

ACHIEZER AT 13: A TALK WITH SHALOM JAROSLAWICZ

Part 2 of a Series

BY AVI SHIFF

In honor of Achiezer's 13th year, we are conducting a multi-part series celebrating the various facets of this remarkable organization. For Week #2, we spoke to Shalom Jaroslawicz, chief of operations at Achiezer, who manages Achiezer's 24-hour hotline.

AS: Thank you, Shalom, for your time amidst your very hectic schedule. What is your role at Achiezer?

SJ: My official position is chief of operations at Achiezer. On a practical level, I serve as the right hand to our president, Boruch Ber Bender. I take care of any task that comes up, especially when his hands are full. I'll handle issues at our headquarters, I'll address crisis intervention, I'll deal with *chevra kadisha* matters—whatever it is, I'll step in to do it.

AS: How many years have you worked for Achiezer?

SJ: 10 years.

AS: What can you say about Achiezer's growth over the last decade?

SJ: Achiezer has grown tremendously over the last ten years in many ways, including our access to resources and our ability to help people. We are now called by every type of person for every type of need. We've become the place, the organization, that everyone falls back on. And indeed,

we're here for the entire Jewish community, locally and globally.

AS: How has COVID-19 affected Achiezer's day-to-day operation?

SJ: COVID shifted our focus in a big way to information-gathering. We gathered—and still gather—information that people seemed to have trouble obtaining. We weeded through the confusion and get the details that are needed.

Last year, when COVID first began, people—even doctors—were obviously unfamiliar with it. We put together a task force of medical experts to answer these questions.

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At the time, we were fielding some hundred questions a day. We were answering queries about treatment, testing, quarantining, and so on. We had never done such a thing before on that level, but because of the infrastructure that we had in place, we were able to step in and do it.



Achiezer's Mobile Crisis Command Center providing light and power to a home

AS: Tell us about Achiezer's incredible 24-hour hotline.

SJ: Other than Hatzalah, I believe that we are the only 24/7 hotline in the Jewish world—and beyond. Our hotline receives calls on a daily—and nightly—basis from

ists, crisis intervention, *chevra kadisha*/bereavement arrangements, and so on.

Through our hotline, we've also collaborated with other community resources and organizations during community emergencies or natural disasters.

We've spoken to the *poskei ha'dor* regarding how to deal with running the hotline on Shabbos and *yom tov*, and we follow a strict protocol, employing non-Jews as well when necessary. I oversee the hotline, which is staffed by a remarkable roster of people who man the hotline all day and night. It's absolutely extraordinary. There's no time when you can't reach Achiezer.

AS: Any final comment?

SJ: From my vantage point, I must tell you that I don't know where our community would be without Achiezer. Over the past 10 years, Achiezer has become an indispensable resource. People don't know who they would call if not for Achiezer. We are grateful to be serving such an important role in the community. ■

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