wrote very clearly in their letters that they had refrained from buying fish, meat, and poultry, or bought in minimal amounts, due to financial constraints. Others said they would open a can of tuna and eat it by themselves. They were too ashamed to invite friends, relatives, or even their children because they didn't have enough food to put on the table.

It seems too frightening to verbalize, but some families were going through a period of terrible darkness. Their income didn't cover more than their rent and other essential bills, leaving them without the means to purchase food. Young children went to bed hungry while their heartbroken mothers would cry when their children didn't see.

These situations continued until the Keren illuminated their homes and provided them the opportunity to serve fresh, nutritious, and abundant meals, giving

family members of every age the satisfaction of feeling “normal.”

As only a mother can understand, a fully functioning kitchen is the way she nurtures her family. It expresses how she runs her household and allows her to live with happiness, confidence, and self-esteem, despite challenging circumstances.

The positive vibes are felt not only by widowed mothers but also by their young orphaned children. One woman wrote the following: isn't it enough my child doesn't have a totty; should he therefore not have a piece of chicken either? Another almana reports what her little girl expressed: I know I am an orphan, but I don't feel it during mealtimes because we have everything we need.

- **Words of Comfort.** Taking a genuine interest in how these resilient women are running their homes gives them great comfort. The volunteers at the Keren call the almanos regularly, encouraging them to accept the assistance they offer. Many women have expressed in their letters that these phone calls infuse them with so much meaning and happiness.

The joy is greatly multiplied when calls are received before Yom Tov. Knowing that their Yom Tov needs will be taken care of alleviates stress and provides much-needed serenity and peace of mind. Whether it is Arba Minim, matzos and other provisions for Pesach, personal letters sent before Yom Tov, the knowledge

that there is a dedicated team caring for their wellbeing, and providing their needs is very encouraging, meaningful, and heartwarming.

- **Unity Bring Comfort.** When almanos see Yidden worldwide truly care about them and take an interest in their situations, it brings them a great measure of comfort. It is common for almanos to think that society has forgotten them. They are concerned about their future, their income, and how they will manage a Yom Tov, a Simcha, a Seder night, or a Chanukah event. As one woman clearly expressed in a letter: I have been alone for many years, and until you called and offered practical assistance, NO ONE has ever reached out to ask how I manage.

The caring and concern, expressed in a modest and dignified way, week after week, year after year – is a source of great inspiration and positivity. It helps the almanos run their homes and raise their children with confidence, without feelings of shame, bitterness, or abandonment.

- **An Open Door – A Listening Ear.** Another common theme seen in many letters is the opening that almanos received to discuss their difficulties. Genuine concern inspires trust, and trust inspires people to open up and be upfront about their struggles. The Keren has accomplished this for many almanos who suddenly found a listening ear and a compassionate heart.

Some women are suffocating. They can't find the open door through which to allow their pain to escape. They feel misunderstood and disconnected and can't find an opportunity for healing and peace.

The various tzedaka and chesed activities of the Keren allowed many women to resolve their emotional distress and ease their pain. They found a kindhearted volunteer who is available to listen, validate, and provide practical assistance, shining a ray of hope into their otherwise darkened existence.

- **They See Hashem's Compassion Above All.** One of the surprising results of supporting almanos is the consistent praise and gratitude to Hashem and His worthy emissaries, which they express in their letters. The emotions that this inspires are beyond description and can only be experienced by seeing the actual notes of appreciation written by the families.

Upon reading these letters, there is only one appropriate response: Heiliger Bashefer (Dear G-D), who is like your nation? Women who are in terrible distress, raising their children on their own under challenging circumstances, without their head of the household, and despite it, are thanking Hashem "for sending his loyal messengers to make our lives more pleasant."

When they can be exuding negativity and sorrow over their circumstances, the volunteers of the Keren have

merited to bring them constant infusions of optimism and happiness, to the extent that they thank Hashem for all His kindness. When the Keren delivers its services to an almana, it is seen as a direct emissary from Hashem – which in itself brings much merit and abundance to the world and has the potential to reverse Hashem's judgment to compassion.

Every donor is a partner in the happiness and relief inspired by the Keren's activities. The fish, meat and poultry are only one of the many benefits that the families are receiving. We may never have known all these additional bonuses, if not for the direct involvement in this most holy and noble endeavor.

Fortunate are the benevolent donors who have merited to support the vast operation of Keren Almanos V'Yesomim. They are certainly judged favorably for bringing happiness to 1148 almanos and yesomim. Only Hashem, the Father of orphans, can and will truly reward them for their kindness and generosity.