Women
TO KNOW

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION

Rivkah Resnik's Financial Literacy Revolution in Jewish Education

Budgets and financial literacy are all the rage these days, especially in the frum world. With the rising cost of living along with the ever-growing expenses of ***frum*** life from ***simchah*** to schooling, it seems like everyone is talking about how to "make it work."

Rivkah Resnik shares that goal, but her approach goes far beyond offering solutions or sharing advice on podcasts. Instead, she's developed a full series of textbooks designed specifically for ***yeshivos*** and Jewish day schools, giving children a strong foundation in financial literacy from a young age so they'll be better equipped to "make it work" later in life.

Self-funded, her curriculum has already made its way into classrooms across the spectrum from *chasidish* and *Litvish* to Modern Orthodox, thanks to a partnership between Rivkah, the OU and Living Smarter Jewish (LSJ).

"Our goal is simple," says Rivkah: "To make sure that every Jewish school and *cheder* can access a high-quality state-approved financial literacy curriculum at cost. We're focused on one thing: getting these real-world skills into the hands of as many students as possible. We believe that early financial education can prevent so many of the everyday struggles people face: credit card debt, living beyond their means, budgeting mishaps and unnecessary financial stress."

How did a busy mother end up authoring educational textbooks while living in Israel? Her story is as thoughtful and practical as the books themselves.

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Money matters and education always played significant roles in Rivkah's life. Her father was a Wharton School graduate with an MBA who worked as an economist for blue-chip companies like RCA, IBM, General Electric, as well as the federal government, and her mother spent nearly 20 years at the CIA after beginning her career in education. "From a young age I was tuned into financial issues. That awareness stayed with me and deeply influenced the way I approached both teaching

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and parenting," she says.

She also points to her educational background as having given her the necessary tools to create the textbooks. "I have a master's degree in psychology with a minor in education, and I'm also a certified master substance abuse counselor with a specialty in interventions. It's a unique combination, but one that's very helpful for the work I do."

Her first foray into the field of financial education began when her oldest child, now nearly 39, was in the first grade at Joan Dachs Bais Yaakov in Chicago. Partnering with the local Success National Bank, Rivkah created the Bank at School program. Students were invited to open real savings accounts; and every month, bank tellers would come to school to collect their deposits. "Withdrawals weren't allowed," she recalls, "because the goal was to build the habit of saving." The initiative quickly caught on, and many parents even transferred their personal banking accounts to Success National Bank.

This wasn't just a successful educational project; it was also an expression of gratitude. Years earlier, Rivkah and her husband had moved to Chicago after he had completed medical school, internship, residency and a fellowship. Burdened with $110,000 in student loans and years of renting apartments, they finally decided to purchase a home. A recommendation led them to Sol Binder, a Jewish bank owner known for helping fellow *Yidden*. Despite their debt, he gave them a 100% mortgage on a $185,000 home.

"We paid it off fully, and the gratitude I felt led me to find a meaningful way to support the bank and educate children at the same time," Rivkah says.

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The program continued long after the Resniks left Chicago. It made such an impact that Yeshiva Tiferes Tzvi, the affiliated boys' school, later received a substantial mortgage from the same bank, thanks to this program.

After her family left Chicago, Rivkah continued to bring her financial literacy efforts to every school in which she taught. In St. Louis, she taught the 12th grade at Bais Yaakov and developed a basic financial literacy course from scratch. "Back then, no one was talking about financial education," she recalls. "People were doing well and personal finance in school was considered unnecessary, even a bit frivolous." Her early curriculum covered essentials like needs versus wants, bank accounts and compound interest.

When the family later moved to Monsey, Rivkah continued to expand her curriculum while teaching at Satmar, Bais Shifra Miriam and eventually Pe'er Bais Yaakov. The course offerings broadened to include more advanced topics such as credit cards, debt and investing.

She also took a break from teaching for several years to support teens through her work as a CASAC (certified alcohol and substance abuse counselor) before returning to the classroom about six years ago. At Pe'er Bais Yaakov, she resumed teaching 12th-grade financial literacy, laying the groundwork for what would become a comprehensive textbook series.

"Eventually, I made the decision to leave classroom teaching. After so many years in the field, I realized that the daily demands no longer fit my lifestyle," Rivkah says. "As a member of the sandwich generation, caring for aging parents while helping with many grandchildren, I needed more flexibility. That's what led me to focus full time on textbook writing and curriculum development."

Today, Rivkah lives in Ramat Eshkol in Israel with her husband, who continues to work as a gynocological oncologist. Meanwhile, Rivkah is still focused on developing what has become one of the most widely used financial literacy programs in Jewish education.

In the early years, Rivkah didn't share her materials broadly. "Everyone was creating his or her own lessons," she recalls. "There was so much duplication of effort without even realizing it." But as conversations around personal finance grew more urgent in the *frum* community, the need for a structured, research-based curriculum became clear.

Conversations with teachers from Baltimore to St. Louis to New York confirmed what she suspected: No one was using a consistent curriculum. Everyone was reinventing the wheel.

That realization led her to examine national standards, and Florida emerged as the gold standard. Unlike many states, Florida mandates financial literacy for all high school students and maintains a rigorous set of over 90 benchmarks. It's also an "adoption and approval" state, meaning that a textbook must be formally approved by the Department of Education before it can be used.

Resnik's curriculum was one of only four approved by the state. Then, standards changed and the texbook had to be totally rewritten. Her second submission became one of seven. "It's not just a personal project I threw together," she says. "It's a comprehensive, benchmark-based curriculum that's been vetted at the highest level."

The curriculum, distributed at cost, covers the full spectrum of personal finance: basic banking and budgeting, credit cards, debt, investing and more. It also delves into the psychological side of money, such as marketing influence, peer pressure and spending habits. "Students learn to ask real questions," she explains. "Do I need five Yom Tov outfits? Can I really afford a hotel for Sukkos? Do my kids need everything to match?"

Both the middle school and high school versions follow a thoughtful format: Each chapter begins with "Let's Get Started" and ends with key takeaways. The high school version, now in its third edition, comprises over 290 pages and includes workbook activities—true/false, multiple choice, open-ended questions and group discussions—while the middle school, now in its second edition, offers more visuals and simplified text. A separate 200-page teacher's guide offers built-in lesson plans and clearly cited sources, including direct links to government websites like that of the US Treasury.

Even the graphics were carefully designed to be universally usable, avoiding gender-specific examples so the same book can be used in both boys' and girls' schools.

"It's really about presenting the facts, plain and simple," she explains. "I'm not telling students, 'You *should* save your money because of compound interest.'" Instead, the curriculum says: '*If* you save your money and it earns compound interest, *this* is what will happen.' You'll earn interest on both the principal and the interest you've already earned. In the second year, you earn interest on the principal *and* on the interest from the first year. "When students are given the facts, they're smart enough to understand how to build a strong financial foundation," Rivkah says.

She does has one disclaimer: "I want to be very clear what the curriculum *doesn't* contain: *hashkafah*. It's written by a *frum* person for a broad audience. You won't find quotes from the Satmar Rav or Rav Gifter, *zt"l*. The material is strictly financial and universally applicable."

To bring these textbooks to fruition, Rivkah hired and personally funded a graphic designer, proofreader and technical support team to ensure that the books were professional, accessible and polished. "This isn't about profit," she emphasizes. "The books are distributed at cost, just enough to cover printing and administrative fees. No one—including me, the OU or Living Smarter Jewish—makes money from this."

Her motivation, she says, is entirely *l'sheim Shamayim*, something that's been consistent throughout her life. In Monsey, she and her husband opened their very large pool to neighborhood families and camps, free of charge. She also ran a school for five years, called Otzar, for girls struggling with *Yiddishkeit*, without taking a salary. "It was all from my heart," she reflects.

Resnik's passion for financial literacy is also rooted in personal experience. She and her husband have made eight weddings, *ka"h*, all paid for in cash. "Watching the *frum* community from the inside, especially at times like that, I noticed an unsettling trend: overextension. Beautiful *simchahs*, yes, but often at unsustainable costs. It troubled me," she shares. "A bar mitzvah isn't an emergency. It's predictable. When your son is born, you know that in 13 years he will turn bar mitzvah. Yet so many families are financially unprepared when the time comes. We made our son's bar mitzvah at home. I cooked everything myself. That son is Rabbi Zecharia Resnik, who now teaches the Quick Daf to thousands of people every day."

She also says that she has always tried to live to the standard she now teaches through her textbooks. "My husband is a physician, but the kind who chose university practice for meaning over money. We lived frugally, paid off our student loan debt and prioritized savings," she says. "No cleaning help, no luxury purchases. I didn't have a new car until I was 50, when my husband gave me one as a gift." They also took summer jobs at camps so their kids could attend for free. "It's not about how

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much you earn. It's about how you think.

"These lessons are missing from so many conversations today," she says. "The *frum* community needs to hear them."

While teaching in Monsey, Rivkah also authored several columns for *The Voice of Lakewood*: "Shared Accounts," "Shared Simchas," "$500 in 5," and a number of financial roundtable articles. One early piece focused on joint financial accounts and what couples were actually spending. She interviewed families across income levels, and the disparity was striking. Some spent $300 on an *upsherin*; others, $10,000. One family with ten children earning $450,000 was deep in debt, what with custom gowns and luxury spending.

"When people see the numbers," she says, "reality hits."

Her curriculum does the same thing. It shows students the facts, and then lets them make informed decisions. "I'm not a financial planner. I gain nothing from this. But I know what worked for our family, and I want to share that."

She returns to her previous point, stressing it again to make a point. "Yes, families with six kids and a $120,000 income *can* save for weddings. But it takes a mindset shift. With *takanah* weddings, home bar mitzvahs and cooking your own food it's possible. Who decided that we all have to live in New York? There are out-of-town communities offering incentives, better housing and better balance," she says.

In the last year alone, an estimated 3,000 students used the high school version of Rivkah's curriculum. That number is expected to grow significantly thanks to her partnership with the OU's Rabbi Simon Taylor and Rabbi Zevy Wolman of Living Smarter Jewish, who now handle all distribution and outreach.

Educators have also requested versions for newlyweds as well as couples who have been married for many years. In addition, Rivkah has been urged to start a blog or a podcast or do something on social media. While she currently prioritizes her family responsibilities, she plans to expand when the time is right.

For now, she's focused on making the curriculum as widely available as possible. And with rising scrutiny of secular standards in *yeshivos*, particularly in New York, having a state-approved professional-grade resource sends a powerful message.

What about couples who missed this education while they were in school? "They can reach out to the OU or Living Smarter Jewish to get the material, or wait for my expanded versions," she says. "Because even if your oldest kid is already 13, you're $30,000 in debt and you've never saved a penny, there's always a way forward." ●