

## Chavrusa Profile

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# Installing the Jewish Operating System: My Spiritual Awakening

My grandmothers taught me the importance of always learning and working on yourself. This growth-oriented mindset has served me well, enabling me to overcome various obstacles on the way to career, family, and personal success. But it took me a while to recognize inner growth as a profoundly Jewish value.

Growing up secular in the Soviet Union, we thought of our Jewishness as an ethnic identity. Being Jewish meant that my skin was a little darker than the neighbors and my family had high expectations. It had nothing to do with religion, which was at best a relic of the past—something ignorant grandmas believed in because they didn't know better.

When I was 11 years old, my family moved to the United States and settled in Brooklyn. Later, I studied Computer Science at Stony Brook, where I became friends with Adam Stein, the Chabad Rabbi on campus. Chabad was a great place to hang out on Friday nights, but Judaism didn't yet appeal to me intellectually and I wasn't interested in spirituality.

After graduating, I worked at Bloomberg, rising from a Junior Software Engineer to Global Business Manager. Eventually, I left Bloomberg for Bridgewater. It happens to be the world's largest hedge

fund, but I was drawn to its extreme culture of transparency and feedback.

The Bridgewater years were when I started exploring Judaism in more depth. The job "blessed me" with a 90-minutes-each-way commute from my apartment on the Upper East Side to Westport, CT. I somehow stumbled upon the wealth of Jewish audio classes on Chabad.org to

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listen to during the commute. At first, my interest was purely intellectual—I was intrigued by the brilliant interpretations and philosophies that were derived from seemingly simple texts. Curious, I bought the Gutnick Chumash, which features English commentaries that illuminate the deeper meaning of the verse. I wasn't yet reading the Torah as a faithful believer, but I was starting to recognize its undeniable wisdom.

One night, while on the phone with my Rabbi from college, I mentioned that I

was hitting the limits of self-study. He suggested I use JNet to find someone to learn with. That's how I met Aharon Fehler three years ago. We immediately "clicked" as we have a lot in common—we both live in Long Island, are in our 40s, and work in tech.



Aharon and I often turn to technology to find analogies for esoteric Jewish concepts. For example, Chasidut teaches that G-d recreates the universe every moment of every day and if he would stop, everything would cease to exist. We compare that to a simulation, like a computer game that has a creator who keeps it running. The analogy makes it easy to grasp this concept, which makes it all the more incredible that our sages understood it millenia ago.

Through our weekly study sessions, Aharon has been helping me understand the relevance and genius of Jewish ideology. When I have an issue on my mind—whether it's related to work, a relationship, or raising kids—the answer often "randomly" pops up in that week's Torah portion.

I've always been a hyper-logical guy. Anything that couldn't be understood

through logic felt irrelevant and unreal. I now recognize that this is an incredibly limiting stance, since an overwhelming amount of reality takes place outside of our ability to understand or even observe. Ironically, logic leads us to understand its own limits. Judaism is amazing precisely because it is the study of how the finite and limited human can engage with the infinite and eternal G-d. This then empowers us to transcend boundaries and constantly climb higher.

My values, the same ones I got from my grandmothers, the same ones that I rely on in my career, I now see as the key to the Jewish "operating system" that sustains growth and enables us to persevere through years of struggle. Perhaps this can explain what our people have achieved—our survival, resilience, and contributions to society.

I have also come to accept that the operating system can only work this well because it is grounded in truth and aligns with the design of the universe, much like a physics formula is only powerful because it reflects the underlying reality. Understanding this has opened up space for me to fully embrace Judaism in a more complete and practical way.

These days, I strive to make Jewish practice a part of my daily life. My family happily supports Jewish causes and we belong to two synagogues. But most importantly, we are trying to raise our young children with the Jewish values and traditions that have sustained us for centuries. I want to "upload" the operating system that will enable them to live rich, meaningful, and impactful lives, and to pass it on to subsequent generations.

## News

### Parsha Pursuit

In memory and tribute to the holy victims of the Simchat Torah Massacre on October 7th 2023, we invite you to join us in strengthening our connection to the Torah through the study of the entire Chumash - The Five Books of Moses. Parsha Pursuit — an engaging weekly Torah study challenge designed to enrich your Torah study, foster a vibrant learning community, and serve as a living memorial to those we've lost.

[jnet.org/parsha](http://jnet.org/parsha)

### Judaic Journey

We offer personalized Torah tutoring from tutors who are experienced at helping beginners discover and navigate Judaism. Connect with a dedicated tutor, learn at your own pace, and deepen your understanding of Jewish teachings.

[judaicjourney.net](http://judaicjourney.net)

## Accomplishments

In the past few months, JNet has welcomed over 200 new members, with more than 130 already matched with learning partners! These incredible new chavrusas are creating meaningful Jewish learning experiences and fostering deep connections worldwide.

Each match is a testament to the growing impact of our vibrant learning community—join us and be part of the excitement!



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Visit us at [JNet.org](http://JNet.org) or call, text or whatsapp us at (347) 770-5638 to find out how you can get involved



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