**Extended Bridging Task - Reb Aharon in Search of a Miracle**

Sources:

1. <http://jewishblind.org/>

The Jewish Institute for the Blind has served the blind and partially sighted children of Israel for over 100 years.  Established in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1902, the Institute has grown into a widely respected Jerusalem landmark.  The first Institute in Israel to care for the blind, the JIB has always excelled in providing special education to the exceptional child.  Presently, the Institute provides a wide range of activities for education, rehabilitation, health and social welfare for the blind and visually impaired in Jerusalem and throughout the country.

The Jewish Institute for the Blind provides a wealth of programs and services adapted to suit the needs, interests, and capabilities of children and adults in the Blind and Visually Impaired community. These programs help guide students as they forge their own paths toward independence through education, rehabilitation, health, social welfare, and a caring, knowledgeable staff.

110 years of providing service and education have put us in a singular position to design and develop programs that address the unique needs of our students and put them at a distinct advantage in society. Our programs foster, encourage, and define our mission statement “to help raise a student’s self-esteem so that he will not depend on others for help, but will himself become a helpful member of society”.

Beit Hatalmid - Beit Ha’Talmid offers students from all over the Jerusalem area, who have already been mainstreamed into regular public and private schools, to be transported to JIB twice a week to take part in courses to further increase their independence. This program has been so successful and popular that similar afternoon programs are now being sponsored by the JIB in Tel Aviv, Haifa, Ashdod, and Beer Sheva.

Psychological Services - Psycho-social services address the student’s psychological growth and interaction with their particular social environment. A team of specialists including a neurologist, neuropsychologist, psychiatrist, doctor, and nurse act as case manager to provide psychodynamic therapy to the student and give advice and support to the family or community contact. This team is especially important in helping individuals to overcome the challenges that they may face in social interaction within society, with its main goal of making it easier for students and older boarders to resume normal life.

Summer Camps - Summer is a time for us to enjoy our friends, the great outdoors, and to reinforce the independent living skills that have been taught throughout the year. JIB sponsors a variety of such camps during the summer break, including an innovative camp for older students that takes place at different locations in Israel each year.

Vocational School - JIB encourages its students throughout their academic career and supports them beyond the primary school grades 1-8 with its Vocational School, providing a wide range of subjects to choose from in order for the student to find what truly stimulates their mind and what will be the area of study best suited to their own personal interested and needs. If they attend a high school in Jerusalem, they may even continue to board at JIB and receive academic assistance and the warm moral support of the JIB family, including help to continue their education or find suitable and fulfilling employment.

Community Center - Located at the Institute, the community center enables blind and visually impaired adults to spend some of their afternoon and evening hours engaged in a variety of on-going activities at our facilities including handicrafts, woodworking, home economics, and sports.  Adults from all over the country also converge on the campus each summer to take advantage of the Institute’s dormitories for an exciting retreat, forging new friendships, maintaining old ones, and always achieving greater independence and confidence.

Library - The Library at JIB, the crown jewel of the campus, hosts a huge array of texts in a variety of formats. Books in braille cover a wide range of subjects from academic texts to religious works, from biographies to novels with many of the selections also available in audio form. Braille printers let students take data with them for further study, computer screens magnify text for the visually impaired, and a news service keeps blind and visually impaired students up-to-date on current events throughout the world. Even university and high school students take advantage of the wealth of text books available at the library. Computer education courses offered at the library ensure that the Institute’s students keep abreast of technology trends. In addition to all that the library has to offer, a Rehabilitation Center was also founded by the JIB, in partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Industry and Social Affairs. that has given 35 blind workers the opportunity to employ their talents in the assembly and binding of books at the library.

Sports Center - One of the campus’ most popular venues, the National Sports Center for the Blind hosts activities that develop coordination along with confidence, skill, and team spirit. Housed within this facility is an indoor, heated swimming pool, a stadium, a well-equipped weight room, and additional space with specialized, state-of-the-art equipment for blind and multi-handicapped children and adults. There is truly something for everyone.

Supportive boarding - Spacious campus dormitories accommodate students from Israel and around the world, with a student-staff ratio of almost one-to one. Highly trained and devoted teachers, counselors, and psychologists encourage social, emotional, and educational independence through personal, individual plans aimed at greater integration into the students’ specific communities.

Housing System - The housing system is a unique transition program developed by the Institute for the Blind, and aided by psychosocial services, aimed at helping high school graduates acclimate to more independent living. Apartments are available in residential buildings in Kiryat Moshe for a period of one to two years and advanced classes are offered to these tenants to help them integrate into the community.

The housing system:

* - Enables maximum physical, emotional and social independence
* - Trains its inhabitants to function in society including coping with various bodies such as banks, medical centers and government offices
* - Provides employment and educational and personal guidance
* - Offers and abundance of extra curricular activites such as plays, trips etc.

2. http://jewishblind.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/INSIGHT-08-2014-888.pdf

**Expressive Therapies Help Students at Jewish Institute for the Blind**

Insight – Volume 39 Number 75 Fall 2014

Aliza can express herself well in conversation with her peers, but when someone asks her about her personal life and visual handicaps, she clams up, hiding her innermost feelings. On the stage, however, she finds the self confidence to confront her blindness and she exudes

self confidence. Jacob, on the other hand, is a quiet and introverted 11-year-old, but when he is working on an art project at the Jewish Institute for the Blind, he can talk with animation, oftentimes opening up about his thoughts and ambitions.

As every child is an individual, each one can respond differently to various types of therapies. Perhaps verbal communication is still the main method of exchange in therapy, but as people have different styles of expression, the Jewish Institute for the Blind employs

a variety of therapies. "We still use expressive therapies with an integrative approach, and hopefully every child is helped according to his or her needs," explains Rachel Skrobish, JIB school principal.

Music therapy, for example, can be a wonderful trigger for a blind pupil, helping with communication, motivation as well as behavior problems. "Music helps to open the channels of communication, allowing for a very rich dialogue," explains music therapist Hanna

Tal-Or, music therapist at the Institute. Students that seemingly have trouble with verbal communication open up with music. Tal-Or explains that one pupil often heads for the music room whenever he feels the need to ponder over a problem. He knows that the drums help him with his frustration and anger, and the organ calms him down.

Another pupil, S. suffers from Usher syndrome and is losing both her hearing and vision. JIB ceramicist and art therapist Mireille Gronner says that when S. has clay between her fingers she can explore and process her thoughts as well as fears, and she enjoys the creativity at

the same time.

As school principal, Skrobish has been a firm advocate of the use of alternative expressive therapies to assist each pupil at the Institute to find his voice. Disciplines such as art, music, dance, drama, creative writing and animal assisted therapy are all utilized at the Institute

with success. "We have found that the use of a variety of therapies enables every student to find his creative niche," she explains. "The variety of therapies also helps to effect positive change in the psychological and social functioning of our students."

Interview with Chaya Plesner Shpiz- employee of the Institute

"Drama can be a very important therapeutic tool, and we have seen how useful it is on a one-to-one basis or with small groups at the Institute," explains Haya Plesner Shpiz, drama teacher and therapist at the Jewish Institute for the Blind. Haya has taught drama and worked as a drama therapist at the Institute for eight years, and she realizes how role-playing as well as projection can help pupils of all ages at the Institute.

"Drama therapy can provide context for the participants to tell their stories, explain feelings and even move them to start solving their problems," she says. "Oftentimes students find role-playing even more effective than talking "one-on-one." Drama therapy has joined the curriculum at the Institute with other arts and expressive therapies, and it is providing a real boon for those students it touches. "We are lucky at the Institute that we have the resources

available as well as the staff to help every pupil find his or her niche," adds Haya. As an actress as well as a drama therapist, she is glad to see drama touching the hearts of the students as well as helping them to express that which is most important to them.

3) <http://www.clfb.org.il/en/Vision-and-goals.htm#maincontent> –

From the site of the Central Library for the Blind (Tel Aviv and Netanya)

Mission Statement

The Central Library will serve as a production center that will make classical literature, periodicals and textbooks accessible to the blind, visually impaired and handicapped. It will be a center for the cultural and spiritual enrichment of its subscribers, with an emphasis on quality, a high standard of service and technological progress that will place it amongst the leading libraries of its kind in the world.

The Library’s Goals

The Library will work to increase the number of people who benefit from its services among the population of blind, visually impaired and handicapped people in Israel. It will work to expand the literature collection that is available to subscribers and will provide accessibility to a wide variety of printed material in a suitable format that is convenient for the reader to use.

In order to achieve these goals, emphasis will be placed on the following:

1. Constantly striving to increase the number of subscribers.
2. Continuously improving the standard of our service to subscribers.
3. Implementing efficiency methods and advanced technological developments for the benefit of our subscribers.
4. Continuous development of modern, accessible formats suited to the differing needs of our subscribers.
5. Broadening the cultural package that is offered to subscribers in a way that is relevant for them.
6. Strengthening the relationship between the Library and its subscribers.
7. Endeavoring to make all textbooks required by students with reading difficulties accessible to them on time and in a suitable format.
8. Constantly striving to make accessible to the reading impaired population all the reading material on the market that is available to sighted readers, because we are all readers!

# Our Products

The Central Library for the Blind gives access to books, reading material and content to everyone who is unable to read standard print. The Library enables its subscribers to reach an entire world of information both for pleasure and for knowledge acquisition. This material is not readily available to them from any other source. The Library aims to close the social, cultural and educational gap by transposing printed reading and reference books, newspapers and magazines to recorded, Braille, Large Print and digital formats.

We currently succeed in providing access to just 5% of Israel’s published material, and we constantly strive to increase the collection to benefit our subscribers. We believe that blind people have a right to know, and that people with learning disabilities have a right to learn, because we are all readers!

# The Education System for the Blind

Although the phenomenon of blindness has existed since the dawn of humanity, it was only during the 18th century that educators began to be convinced that the use of unique educational methods could significantly improve the ability of blind people to function.

The biggest single advance in education of the Blind is credited to Louis Braille, a blind French student, who in 1824 developed for the first time a system that allowed blind people to read.

Until the 1970s, most blind children in developed countries studied in institutes designated exclusively for the blind. Since the beginning of the 21st century, blind children are in most cases entitled to study in ordinary schools, with equal rights and obligations to children with normal vision (according to the Israeli Ministry of Education, each child is entitled to study in a regular classroom in the area where he or she lives). This change of approach occurred both because of the growing understanding that blind children have equal rights to children with normal vision, and due to technological innovations that made it possible to teach the visually impaired in standard schools.

# The Contribution of the Library to the Quality of Life of the Blind or Visually Impaired Person

## An interview with Mrs Gila Lahat, a visually impaired Library subscriber

**Hello Gila, could you tell us something about your life story?**  
"For more than 30 years I worked as a costume designer. During that period I also taught costume design in schools. Now I am retired. I suffer from impaired vision but I am not willing to give in to it or to let it limit me in any way. I struggle with it all day, every day – and I succeed.

During recent years I have been occupied with art and sculpting, and I have just presented an exhibition of my own works at the Opera Building in Tel-Aviv. I create and sculpt characters and figures from the world of opera, and my wide experience in theater costume design serves me today when I design the characters that I create. Initially, I research the characters, just as they do in the theatre, and only then do I begin to sculpt them. I make the figures from paper, using a unique technique that I developed myself. You could say that I train the paper to work for me. My impaired vision does present some difficulties in the process, but I have found ways overcome the difficulties and I cope well with my disability."

**What kind of a visual impairment are you struggling with?**  
"I am partially blind. According to the law, I am defined as a blind person because I see less than 10 percent. I have been suffering for years from AMD (retinal degeneration). It is usually referred to as an "old people's disease" but I fell victim to it sooner. These days there is a pharmaceutical treatment which stops or delays the disease, but at that time, when I became sick, it did not exist. Lately I have been given medical treatment that helps delay the progressive loss of vision.

Although I can still see, I can't read normal print as my fine vision is impaired. In order to read I need to enlarge the font substantially, to at least 3 cm, and only then can my eye see it. Nevertheless, I can find my way around as my peripheral vision was not affected by the disease. When I am walking in the street I can see images of people walking by but I can't recognize who they are."

**How did you hear about the Central Library for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Handicapped?**  
"I have always been an obsessive reader. I was always reading two books simultaneously, if not three – a science-fiction book and a novel. Reading is second nature to me, like drinking water. I got in touch with the AMD association at an early stage of my condition, and I thought to myself that I could be of assistance and be a guide (I could still see and drive) and that I would handle the disease in this way rather than waiting until my vision has completely gone. I heard about the library immediately from my group. As soon as I started experiencing visual difficulties I contacted the library in Netanya and asked them to send some books to my home. After I moved from the north of Israel to Tel-Aviv, I began to visit the Tel-Aviv library branch once in a while, and I equipped myself with a good number of books. Generally speaking, there have been great developments in recorded book technology. While in past I received a large set of cassettes for each book, nowadays everything is on CDs and that’s great. Today, even if I ask for a book and there is no available copy, they just burn a copy on the spot and so I can read whatever I want to. I enjoy reading enormously, so for me that is a source of great pleasure.

**What do you usually read? Do you read for relaxation or also for the purpose of learning?**  
"I read books for pleasure and it gives me a lot of enjoyment. First of all, I read the books written by the Israeli authors. Unfortunately, the library does not produce them as often or as rapidly as I would wish. I participate in a literary circle where we have a monthly meeting with an author, and we discuss a pre-designated book. In most cases, I cannot actively participate in the discussion because I have not read the book. I read the abstract which I find on the Internet, but that is not enough. It is a shame that due to a lack of budget, not all new books are recorded by the library, or it takes too long for a newly published book to be recorded."

**What does the library mean to you?**  
"Personally, for me, literature - in which I would include theatre, is my life. Even when dealing with theatre costume design, your first and foremost concern is the text, the play, and your creation comes only from there. My entire world revolves around literature. If I go to the opera, I'll read the storyline first. I consult books on a daily basis, and I am really addicted to them. My greatest pleasure is to finish my chores for the day and to listen to a talking book."

**You set an example for every disabled person – how not to let a disability overpower one's life.**  
"I do want to set an example and I try to pass on that kind of message. Coping gives me strength and I see that people who don't try to deal with their situation tend to become bitter and depressed. To be honest with you, it is far from easy. It is much easier if you can see well, or to put on a pair of glasses and see (they don’t help me personally). But when you are active and keep a positive mental attitude, then you can be just fine and you can do everything. Besides, nowadays there so many aids for the blind that allow new possibilities that were never available before."

**Do you have an important message to deliver regarding the library?**  
"It is important to bring the existence of the library, and its importance to the lives of blind and visually impaired people, to the attention of people with normal vision. It is important for people to know what blindness is, what visual impairment is, and the implications and the difficulties that accompany them in everyday life. How much books mean to blind people, and how much a donation to the library can help add joy to their daily lives."

# Aids for the Blind

There are many low-tech aids available that can help blind and visually impaired people perform everyday tasks. The most familiar one is the guide stick, which helps the blind person avoid stumbling over objects and obstacles that stand in their way. Optical aides designed for the visually impaired include special glasses equipped with microscope lenses, magnifying glasses and special glasses that reduce glare and provide a correct balance between shades and colors. In addition, guide dogs are sometimes used. These dogs are specially trained to guide blind persons, and are able to assist the blind and visually impaired person when walking in unfamiliar environments.

These days there are a number of auxiliary applications available to blind persons to help them in reading and writing. Today, Braille books are written by machine and are can be printed quickly on a special typewriter or by a specially designated word processor and Braille printer. Additionally, machines that can convert text to voice and Braille also exist today. Blind and visually impaired persons can also have transcripts of recorded textbooks, which allow them to study by listening to CDs. Home computers that incorporate artificial speech systems have also become available. By using software combined with an audio output device these computers are able to convert text to voice.

Other technological devices, such as Closed Circuit TV, that comprises a video camera or a stills camera and a screen, enable the visually impaired to read - a printed page of text is placed in front of the camera which projects a massively magnified image of the page onto the screen.

# Our Community

The Central Library for the Blind is a registered not for profit organization that has existed for 60 years, and that serves some 10,000 subscribers. The population that benefits from the Library’s services are blind, visually impaired and reading-disabled (learning disabled, any person who cannot hold a book as a result of physical disability such as ALS etc.).

4) <http://www.boi.org.il/en/Currency/BanknoteSecurityFeatures/Pages/signs-for-the-blind.aspx>

(There is a 20 second clip showing the raised print.)

# Signs for the Blind on Bills (Paper Money)

Signs in raised print (intaglio) enable the blind to identify the denomination of the banknotes.​

The portrait, the body of text to its left, and the sign for the blind (on upper part of the note) are printed in intaglio, and are discemible by touch.​

5) <http://www.guidedogs.co.il/Eng/pages/63.aspx>

The blind deserve the chance to live a full and independent life. A Seeing Eye dog can help them do exactly that.

Guiding Eyes for the Blind is a nonprofit organization and is recognized as a public institution. The organization's facilities are located near Tzivon in the Galilee.

It is the center at which the dogs are trained. The Center was established in 1989. There are over 20,000 blind people living in Israel today. Among them are many disabled IDF veterans. The demand for dogs exceeds the numbers which are available, and there is a long line of blind people waiting to get their own dog.

The dog candidates are chosen from soft tempered and highly motivated breeds such as Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever and German Shepherd. The puppy's first year and a half is spent with foster families who have volunteered to give it a warm home and become used to being around people and socializing with them. At the end of the foster period, at age one year and a half, the dog begins an 8 month concentrated training program at the training facilities and in a city environment. When this training period ends and the dog is ready to serve his new owner, the blind person is invited to the course, together with other blind people who have gone through a process of matching and acceptance. The candidates will spend 28 days at the training center, sleeping there as well. During the training period each blind person is taught to function with his new dog.

There is a great amount of attention invested in finding the right dog for each owner. Emphasis is put on mobility data, the blind person's personality and the environment in which both dog and owner will be living. At the end of the course, both the blind person and his new dog will return home, where the owner will apply all he/she has learned at the Guiding Eyes for the Blind Training Center.

The Training Center's professional staff will be available to the blind person when even needed for the rest of his life.

This is a highly important mission.

The opportunity to walk freely and securely with the help of Seeing Eye dogs improves the quality of living of the blind person.