

Devora K. Wohlgelernter, Associate Professor of Mathematics at Baruch College of the City University of New York, was on a sabbatical in Jerusalem in 1986.

SHIVA IN YERUSHALAYIM— A LETTER TO MY CHANA

February 12, 1986

We buried Chana Pere last night. It was dark and they had to use floodlights to see the grave. It was very dark. It made so much sense that it was night. I think God must have been so embarrassed, that He wanted her to be buried in secret—when no one could see.

I remember that at your *Bas mitzva* dinner, I told you not to grow up too quickly. You will not grow up at all. I asked you not to make the clock go too fast; that I needed it to go slow. The clock has stopped. I told you to remain a child yet a while. You will remain a child in Daddy's and my heart until we join you.

I miss you. You are missing to me. My head aches from too little sleep and too many thoughts. I cannot sleep but maybe if I put some of the thoughts down on paper they will leave my head for a while. They are not bad thoughts. They are even good thoughts.

I have lived with fear and dread for seven years. But, in fact, I was never prepared. The doctors told us that if we were careful with food and insulin, you, Channalle, could lead a "normal" life. We were careful with food and insulin. Yours was not a "normal" life. How can two injections a day, having to eat when you are not hungry, waking up shrieking, resisting whipped cream from the age of five and pricking your fingers for a blood test three times a day be considered "normal"? Are they crazy? You certainly did not live a normal life, but, in fact, a supra-normal life. Let me talk about it.

You were my partner. My partner in crime. The rest of the family were naturally thin. I would gain five pounds just by looking at pecan pie. Or, so it seemed to me. We both looked longingly at all the cakes in the windows of the cafes on Yaffo Street. Last Thursday,

when we were in town and had to wait for my eyeglasses to be ready, we went into a cafe. I ordered cappuccino and, for you, coffee with milk. The cappuccino had lots of whipped cream. You took a bit with your finger. I told you, gently I hope, to stop. You were not too upset with me, were you, my love? We cheated with a cinnamon bun. Half and half. You were my partner in illness. Frightened more than the others. Understanding more than the others. When I was speaking to my friend Ruth on the telephone and telling her that I would need chemotherapy forever I did not know the door was open and that you were outside and heard. I found you sobbing. I thought *I* would die. What have I done, I thought. "It is not so terrible," I said to you. "Look, *you* will have to take shots for the rest of *your* life. Is that *so* bad?" "No," you answered, "that is not *so* bad." It was *so* bad, wasn't it, Channalle? But, wasn't there a peculiar glory in besting the illness for a while, my darling, Channalle? Were there not things you experienced simply because you had this illness? For example, take Camp NYDA (New York Diabetes Association camp). Your doctor said it would be good for you emotionally. It wasn't kosher, not even Jewish. "How can we send her?" I said to Daddy. "Just register her; then we will solve the problem," he said. We registered you. Then we went to the company that provided kosher food for the airlines and matched up meals with the camp meals. We brought the frozen dinners, together with kosher crackers and hotdogs, to camp. "Won't Chana feel funny being the only one eating kosher?" I asked the director, Al Passey. Al answered, "We have children allergic to wheat products, we have children allergic to milk products, so your Chana is allergic to *treif* (non-kosher food)." And we did it, Chana. I thought you should stay in NYDA for Shabbos; to leave would be disruptive. Daddy disagreed. "Chana must live with diabetes. Shabbos is part of her life. Therefore, Shabbos will just have to fit in." And, so you quickly learned to give your own injections and we arranged to have you picked up just before Shabbos and taken to your sisters' camp an hour away and we had you brought back Saturday night. You went with a pre-filled syringe, remember? That was before we trusted you to fill the syringe. Did you fill it right last Sunday? Was there maybe just a bit too much insulin that tipped the scale? Did you look? Oh, my Chana Pere, how in God's name did you die? I must get back to NYDA. You loved it so. For three summers you spent a month not being different. Actually, you were different there too. You were the only one who got up early to *daven* (to pray), the only one who washed before eating bread and *bentsched* (said grace after meals). And how they respected you and loved you. You are the only one of my kids that went fishing and canoeing. You were a star in the production of Peter Pan. You are the only one of my

girls who, at the age of eleven, was asked to be somebody's girlfriend. It just does not happen in our circles. I am glad it does not happen in our circles, but I am glad it happened to you. And you told him "no" because 1) he was not Jewish; and 2) you were too young and your parents would not allow it. How we laughed when you told me about it. It felt good to be asked, didn't it? I am so glad you were asked. I have a selfish reason for having loved NYDA. It was the only time in the last seven years that I slept without listening for you with one ear.

February 10

Monday morning, 6:30 a.m. The children come to my bed. "We can't wake Chana," they say. There is a slight undercurrent of fear. I get up and get the glucagon. I inject. You were lying on your stomach. I could not see your face. I am sure the glucagon will work. I call Dr. Landau. "Call Magen David Adom, the Israeli Red Cross, and bring her to the hospital." "Ein Karem?" I ask. "Yes, I will be there." I call. I dress. I am very efficient. I have to be at Hadassah Ein Karem today for treatment. I know that you will be o.k.; that the glucagon will work. 6:55 a.m. Magen David Adom comes. They turn you over and start C.P.R. Your lips were blue, the color of gentian violet. Not Ein Karem. Too far. Hadassah at Mount Scopus. Five minutes away. The guy tells me to get the driver. They wire ahead to the hospital. "Get in the van." I get into the van. We come to the emergency room. They are waiting for you. I am sitting on a bench—trying to say *Tehillim* (Psalms). You are behind the curtain. I think they ask me something. I must have told them about the diabetes because I hear and see a nurse preparing to inject glucose intravenously. I telephone my sister Channie. "Come. It is very bad." "I will be there in 20 minutes." A doctor comes out. "The situation is critical." "But not lost!" I say in a very determined way. "You must not give up!" "We won't give up," he says. I realize now that he was just preparing me. That you had already died. That you were "dead on arrival," D.O.A. "Do you have family?" someone asks. "My sister is coming." Another doctor comes out from the curtained enclosure. "We did all we could," he says. It is 7:45 a.m. What is he saying to me? He looks very familiar. "You look familiar," I say. Now, I ask you, Chana Pere, wasn't that a ridiculous comment? He tells me you are dead and I say, "You look familiar." Well, you always knew you had a nutty mom. "I am Alon Moses," he says. Alon. Karin's son. Karin is the lady from whom I had let the beautiful house we are living in. This is not real. Aunt Channie comes. I have to see you. I go into the curtained room. I think the nurse was prepared for a scene. There was no scene. I just had to see you. You were lying there so sweetly. I closed your eyes

which were slightly open. I kissed your face. Your lips were no longer blue. They were their usual pink. I moved the sheet a bit. There were blue lines on your body. Your beautiful little body. I could not bear to leave you. I kissed you again and again. How will I tell Daddy? He is in New York. How in the hell do you call a daddy and tell him that his precious child has just died? Dr. Fink was in the hospital. I had met him 18 years ago in New York, soon after my marriage. I had been feeling absolutely dreadful. "I think I'm dying," I said. "No, you are just pregnant." Dr. Fink, head of the Emergency Room at Hadassah, Mount Scopus. He tried to get me through to an international operator. There was a social worker. Her name was Devora. He could not get an international operator. The telephone at the desk rang. It was for me. It was Daddy calling from New York. How could that be? He had called home to speak to all of you before you went off to school and the kids told him that I went to the hospital with you. So he called the Emergency Room. "What's happening, Deb?" he asked. "Yisrael, it has already happened." Was it a shriek I heard? A sob? A scream? It was the sound of a heart being broken in two. It was a terrible sound. We made plans over the phone. He would pick up your brother Tati and try to get the first plane out. The nurse tells me that they have to take you to the *mekarer*. The refrigerator. My daughter to the *mekarer*? Are they nuts? No, they are not nuts. I tell her that I will go with you until the end. I learned eleven years ago when my babies died that you have to say goodbye. For eleven years, I have regretted not saying goodbye. I think that the nurse understood. I went until the *mekarer*. Imagine, my darling! I discussed *Bubby* (grandmother) and *Zaide* (grandfather) with my sister Channie and decided that it would be best if Channie would tell them and if they would come to my house to help me. Uncle Melech comes. Eighteen-and-one-half years ago, we called Uncle Melech from New York and said, "Uncle Melech, make us a wedding." That morning, I said, "Uncle Melech, make me a funeral." Tamar and Yaakov Ross came. I was not alone. I came home. Channie was with me. Elisheva was home. She had gone to school but came home. I tell her. No matter how great my desire to record faithfully, I cannot record the look of horror, disbelief and pain. Dvarya comes in. How did I tell her? I just did. And, all the time I was thinking. How can I handle this without Daddy? And Daddy called to tell me that he could not get a flight right away and that, if it was easier for me, I should make the funeral without him. I know he meant it for my good but the thought horrified me. "Daddy deserves to be at the funeral of his beloved Chana Pere. Chana Pere deserves to have her Daddy at her funeral." And so, despite Yerushalayim pressure, we waited. I do not know how I passed the time. Yes, I do. I

called the boys at the Yeshiva where Daddy teaches and arranged for *shomrim* (guardians for the body before burial). Uncle Melech said we should have signs, so I got some boys from the Yeshiva to put them up. Aunt Channie slept over. How normal I acted. Channalle, I was half crazed.

February 11

I waited for Daddy. I don't remember what I did. His plane was supposed to land at 3:45. We set the time for 6:30. Daddy and I had decided to buy three plots on Har Hamenuhot, where Bubby and Zaide had bought plots. Melech and Miriam and Bubby and Zaide come to my house. I could not stay in the house. I waited in the street for Daddy to come. Uncle Moish had gone with Avraham Aryeh to pick him up. Uncle Melech told me to come into the house. I could not. Mena's Rebbe brought Mena home from *Cheder* (elementary school) and waited for Daddy. You would have loved Mena's Rebbe. We had decided that Mena should not go to the funeral but he had to see Daddy, so the Rebbe was waiting and then he would take Mena to his home. How can I describe what happened. Facts? Moish drove up. Daddy saw me. He got out of the car and took me in his arms. He was sobbing. I was sobbing. Perhaps there was some comfort in being together. I think there was. I am not sure. I think that in the days to come there will be. There always has been. We go to the funeral. Channalle, this is not real. Channalle, there were hundreds of people there. Hundreds. Uncle Moish spoke. He spoke so well. About you having been given to us as a *pikkadon*, a gift to keep for a while, and now the *pikkadon* is being taken away. And then Uncle Melech spoke. And then Daddy got up to speak. People tell me that they never heard such a *hesped* (eulogy). They tell me that it shook the rafters, that it was pure Picasso. I don't remember a thing. All I heard was one big scream and sob. All I saw was pain. As if pain can be realized into human form. I remember one phrase that he said. *Rabbat banim umlala*—"The mother of many is bereft." I will insist that he write the *hesped* down. I will help him.

February 12

It was Wednesday. It was our first full day of *shiva* (official mourning period). You know, my darling, during *shiva* hundreds of people came. You would think that we had lived in Yerushalayim for years. People come all day. And we cannot stop talking about you. The table in front of us is full of "you." The picture of you speaking at the *Bas mitzva* and that beautiful picture of you sitting in the chair at

Rachel Rena's *Bas mitzva* party. You looked about 17 years old. We show everyone the report that you had written on the thirty-nine *melakhot* of Shabbos (prohibited forms of work on the Sabbath). I brought it here so that I could show it to Bubby and Zaide. I was so very proud of it. Did you know that? I don't think so. But I don't think that it really mattered. You were very proud of it. Everyone who looked at it said things like, "A *yeshiva bachur* couldn't do better," or, "It is fitting for a first-year University student." No. Chana Pere, it was fitting for you. And we show them the book you made on the *Shoah* (Holocaust). And we show them the baby blanket you were sewing as a project in Arts and Crafts. And we show them the funny hat you made for Purim, just the day before you died. And your classmates come. In groups. They look as if they are in shock. We ask them to sit near us. We ask them to tell us about you. They speak in pain. They use words like *anava* (modest), *mushlemet* (complete), brilliant, quiet. One girl says, "We miss the quiet in the class." The day somehow rolled into the next. There is a night in between. When the last person leaves, it is late. Daddy sits and sobs out loud. I cry. I wondered if the children upstairs could hear. It was such a terrible sound. It is good that they heard. I cannot sleep. I write. The words sound hollow. I call my friend Ruth again in New York. Jacob tells me she is out. "Where is she? I have to speak to her." Jacob answers, "She is on the plane." My friend. The next day is the same. People keep coming. The neighbors bring food. I am part of a community. And then I begin to discover that we have become part of a club. The club of parents who have lost children. You can tell them immediately. They do not sit in the back of the room. They come right up to the front and look you straight in the eye. Arlene and Alex Gross whose son Aron was killed in Chevron; Marion and Jason Propp, our friends from Petach Tikva, whose eleven-year-old son Aryeh was killed by an avalanche of earth while playing on a hill. The hill was just behind the apartment house we lived in when we were in Petach Tikva eight years ago. Sam and Judy Rosenbaum, whose son died of cancer, leaving a young widow and four small children. Rabbi Rose came. His son was killed while serving in Lebanon. Barbara Pomerantz, whose daughter died of a brain tumor. The Melameds, who lost a three-year-old daughter to cancer. The Falks, who lost a little son. And then there is Rabbi Dolgin, who came on Friday morning. I had never met him. He spoke of the fourteen-year-old daughter he lost twenty-five years ago to asthma. And, as he spoke, the tears rolled down his face and I found that I wanted to hear about this daughter. It was as if we were paying a *shiva* call to him twenty-five years later. He told us how they had sent her to Denver, Colorado, because that was the place for asthma

patients and how the doctors had told him and his wife to take the child home because they didn't want her to die there. He told us how she had torn off all of the corners of the letters that she had received from friends and had stored them in a bag because they had written on them the letters ב"ה. He and his wife found the little sack that she had been keeping for *Shemot*. Rabbi Dolgin's visit both comforted me and frightened me. I understand both the comfort and the fright. The fact is that Rabbi Dolgin has built quite a life in the last twenty-five years. That means you do go on. But the fact also is that he was crying on that Friday morning as if his precious daughter had just died. And I got a glimpse of what the future would be and it frightened me. All of the members of the club said the same thing. Nothing will ever be the same again. I know it won't, Channalle. I had crazy thoughts that night. That the club ought to have regular meetings. And that a good time for the meetings would be in the middle of the night. Because all of the members can't sleep anyway. And Daddy's brother Davy came and Ruth came and the neighbors kept bringing food. Do you know who else came? Reb Aryeh Levin's son. Can you imagine? I had read so much about Reb Aryeh Levin. He spoke of souls completing their mission. He spoke of *gilgulim*, the returning of souls to earth. And I listened and the words found their way. And we talked and talked and listened and listened. Your teachers came and we were hungry for their words. The private teacher told us how happy you were on that last Sunday. She told us that you were studying about the *Nesi'im*, Rabban Gamliel, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, Rabban Gamliel Hasheni and Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel Hasheni. And you told her that in our family we also had repeating names. Yisrael Elazar, then Yaakov Yitzhak, then Yisrael Elazar again, then Yaakov Yitzhak again. Let me speak about the private teacher. In the beginning, when we first came, remember how nervous you were about doing well in school? So, we got a private teacher. But, after three weeks, the teacher called to tell us how you really did not need private lessons, how you were already on the top of your class. When I mentioned to you the possibility of giving up the private teacher you were afraid. So I told you to keep the teacher. Let me stop calling her the "teacher." Her name is Miriam Eichler. I told you to call Miriam whenever you felt like it. That I did not want to be bothered with making or breaking appointments, that you knew your own schedule and I would settle the bill at the end of the month or whatever. And you gave me no argument. You accepted this gift with grace and with a smile. You did not give me a song and dance about how expensive it was or that you felt guilty because you really did not need it. You did not ask me twice or even once whether it was really o.k. You just smiled. What a

gift you gave to us. That you allowed Daddy and me to give to you. How gifted you were. It is something splendid to be able to accept a gift freely and with grace. This ability to receive a gift also gave you the ability to give. Do many people understand this? You allowed Daddy to go from shoe store to shoe store until you found the exact Shabbos shoes that you wanted. You were total love. And the mathematics teacher came and the science teacher. And they told us what we already knew but it was good to hear it. You are *my* daughter. Should I say you *were* my daughter? Are you not still my daughter? Will you not always be my daughter? Does death end it? I cannot feel that that is so. And then the teacher of Yiddish came. And we found out that you went into a class with children that had been studying Yiddish for two years while you had never had an official class but that your longing for that language made up for lack of experience. You must have felt comfortable because you never complained. And your homeroom teacher who taught you Torah and *Navi* (Prophets) came. Channalle, you knew who you were and clearly all your teachers knew even though you were so quiet. *Shtillerheit*. Day ran into day. All of Elisheva's class came, all of Dvarya's class came, all of Tehilla's class came. I didn't know that Tati had so many friends here. They all came. It seemed as if all Yerushalayim was crying with us. And then there was this man who came in and sat down. He had a long white beard. We did not know who he was. He said, "*Hamakom yenahem etkhem*—May God comfort you"—and got up to leave. "Who are you?" We asked. "I am a Jew from Yerushalayim," he said. And left. Dr. Hersh came. Dr. Landau came and cried with us. "Why were we not warned?" we asked. She said so sadly, "And, if I told parents of every possibility, they would never sleep." And I think, my baby, that she was right. You did not live your life in fear. Diabetes was at most one big annoyance for you. And you even used it sometimes to have fun. Like the game "Dietopoly" that you and Elisheva made up. Patterned after "Monopoly," board and all. Instead of "Community Chest," you had "true" and "false" questions. Example: "You gave an injection in your leg this morning. You may not go skiing. True or False?" "You feel dizzy. You should drink diet Coke. True or False?" And instead of "Chance," you had instructions. Example, "You ate two chocolate bars. Go back three paces." "You learned to give an injection (we always called them shots) in your stomach. Hurray, go ahead five paces." You invented this game as a project in Manhattan Day School. Daddy and I were so excited. We spoke of patenting it. But we didn't know how to go about it. And then we were so busy living. And friends of Daddy whom he had not seen in ages came. Like Yisrael Weinberg and Duvie Hartman. "Do you remember," Duvie

Hartman said to Daddy, “You were the one who got me to read when I came to Yeshiva University from Lakewood?” And Daddy remembered. Why do I mention this, my Channalle? I really don’t quite understand it myself. Maybe it is because that I found these echoes from the past comforting. That life is a continuum. That life is not made up of discrete (in the mathematical sense, i.e. separate) events, but that one event flows into the next and so, too, does health become part of the continuum. Oh Chana, I have to tell you about the wonderful people from Mena’s Cheder. Mena’s Rebbe, Rav Shraga Levy, Rav Miller, Rav Gamliel and especially for me Rav Deutch, the *Mashgiah Ruhani* of the *Cheder*. When Harav Deutch was here he spoke about how in the First World War many children died in Eretz Yisrael from sickness. He spoke about the concept of sacrifices, *korbanot*, for Eretz Yisrael. Daddy turned to me and said, “Listen Deb, you must hear this.” And I listened but I don’t think I heard. At any rate, I don’t think that I understood. All night I thought about it. How terrible! Did my desire to come to Eretz Yisrael demand your death? And in the morning I called Rav Deutch and told him about my night and thoughts. He came over and we spoke for over an hour. He said that *has ve-shalom*, I should not think of *korban* as a sacrifice in this sense, and that in fact the years that were given to you were predetermined. But he spoke of another meaning of the word *korban*. A sign of acceptance—אות התרצות—as with Hevel. He also spoke of how the Mitzva of being in Eretz Yisrael is one of the three Mitzvot that one does with the entire body, *Sukka* and *Tevilla* being the others. I spoke about your love for Eretz Yisrael and your joy in being here. I am so glad that you were already a *bogeret* (adult in the eyes of Jewish law). That the Mitzva was truly yours. You know, my sweetheart, I feel as if I am talking to you and that you know exactly what I am talking about. Channalle, there is so much to tell about those “almost six” days. But I am so very tired.

February 18

Tuesday. This morning we got up from *shiva*. Last Monday, when our friends Emanuel and Jackie came, I said to them, “How will I sit *shiva*? I don’t know how to sit *shiva*. I never have before.” I must have sounded crazy. I did indeed sit *shiva*. But today it was over. Ever since last night, I have been fearing the end of *shiva*. What happens when *shiva* ends? Do we go back to normal? Do I go back to teaching on Mondays? Do I make a dentist appointment? Just like that? As if nothing? Do I laugh at a joke? Will I be able to laugh at a joke? And when we got up we went to the grave. That is the custom here in Yerushalayim. It rained very hard on Friday night. When I

started to *daven* with the *minyan*, Tati handed me my *siddur* (prayer book). In it was a note that he wrote. It said, "God is crying." Because of the rain the earth between the pebbles (do you call them rocks?) that they had put around the grave had sunk a little. It looked for real. Not pretend. Pretend. Do you know what the word "pretend" makes me think of, Channalle? How you used to put on a long dress, apron and the bonnet Dvarya got from Amish country and together with Tehilla (and the dolls, of course) used to pretend you were a character in "Little House on the Prairie." So sweet. So sweet. I can almost taste the sweetness. I looked at the grave and knew that your body was lying below. I knew because I saw the *Chevra Kaddisha* (burial society) put it there. And they were dignified and gentle. Why does that matter so much to me? Because it does. We came home. The mood was angry. Daddy does not speak to me. In all of our other troubles, I always felt that we became bonded more strongly. But this is a different order of magnitude. Any touch between us is painful. How unhappy I am! That sounds ridiculous. You are gone from me and I say "How unhappy I am!" Later in the day, Rabbi Kaminetsky, the principal of Manhattan Day School, telephones. He tells me how your class is grieving; so many had just received letters from you and had answered immediately. He tells me that your class has elected to study *Mishna Rosh Hashana*. He tells me that he had sent some letters from the students to me and is surprised that I have not received them. The minute I hang up, Uncle Moish walks in with the mail. Among the letters was one that Rabbi Kaminetsky had pulled from your file. It was a letter that I had written to the school in February, 1982, giving detailed explanations to the staff on how to handle emergencies. I write, "We are trying very hard to raise an independent, unspoiled kid, who does not view herself as an invalid. Since the burden she bears is so heavy (shots twice a day and a restricted diet are no picnic) this is sometimes hard because one is tempted to treat her with silk gloves." We did not treat you with silk gloves. You were angry at the disease but I think I can honestly say that you never felt sorry for yourself. You reacted violently to any special consideration. You honestly felt that there were so many worse things. You felt bad when a sister was unhappy in school, especially since you were so very happy. You felt bad if a friend did not have any brothers or sisters, thinking how much luckier you were despite the fights. You were capable of a compassion that I have never seen in anyone. No kidding! When Ophir, our new friend, was getting married and his parents refused to come because they were angry that he had become a *Ba'al Teshuva* (an observant Jew), you were so upset and insisted that we all go to the wedding. Daddy was in New York. It was on a Monday night. Less

than one week before you died. I cannot believe it, my *ziskeit* (sweetness). And you wore my black wool dress and the necklace we had given you for the *Bas mitzva*. I told you how beautiful you looked. And we went. The bride was so pretty and Ophir was so happy to see us. As we were leaving, you kept saying to me: "Mommy, promise me that we will keep in touch. Promise me." And I promised you. Ophir and Einat paid us a *shiva* call. In the letter that I had written to Manhattan Day School in 1982, it also said: "I realize that I am asking everyone to invest some extra time in this child but I can promise you that she will do the Yeshiva proud." Rabbi Kaminetsky reminded me of that line and said in his letter: "Today, I can honestly tell you that this is certainly true. She has made us all very proud because of her love of Torah, her beautiful *middot* (qualities) and her very pleasant disposition despite the fact that she had to deal with a very difficult illness." Oh, my baby, you were so, so pleasant and I miss you. So, so much.

February 19

We have just returned from an *azkara* (memorial service) at your school. I dressed nicely—just the way you would have wanted. I was a pretty Mommy. I wanted my Chana Pere's Mommy to be pretty. The children and the teachers from the upper grades were all there. Ruth and Channie went with Daddy and me. Channalle, I have no words. The principal spoke of your love of the Book of Jeremiah; the homeroom teacher spoke of how you touched the lives of so many even though you were only in the school for such a short time. The assembly was held in the gym and birds had flown in through the windows. They were chirping the whole time. I like to think that you were watching us all and laughing at the birds. It was really as if they too wanted to talk about you, my sweet child. And then some children spoke. They read poetry they had written. They spoke of pain and of the anguish at not being able to have said good-bye. They spoke of ache and of God. What beautiful children they were! One would have thought that you had been at the school for years and not just five months. The children recounted things they had heard in our house when they came during *shiva*. One girl remembered that I had told her of your desire to have a calisthenics class and my difficulty in finding one for you. And then on that last Sunday Aunt Channie gave me a number to call. I did and was so happy to find someone who was organizing a class for girls your age. I went on and on telling this woman whom I had never met how thrilled I was and how thrilled you would be. She was going to call me on Wednesday to tell me of the final arrangements. I told you and you were so happy. I

find myself being grateful for so many things, Chana Pere. Like being able to tell you about the calisthenics class before you died. The girl at the *azkara* also told everyone that Daddy had told her of your desire to marry a Gerrer Hasid. She told everyone about the card that Daddy had sent you from London with the picture of the Grenadier Guards with their fur hats and belted uniforms. “How would you like to marry this type of Hasid?” Daddy wrote to you. “He is also wearing a *gartel* (Hasidic prayer belt).” The postcard came on Thursday when we were sitting *shiva*. How you would have laughed! The student also remembered how I had told her about that time you were at Dr. Ginzburg’s and she said, “I understand Chana.” And you pounded the desk with your fist and said, “You do not understand!” How can someone who does not have diabetes understand someone who does? And we would speak that perhaps some day you would be a juvenile diabetes doctor and when you would say “I understand,” it would be true. And then Daddy spoke to everyone. You would have been so proud. He spoke of true *hesed* (*hesed shel emet*), the *hesed* that one does for someone who is no longer living, the kindness that cannot be repaid. And he thanked all of the children for their coming to us and sharing their impressions. And he said that this was a true *hesed* to you, my Channalle, but also to us because we hope never to have to repay this type of kindness. And then he spoke about the *sidra* (weekly portion of the Torah), *Tetzaveh*. And he spoke of the fact that *Moshe Rabbenu’s* name is not mentioned in the *sidra*. He told the children that *Hazal* (the Sages) say that this was because when he was praying for the people in *Parshat Ki Tisah*, he said, “If You will not spare the people then erase me from Your Book.” And that even though his motives were pure and, in fact, his prayer successful—God did forgive the Children of Israel—one has to be very careful with what one says. And he told everybody, Channalle, how he never heard you say anything against anyone, how all your words were naturally measured and gentle. Did I take you too much for granted, my angel? Did I tell you enough how special you were? Did you know how much pride we took in you? And then Daddy spoke about the verse from the *Song of Songs*, “Your eyes are like doves.” And he told everyone how beautiful your eyes were and deep. And then he told them what *Hazal* say about the dove—pure and gentle. And everyone was so quiet. You would have been very proud of Daddy. Even without the *beckeshe*, the Hasidic garb. When we came home and I started to write, I looked for your *Bas Mitzva* speech on a diskette. All during *shiva* I could not find it. And I found it today. You spoke about the Book of Ruth and how you were accepting upon yourself all the *mitzvot*. The last sentence is, “I want to die in Eretz Yisrael,” Ruth declared. ‘And there I will be buried.’

For *Hazal* tell us that being buried in Eretz Yisrael is like one who is buried under the altar." I could not believe my eyes. I must stop for a while, my darling. The computer is getting wet with tears.

February 23

Sunday morning. Ruthie left for the airport. Elisheva, Dvarya and Tehilla have gone to school. Daddy went to *daven*. Tati, too. Temima is waiting for Daddy to take her to *gan* (nursery school). Mena has a fever. He had a dream last night. That you were very sick and we thought you were dead so we buried you but then you got better and broke through the box (there was no box, but he is dreaming) and came home. It is getting worse. I keep looking at your pictures and the things you wrote. I try to find comfort in the fact that everything I read and see shows me that there was much joy in your young life. Whom do I weep for? You? Me? Me and Daddy? We cannot stop crying. I look at the family picture from your *Bas mitzva* and think how we were sitting on top of the world that evening. I cannot imagine taking a family picture again. Something has happened to the children—I mean the older ones. Especially Elisheva and Dvarya. I know this sounds crazy but they seem more tranquil. Happier with themselves. I think that I understand it. I think that they have seen what the loss of you has done to Daddy and me. I think that they sense that it is terrible and irreparable. Oh, my God, words simply cannot say it. And I think that they realize how valuable a child is and how valuable each of them is. I am talking to you. Like I always have. Like my little friend. We so often spoke of how the older ones were not as happy as you in school and with themselves and that this was the reason that sometimes they would pick on you. I have to believe that you are watching us and seeing this transformation. I imagine you coming to me quietly and saying, "Do you see, Mom? It makes me happy." I don't know how to end this letter to you. I am tired and my bones ache. "Lie down, Mommy," you would say to me. Maybe you still are saying it but I cannot hear you. I long to hear you. I love you, Channalle. I miss you. You are missing to me. I cannot bear it.

February 24

It is a Monday. Exactly two weeks since you died. I did not think that I would write anymore. But I have been thinking and I have to talk to you some more. I think about that last night a lot. I dwell on the details. On that last Sunday night I took off your glasses (you were falling asleep studying) and kissed you goodnight. You were happy.

Confident in the next day. Yesterday, I received a letter from Gord. Remember? My college friend from Chicago. Her real name is Esther Friedman but I have always called her Gord. It was a beautiful letter. She writes that I must consider myself blessed that “her short years were filled with rich and varied experiences. Imagine, to be one of seven children. On the one hand to be a little sister and, at the same time, to be a big sister. To be blessed with parents whose life styles brought the whole family into contact with a broad spectrum of people and whose outlooks were open, inquiring, and at the same time, firmly rooted in Torah. To live in Manhattan and walk out, past the doorman, into the hustle and bustle of the ‘Big Apple’ on the way to a school and a community in total contrast to the style and content and culture of 101 West 12th Street. To straddle both worlds and to dream eagerly of reaching the best in both.”

Yes, Channalle, we were and are very blessed. I do not remember ever having angry words with you except about matters that concerned the diabetes. (Did you eat enough? Did you take a blood test? How I hated those questions. You did, too, I know. But I had no choice. Please, my darling, forgive me.) Daddy and I have only sweetness and joy to look back upon. Do you know what Temima said the other day? She said, “Chana is in *shamayim* (heaven) playing with *Hashem* (God).” And do you know what Mena said? He said that we must take all of your notebooks and put them in a bag and save them to give to the *Mashiah* when he comes so that he can give them to you.

I am writing this on May 22nd. It is exactly one solar year since Chana Pere’s *Bas mitzva*.

And then Chana died. Period.

The sentence stands by itself. There doesn’t seem to be anything to put before it or after it. Just . . . And then Chana died.

I go to the grave. I don’t want to go. I want to go. I am fearful of going. I simply must go. I like to go alone, without Yisrael. I am not sure that I understand why. The day before yesterday we went together. He put his arm around me and we wept. I must learn to go to the grave together with Yisrael. I think that when I learn to do that with ease, there will be something to put after the period.

We buried Chana on Har Hamenuhot—the mountain of rest. It is one of the many mountains that surround Yerushalayim. The grave is down the slope and looks over the rolling hills. You cannot see any buildings. I stand at the top of the steps and look down at the grave. It never seems real to me. The tombstone stands out among all of the others. It is white and shining in the Yerushalayim sun. The

monument is stately. Even as I write I have this surrealistic feeling. Can this all be true? Is my Channalle really dead? Will I really never see her again? We went shopping for the monument. And I kept thinking that I should be shopping for a dress for her. And I thought how during the last two years I had been ill and did not have the strength to shop for a dress. Her *Bas mitzva* was in May and I had had the brain operation at the very end of February. A friend offered to go shopping with Chana for a dress for the *Bas mitzva*. They bought a lovely suit. They had a good time. In fact I think Barbara had more patience than I would have had under the best of circumstances. I do not think that my Chana minded. Did you, my darling child? And here we were shopping for a tombstone. The owner's name was Mr. Rosenberg and he was very kind. There were three types of stone. The nicest was marble from Italy. Yisrael thought that maybe we should get that. It was as if this was the last thing we would do for our daughter and it must be done well. I did not want stone from outside Eretz Yisrael. There were two types of Israeli stone and we bought the more expensive. And then we had to decide what to write on the stone. It was a week of great tension and I kept thinking that I will not survive. I wanted it to be done by the *sheloshim* (thirty day mourning period). I was more or less a sounding board but it was Yisrael who composed the text. And he agonized over each word. It had to be beautiful for Chana. What else can he do for her? He used to shop with her, he used to study with her, he used to do everything possible that would make her life a little easier. And now this was the only thing left to do.

I stand on the top of the steps and look at the grave. It is white and shining in the Yerushalayim sun. The black letters stand out. We had the model of a book put on the head of the monument and on the book we had written the phrase from the Book of Ruth which she quoted in her *Bas mitzva* speech. "Where you lie, I will lie . . . and there I will be buried." We had the monument made with a slight incline so that when it rains the water will run off. I stand at the top of the steps and look down at the grave. It is white and shining in the Yerushalayim sun. A phrase comes to my lips. "As a rose among the thorns." Am I crazy? Am I talking about the grave? Or does it seem to me that my little girl is lying there with her head on a pillow? So serene and so sweet. The grave and my child are all mixed up in my head. Why do I stay at the top of the steps? I have to see and speak to Chana. And I go down the steps. And I speak to my child.