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# I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar

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Amy Kasson became a lion while lying in the recovery room after the birth of her first daughter, Sophie.



It was August 12, 2004, and her husband walked in the room, presenting her with the membership pin he had secretly arranged for her to receive on that already special day. This signified that she was now a Lion of Judah, just like her mother, Meryl Gallatin.

Nine months later, baby Sophie, Kasson and Gallatin attended the Lion of Judah (LOJ) conference, each wearing her lion pin; Gallatin had created a laminated mini-pin for Sophie.

The LOJ was founded in 1972 to recognize Jewish women who are major donors and leaders in the Jewish community. Lions each give \$5,000 annually to the federation system nationally; women from New York give \$6,000. Through these women, the organization has raised billions of dollars for local and international Jewish communities. There are approximately 12,000 Lions in the U.S., 900 in Canada and over 13,000 overseas. LOJ held its annual conference in Washington, D.C., last month, bringing together 1,700 women; as a measure of the group's clout, the guest speakers included former President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and current UN Ambassador John Bolton.

For the Lions, charity is a family affair and a powerful Jewish value linking different generations. In a philanthropic world dominated by men, the Lions have made their mark.

One of Gallatin's early childhood memories, the tzedakah box, made a lasting impression; her parents, grandparents and great-grandmother all kept one. Continuing her family tradition, Gallatin became a third-generation life member of Hadassah, and Kasson has become a junior life member. Gallatin, along with her husband and friends, has also created the charity Hands on Tzedakah to "reach those in need who fall below the radar," she said, including the hungry, the poor and special needs communities.

"The reward back is far greater than the dollars," Gallatin said. "It's sad that there are so many needs to be met and you can't meet them all. To touch another life is what it's all about."

The desire to give back to the community, to enrich the lives of others, has been passed down to Kasson, who is also fueled by the memory of the tzedakah box.

"I grew up with that little blue box, and every Friday night while lighting the Shabbos candles, we threw in some change," Kasson said. "When my parents were honored for their UJA work at the local synagogue one year, they did the calling of the cards and my brother and I gave \$18 from our allowance in honor of our parents." Kasson was around 8 years old at the time; her brother was 10. She has given both her daughters, Sophie, now 2, and Emma, 4 months, tzedakah boxes of their own and has begun to teach Sophie the power of giving.

"Sophie started a twos program at the local temple," Kasson said. "They have to bring in their tzedakah envelope every Thursday. So we sit down and count out 18 pennies... She's learned 'mitzvah,' 'tzedakah,' and 'money for people who need it'... By the time they understand, it's already part of them." Once her daughters are older, Kasson plans to return to more hands-on involvement, and bring the girls along.

Judith Stern Peck, another LOJ donor, believes so firmly in transmitting the value of tzedakah to her family that she has set up a grandparents' fund for her grandchildren. "I add money to it every year for their birthdays," Peck said. "When they are old enough, I'll sit down with them and discuss allocating it."

Peck's philanthropic work, both with UJA-Federation and with groups like Turnaround for Children, has been a great example for her three children. Her daughter, Andrea Stern, has begun transmitting those values to her own children. Her 6-year-old son knows about the importance of giving to others, and every year they take the toys he no longer plays with to a day care center for less fortunate children. There, her son gets to meet with the children and play with them, making tangible the idea of those in need.

Wendy Gould Shenfeld also stresses future generations when discussing her LOJ endowment. "It's a living legacy," Shenfeld said. "You want the next generation to know what's important to you."

Shenfeld's paternal grandmother and her mother both set up LOJ endowments. "I wear my

grandmother's pin," she said. "It gives me a tremendous amount of satisfaction, and it has become like a family heirloom."

Shenfeld's mother, Helaine Gould, began her work with UJA after she and her family lived in Michigan for a brief time when her kids were young. It was her first experience with anti-Semitism.

"I grew up in the Five Towns [on Long Island], in an almost completely Jewish world," Gould said. "I thought anti-Semitism was just something in books. When we returned from Michigan, I immediately called UJA."

That was 34 years ago. Gould became a lion in 1982, the first year it was offered in New York. She was also a member of the first Women's Young Leadership Cabinet, a breakaway group from the originally coed but male-dominated Young Leadership Cabinet.

Giving back to the community, to those in need is "the mission statement of the way we live our lives," Gould said. Gould's two daughters-in-law are lions as well.

Shenfeld and Gould get involved in many of the same philanthropic endeavors. Three years ago, the mother and daughter team co-chaired the annual event for UJA-Federation's Women's Division.

Looking to enrich the event, they set up a house tour of four luxury homes on Long Island, a model for every annual event since. The entire family is involved with Seeds of Peace, a camp that brings together Arab and Jewish children who are considered future leaders. The family raises funds for the camp, Gould and her husband are on the board of directors, and Shenfeld's son, Kyle, attended the camp last summer, a year after the family's mission to Israel.

While all these women have worked to instill the value of tzedakah in their children, they say more needs to be done.

"I'm afraid for the future because we are a dying breed," Kasson said. "In our generation, there aren't as many of us as in our mothers' and grandmothers' generations... We have to instill the values. More has to be done. Something got lost along the way and needs to be found again."

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