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In the News

BUCKHURST HILL LIFE

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HISTORY & EVENTS

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BUCKHURST HILL'S
RUNNING RABBI



THE RUNNING RABBI

Rabbi Odom Brandman, 29, a getting daily fitter Rabbi from Buckhurst Hill is training hard to be the first Orthodox Rabbi to take on the 26 mile London Marathon next month on 17th April 2011.

Rabbi Brandman, who has never really run a proper race before in his life has been working extremely hard to organize his time to train 3 times a week, running a maximum of 14 at a time fitting this in around all of his parochial responsibilities.

Always on call to do G-d's work to help anyone in need, he recalls with a grin, how one evening when he was out on a training run far out into the country, he received an urgent call on his mobile from a distraught family who had sadly suffered a bereavement that week and desperately needed him to come over to help them. Promising to be over within the hour he didn't want to make the family feel uncomfortable by telling them that he was actually quite far away from home on a long run, so Rabbi Brandman turned his jog into a prolonged sprint to quickly get home, shower and change

his running gear for his suit and tie to be over at that family's home within the promised time. "But, that's always been our calling and I feel privileged" said Rabbi Brandman, "I'll always drop everything to help somebody and my wife and I are dedicated to the needs of the community".

Rabbi Brandman with his wife Henny feel blessed to have three young boys, Menachem (4), Dovid (2) and Zalman (1). They are all such a bundle of fun playing together and from an early age the older two have learnt to welcome all sorts of people to the family home in their own special ways.

The dynamic couple work as team to run a Jewish communal centre which they established 6 years ago in Buckhurst Hill providing warm and inclusive educational, social and youth programs for all members of the local community.

"The Centre exists for all people of West Essex, everyone is welcomed and made to feel comfortable and it's a place where they can grow, develop and feel at peace. All are

invited to drop by, have a drink and a relaxed chat - no questions asked" said Henny, with a smile.

"It's a fantastic place" quips the Rabbi, "we have a wonderful group of people, we all work as an expanding team, ready to meet any needs of the community. It has been wonderful to see so many people grow through their involvement. These good friends form the core of the growing community and its humbling to see how people give of themselves to help others and help out at events.

Rabbi Brandman was born and raised in Essex where he lived in Chigwell with his parents and four sisters, his father is a popular local doctor and mother a primary school teacher. After completing his GCSE's and A-Level's he began to pursue his dream and vision of becoming a Rabbi through the necessary studies while seeking to gain experience in communal work all over the world.

Studying in Talmudical and Rabbinical colleges in England, Canada and Australia he received his Rabbinical ordination from the Rabbinical College of Sydney after 5 years of intensive study. During these years he was also involved in many aspects of communal life and outreach work with his experiences including trips to the Ukraine to help communities with festival celebrations, leading youth summer camps in Canada, New York and Australia and during his final year, volunteered directing extra curricular programs in a High School in Australia.

After completing his Rabbinic studies he undertook a six month posting in Las Vegas working within the local Jewish community there. His responsibilities included hospital chaplaincy, prison chaplaincy, running religious prayer services, youth programming and other aspects of communal service.

Rabbi Brandman's wife Henny was born and raised in Chicago, USA where her father is the Rabbi of a community in the suburbs of Illinois. Growing up as the daughter of a well respected Rabbi who is also the State Prison Chaplain, an open home to all was her natural way of life. After graduating High School in Chicago she went on to receive a diploma in education from a Teachers Seminary in Israel. With their warm smiles and non-judgemental nature, the Brandmans moved into Buckhurst Hill in May 2005 with the goal of strengthening all aspects of Jewish life in the area and to set up a centre which would be a hub of activity, a beacon of light to all and an address for anyone to turn to in a time of need.

Rabbi Brandman has been into all of the local schools to speak to children about his work as the local Rabbi and to answer questions on Judaism and make himself readily accessible. The Chabad Centre organizes a host of fun social events, delightful services, warm and inviting family meals, lively Friday evening, Sabbath and festival programs and many other invigorating activities for all ages.

Always on the run, Rabbi Brandman keeps himself busy with the needs of the community and his family from early morning till late at night. "It's a full on job" he says. From teaching people on a one-to-one basis, running services, hospitals visits, school visits, preparing for events, cleaning up from events, fundraising and occasionally, when necessary a prison visit too.

So why the gruelling 26 mile Marathon? Rabbi Brandman says "I want to show, firstly that Rabbis are real people, that we can be approachable, down to earth and that I'm ready to take on challenges out of my comfort zone".

Rabbi Brandman has been learning to juggle his extremely demanding schedule of communal work with allocating time for his family and training for this marathon often heading out on his runs at 5am, early in the morning before his children wake up or at 11pm at night once all are sleeping. Already a familiar face around the neighbourhood Rabbi Brandman is being encouraged by his wife, family and community who are supporting him in this endeavour and everybody else is invited to support him too.

Becoming somewhat of a local celebrity with a large following, Rabbi Brandman, with the help of the Sands Brothers, has produced a hilarious video which has already received over 3,000 hits on Youtube and can be seen by searching "Go Rabbi Go" on Youtube or through the link on his website: www.chabadonthehill.co.uk
From this video a link can also be followed to the Rabbi's sponsorship page at www.virginmoneygiving.com/odombrandman

For more information about the Chabad Centre and what it might have to offer you, please contact Rabbi Brandman directly and he would be delighted to speak to you.

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