



This Is What I Want

A True Story

Mishpacha

As a kid, Josh Bieber just wanted the things that other kids wanted. Ditto for when he was a teen. But then one day, he lost the use of his left arm and his speech started to slur, and his list of “This Is What I Want” began to change. *Dramatically*

AS TOLD TO *Brocha Miller*
PHOTOS *Meir Haltovsky*

Here's What I Want:

I want my dad to take me to the Jets game this weekend.

I want my little brother to stop using my Nintendo without permission.

I want to ace my math test on Monday.

And I don't want to sit through Hebrew school on Sunday.

Dad is an administrator at Beth Israel Medical Center. He goes to games with his friends from work, and sometimes he takes me along. It's the best part of my weekend. The rest of it is boring. I'm in seventh grade at King's Park Long Island Public School and I have to study a lot. I have to keep my brothers out of my room. And I have to go to temple with my parents. I sit through Hebrew school and listen to Mr. Rothman* drone on about history, and the Jewish experience, and love for Israel. Sometimes we watch videos about Israel, and it looks like a cool place to visit. But the rest of the class is really dull. I have enough school during the week; why do I have to go to class on Sunday too?

I'm turning 13 this year, and my parents are planning my bar mitzvah. The party is going to have a wrestling theme, and we got a great DJ. I know I'm gonna bomb at the ceremony. Mr. Rothman wanted to videotape us saying the blessings on the Torah at the beginning of the year. Then he was going to tape us after we had learned everything. When it was my turn, I sat down in front of the camera and just handed the book back to him. I couldn't read it. I'll just have to memorize the blessings and fake it through the ceremony. But the party, that will be awesome.

I'm getting all kinds of presents for my bar mitzvah, a pen and pencil set, and lots of checks. I asked my parents if we could go to Israel; some of the kids do that. But they said no, that it was a war zone, and too dangerous. Maybe when I get a little older and things quiet down there.

**name has been changed*

I definitely want to go back to Israel soon. I'm trying to recapture some of the experience, but the closest I can get to it is this kosher pizza store

As a teenager, nothing seemed more important than football

Josh preferred to work with wires and cables and be out and about, instead of doing customer service in a sterile office



Here's What I Want:

I want to make the high school football team.

I want my own computer.

And I want to be able to eat a cheeseburger in my own kitchen.

I like my new stepmother; she's really sweet and makes my dad very happy. But she had this idea of making our kitchen kosher. My dad agrees but I think it's just crazy. We're not religious at all, and neither is my new mom. But she's got this big family in Brooklyn — part of the religious Syrian community— and she wants her relatives to be able to eat in our house. So, she brought in a rabbi and he came and poured boiling water over everything: the counters, the stove, even the barbeque grill. Now we can't eat any meat products mixed with milk at home. We still go out to eat at McDonalds, so I don't really see the point of it.

It's not all bad; Mom's family is very warm and welcoming. They have a big Chanukah party every year, and that should be fun. Uncle Steven is a nice guy, too. He always takes the time to talk to me. Still, it's annoying not to be able to eat chicken parmesan in our own kitchen.

Here's What I Want:

I want season tickets to the Yankees.

I want a date for the company picnic next Sunday.

And I want that promotion to Field Audit Technician.

I really can't complain; my job has been pretty good so far. I'm working for Cablevision, providing internet, TV, and phone services all across Long Island. I started off as a customer service representative, but I'm working my way up to field audit technician, which means driving around and checking for problems with wiring and cables. I would like to work out of a van, instead of an office, and see new scenery every day.

I drive into Brooklyn occasionally for dates. I met a couple of nice girls, but I haven't found Miss Right yet. But I'm only 25, I've got time.

Here's What I Want:

I want to sleep for three days to make up this jetlag.

And then I want to eat a huge pita with falafel and hummus.

Yup, I just got back from my first trip to Israel! Uncle Steven found out about this Birthright program offering free trips to Israel, and he convinced Mom and Dad to let me go. I just got back from a 10-day trip that was unreal. We traveled all over Israel: Tzfas, the Golan mountains, and then Shabbos in Jerusalem with Aish HaTorah families. There were some lectures and workshops about Judaism and the Torah, but they were nothing like what I've heard before. These rabbis were interesting and they really know their stuff. Our chaperone was a rabbi from St. Louis. He's a friendly, down-to-earth kind of guy, and we really connected. It's hard to believe he's a rabbi, he seemed so normal.

The whole trip left me on such a high — I definitely want to go back to Israel soon. I'm trying to recapture some of the experience, but the closest I can get to it is this kosher pizza store that I found in Long Island. They have falafel, *techina*, baba ghanoush, and pita bread. I'm going to have an Israeli lunch.

What's an Aneurysm?

On Josh's first visit to the hospital, the MRI scan revealed a right-cerebral aneurysm. An aneurysm is caused when arteries supplying blood to the brain become weak, which causes the blood vessel wall to swell and form a small sac of blood, or aneurysm. When the aneurysm grows, there is a risk of a leak or rupture, causing stroke-like symptoms or death.

There are different symptoms for a ruptured or non-ruptured aneurysm. Symptoms for a non-ruptured aneurysm include fatigue, loss of perception or balance, speech problems, and double vision. A ruptured aneurysm presents more severe symptoms, such as strong headaches, stiffness or loss of feeling in limbs, or loss of vision.

When Josh's symptoms reappeared a few months after his first aneurysm, they were more intense. His slurred speech and blinding headache brought him back to the hospital, where the MRI showed his initial aneurysm had grown from one centimeter to two. This second aneurysm was caused by a new blood vessel growing to circumvent the old blood clot. The new blood vessel was swelling up and pressing against his brain.

At first, the doctors tried to treat Josh with endovascular coiling, a minimally invasive treatment. Under general anesthesia, the doctors performed an angiogram, inserting a catheter through

the femoral artery in his groin. Once the doctors would localize the aneurysm, they could treat it with a detachable coil made of platinum. The micro-catheter inserts the coil, which is steered through the blood vessels to the aneurysm. The coil blocks the normal blood flow, and over time a clot forms inside the aneurysm, removing the risk of rupture.

In Josh's case, the doctors were unable to access the aneurysm, and decided to perform a craniotomy to insert a surgical clip. The doctors slit open the skin from Josh's right ear to the top of his forehead. Using a saw, they removed a square flap of his skull, and inserted a clip around the neck of the aneurysm, effectively stemming the blood flow. The surgeons then wired the piece of bone back in place, and stapled the skin of his head back together. The bone of Josh's skull grew over the fixation, and the staples have healed.

Josh has been given full medical clearance. The only precaution he must take is to carry around a laminated card with the serial number of the titanium clamp resting in his brain. Should the need arise for another MRI, Josh must be careful not to take any test higher than 1.5 tesla (unit of magnetic field density), as a stronger magnetic force may dislocate the clamp.

Maybe I'll also call my uncle in Deal and see if I can go to him for Shabbos. Shabbos in Israel was so incredible that I wonder what it would be like to have a Shabbos here, too.

Here's What I Want:

Something weird is going on with my speech, which doesn't feel right, and I wish it would just go away.

It started last night, when I was driving home from Brooklyn after a date. My right hand was on the steering wheel, and with my left hand, I tried to twist open my water bottle. My left hand and arm felt slack, and I couldn't control them. I thought it was just a weird fluke, so I switched hands and opened the cap and took a drink.

When I got home, my parents were waiting to hear about my date. I told them how I took the girl to Coney Island and that we had a nice time together. As I was talking, I realized that my speech was slurring. I knew what I was saying, but the words weren't coming out clearly. I started laughing, because this felt so weird. It had never happened to me before. My parents were confused. They checked my breath to see if I'd been drinking. They wanted to know if I'd gotten my tongue pierced; maybe that was why I was talking this way. I decided that I was just tired, so I went straight to bed.

But I woke up this morning and my speech is still slurring and garbled. I feel completely fine, I just can't talk right. I'm gonna go to work and see what will happen.

Here's What I Want:

I want to understand what is happening to me.

Driving to work this morning, I realized that the car was swerving and I had no control over my left arm. I called my dad and told him I was coming to the hospital.

Dad walked me through the emergency room at Mercy Medical Center, and I was admitted for testing. They did a CAT scan and an MRI. This paper hospital gown is itchy and uncomfortable, and I'm shivering. I've never been hospitalized before.

The doctor is talking to my dad. He's saying that I have a blood spot on my brain. I don't even know what that means. Nothing hurts me, just my speech is slurred. They're sending me to get an angiogram now. Mom is watching me closely, and Dad is holding my hand. Then something must have happened, because Mom just jumped up and said she'll be right back. She had seen the left side of my face collapse and sink in. She came running back with the doctor, who said I was having a stroke.



On Rosh HaShanah, after ten days in the hospital, he felt his first sense of spiritual connection to G-d

The doctors found a weak blood vessel in my brain which is leaking blood and then clotting itself. A piece of the clot broke off, and I suffered a mini stroke on top of an aneurysm. I don't even know what that is. I thought strokes were for old people in nursing homes, not young guys like me.

Here's What I Want:

I want the doctors to just leave me alone.

They transferred me to the neurological department at Columbia Presbyterian. I'm a little anxious, but Mom and Dad seem calm. I guess Dad is familiar with all these tests and things, but I've never done this before, and I'm nervous.

They had to run the tests all over again — the CAT scan and MRI. Then they did a spinal tap, where they inserted a needle into my spine to access cerebral fluid. I'm not usually scared of needles, but that one was huge. I have never felt such pain in my whole life. I wrapped my arms around the bedrails and I was squeezing so hard the whole bed was curving upwards.

I'm resting up now. The doctors keep stopping to check in on me. They're asking me questions, like, "What's your name?", "What's today's date?", "Do you know where you are?" They made me repeat the alphabet. One of the doctors asked me to say the alphabet backwards, and I was like, are you kidding me? Of course I can't do that! I wish they would just let me sleep, until this aching pain goes away.

Here's What I Want:

I want my life to go back to normal.

They watched me for ten days in the hospital. They said the blood clot was sealed and they wouldn't have to operate. They let me go, but they said I have to go for MRI checkups once a month. I also need speech therapy and occupational therapy for the motor skills in my left hand.

I'm trying to put this all behind me and get on with regular life. The doctor did not clear me for installation and repair work, so I'm just doing some light technical work. I'm so glad to be back on the job, I don't even care.

For Rosh HaShanah, instead of staying home and going to the temple, we went to Mom's family in Brooklyn. The Magen David shul was different from any service I had ever been to. It was so beautiful; it was the first time I felt any kind of spiritual connection to G-d. I couldn't

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How can I close my eyes and let my mind rest when I know that tomorrow they are going to saw open my skull?

understand the Hebrew, but sitting there with my uncles and my grandfather, I still felt connected somehow.

We were back at our own temple for Yom Kippur, and it was awful. The cantor is doing her thing, the rabbi is speaking, and my dad is throwing elbows at me to keep me awake. I don't ever want to go back to that temple. After my experience last week, I'm going to find my own synagogue, something that's closer to a real experience, like I had last week.

Here's What I Want:
I want to live.

I got full medical clearance in October and I was excited to be back on the regular job. On my second day, I felt a really strong headache coming on. I was up a utility pole and on the phone with a customer when I realized that my speech was slurring. I felt this overwhelming dread that my aneurysm was back. My partner drove me straight to Mercy, and the MRI test showed that a new blood vessel had formed, and there was a clot in my brain growing to two centimeters. The swelling in my brain was causing the severe headache and slurred speech.

I was transferred to Columbia, where they did an angiogram. The doctors think they can't mend the clot without surgery, and I'm scheduled for emergency craniotomy surgery tomorrow. I can't fall asleep. How can I close my eyes and let my mind rest when I know that tomorrow they are going to saw open my skull? I'm in this daze, where I can't think straight.

My parents seem calm. They know this is the right thing to do. They explained the procedure to me. It will be an eight-hour surgery. First they'll shave my head, and the doctor will make a slit in my skull from the top of my right ear to the middle of my temple. They'll insert a titanium clamp to stem the blood flow. Then they'll wire my skull back together again and stitch up the skin with staples.

The doctors are saving my life. At least I sure hope they are. I'm too young to die. I'm not ready for this.

On a 2004 Birthright trip, Josh delights in his first encounter with tefillin, thanks to Gutman Locks, who works at the Kosel tefillin booth. After his encounter with mortality, he returned to the Holy Land, ready to soak up the spirituality



Here's What I Want:

I want to know why I survived. Why am I alive? What purpose do I have here?

I woke up from my surgery and I was still in pain, drifting in and out of consciousness. But when I opened my mouth, my speech was back to 100 percent normal. My dad pumped his fist in the air and shouted, "He's back!"

I can't help wondering why. Why did G-d give me this second chance at life? I need to discover what G-d wants from me, and why He brought me back. I need to go back to Israel to learn, to discover more about my heritage and my mission in this world.

I fly out to Israel, and my first stop is at the Kotel. I stand there at the wall, and I'm just crying. I know I have to pray, but I don't know how, so I stand there and sob and I say over and over, "Thank You! Thank You for saving my life."

I go back to Aish HaTorah and join the Essentials program for one month. There are some amazing rabbis here who are teaching me about Torah and mitzvos. I set up *chavrusas* and am learning to read Hebrew. Rabbi Gil Eisenbach helps me buy my first set of tefillin. I'm so excited to wear them, and I take my tefillin down to the Kotel and put them on for the first time. I'm holding my ArtScroll siddur, trying to see the words, but I'm crying too hard to read.

On the plane ride back to the United States, I realize I have been eating only kosher food for a full month, and it was doable. I decide to continue eating kosher from that point on.

Here's What I Want:

I want to learn more, to grow in my service of Hashem. I want to create my own Jewish home and build a family.

A few years ago, my family moved to Central Jersey, and I found a *frum* community in East Windsor, New Jersey. I'm a member at Congregation Toras Emes, and I became very close with Rabbi and Rebbetzin Gruman. I go to *shiurim* and have *chavrusas* in halachah, Hebrew reading, and the weekly *parshah*. I'm just soaking everything up.

A few times my *chavrusa* took me to Lakewood's Beth Medrash Govoha, and I got a couple of funny stares. I was the only guy without a white shirt. People were very nice and friendly, but they kept looking at me.

I have a weekly *seder* in Mishnayos, and I hope I'll be able to graduate to Gemara soon. I love Shabbos, and it is the busiest day of my week. I eat the *seudos* with my friends, go to shul, and learn. Keeping kosher is simpler than I thought it would be. I was a big fan of McDonalds' dollar menu, but once I decided to keep kosher, it's been easy. Remembering *brachos* before and after eating is much more difficult. I know I'm supposed to say something, but it's hard to remember what. I didn't learn it as a kid, so the *brachos* are not ingrained in me. I carry around an NCSY *bentscher* and I look up the correct *brachah*.

It's hard for me that I don't fit into a specific mold. I wear a black velvet yarmulke, but I'm a big guy with fair hair, and I don't really look Jewish. Also, how many *frum* cable guys are out there? It's difficult for me to fill out a *shidduch* resume. The *frum* dating websites ask you to check off if you're yeshivish, traditional, Carlebachian, liberal or *machmir* Modern Orthodox. I don't fit into any one category. I want to find a *shidduch* with another sincere and religious person, who will appreciate my spiritual side and my fun-loving personality.

I've decided to go back to college, so I'm really busy these days, between my job, classes, and my learning schedule. But I'm not fazed by all this activity, I'm so grateful just to be here. I feel like I have a second chance at everything. And now I can spend my life achieving what I've really wanted all along. ■



Top Signs You Have a Bed Bug Infestation:
Bite Marks

This is one sure fire way to find out if your place is infested with bed bugs. One bite, although quite gross for many, doesn't signify an infestation just yet. However, if you have multiple red welts along your exposed skin when you wake up, it is a guarantee that you have an infestation.

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