

# Connecting in Chicago with Rabbi Ari Goodman: Part 1

*By Logan Bierman*

Ari Goodman was raised in West Rogers Park, Chicago, in a Chabad home surrounded by a strong Jewish community. Ari attended yeshiva all over the world; Australia, Israel, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, to name a few. Ari became a full-fledged Chabad Rabbi just a few short years ago.

Since becoming a rabbi, Ari has gotten married, had two children and set up shop in Chicago's West Loop with a mission. What is that mission? To reconnect Jews of all shapes, sizes and affiliations to the Jewish community; to provide a warm and caring Jewish home to any and all who come; and to teach Jewish lessons that can be applied to every person's everyday life.

I had the pleasure of sitting down with Ari on February 12, 2019 for an interview.

Q: How long have you been back in Chicago?

A: My wife, Mindy, and I moved to Chicago's West Loop a year and a half ago.

Q: Why are you here?

A: We are here as Chabad Shluchim.<sup>1</sup> We are here in the city to spread Torah and Judaism to the beautiful Jews in this awesome city. There is just so much potential and so much opportunity here. There is a huge demand for more Jewish life, activity and community.

Q: That is a lofty goal. Where have you started?

A: We have started with people like you.<sup>2</sup> There is a National Conference of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists<sup>3</sup> that Rabbi Meir Hecht<sup>4</sup> started about six years ago. I joined him and used that as the first platform to connect with Jewish law students. It was before the conference two years ago that I first reached out to you. After we met, you and others introduced me to your friends who have introduced me to their friends and that is how we have started to build our community of Jewish graduate students and professionals. We have just been out meeting professionals in the city. We meet for one-on-one coffee; they come to us for Friday night meals; we throw parties for Jewish events, etc. People seem to really love what we have going on, so they bring their friends who bring their friends. Our community, I really prefer the term family because that's how I feel about all these people, has grown exponentially in the last year. We have been able to curate a real Jewish environment.

Q: What have been your major successes since starting?

A: First, I would say that being able to work with law students, young lawyers and professionals from around Chicago—allowing them to help create, shape and expand our family—has been an amazing success. Just two months into our endeavor we decided to throw a Purim soiree. Rabbi Hecht is close with partners at Dentons and he was able to arrange for us to use their space. I worked with the few people I had met, yourself included, to plan and promote the party. We (Mindy and I) had really low expectations. We thought it would be a smaller, more intimate group; anywhere from seven to forty people. After a meeting I had with you at the Starbucks near Kent, you told me that with the right marketing plan, the party could be huge. We worked together to create a plan to get the word out and get people in the door. At the end of it all, over 150 people attended our soiree! It was just really special and definitely a huge success.

At the beginning of December, we threw another party at Dentons, this time for Chanukah. Mindy and I used the same basic model to let the people we have met plan and promote the party. Because we have met so many people we had to put together a committee of just a handful to make the party happen. This time we had 280 people! It was amazing! Jews from all backgrounds and all different professions; there were law students, medical students, lawyers, doctors, people in finance, business, marketing, etc. It was really special for me to be able to work with the people on the committee to make this happen.

The other major success we have had is our Friday night meal. For me personally, it is a treat and a highlight. I love being with everyone there in our home. My wife, Mindy, is not just our chef (I get to play sous-chef), but she truly makes any and all feel so welcome and at home. Every time we host, there are more and more people who want to come. We have to cap it because our current home can only seat 50. There are new people every time, and so far, it seems everyone has wanted to come back.

We have had some really special meals. One in particular, we had the pleasure of having Justice Richard Bernstein from the Michigan Supreme Court.<sup>5</sup> Justice Bernstein is blind from birth but has not let that stop him in any way. In addition to his impressive legal career he is also an avid marathon runner and triathlete. We made sure to invite mostly law students and lawyers and Justice Bernstein shared with us stories and lessons from his life.

Q: So what is next for you? What will be your next measures of success?

A: To be honest, being involved in this type of activity and connecting with so many people, while the demand for Jewish experiences and Jewish knowledge is at an all-time high, and people need inspiration and meaning in their lives—providing all of that is our goal. Unfortunately, sometimes you can lose the individual, one-on-one relationship with the people you are connecting with. For me, the goal is to keep growing, but at the same time strengthen the close relationships we have already built.

It's a step by step process, but it has to be done as a whole. It's not just my wife and I. We want to be doing this together with the community we are building. If someone is inviting a friend to an event, we don't want them to say, "there is a rabbi and rebbetzin and they're doing this and you should come." Our hope is that they might say, "I'm a part of this and we are hosting this event and you should join me." That is how we have been successful so far and how we will continue to be successful. That is, in my mind, what not just a true Jewish organization is, but what a true Jewish community and family is.

I know it sounds like an attempt to be humble but it is just the truth. We would be nothing without the people we have met and connected with. They are the driving force behind everything. My wife and I are really just here to help the process along.

Q: Do you have any event coming up?

A: We will be throwing another huge Purim soiree. The details have not been announced yet but as soon as everything is finalized we will be getting the word out. In the meantime, we are hosting Friday night meals and will continue to invite new people as we meet them.

Q: How can people meet you?

A: I invite people to call me or email me. My number is 773-633-5560 and my email is [rabbiarigoodman@gmail.com](mailto:rabbiarigoodman@gmail.com). I am always happy to sit down for coffee or meet people at their office. Around Chicago, I host periodic Lunch 'n Learns.<sup>6</sup> Mindy and I also host a Torah class and social on Wednesday nights

at 7:30 p.m. in our home. Finally, I hold Rabbi hours at the Standard Club where people can always come to meet me and schmooze.

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I cannot thank Rabbi Ari enough for sitting down with me for this interview. I have to say, working with Ari for the past year has been an absolute pleasure. In my opinion, Rabbi Ari is doing something very special that currently the Jewish people desperately need. Ari possesses the passion, drive and ingenuity to continue to be a great success. The Chicago Jewish community is very lucky to have him and I am excited to see what the future holds for him and the community he is building.

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<sup>1</sup> Schluchim are a team. Husband and wife. Shliach and shlucha. They bring with them by the truckload: friendliness, affection for all Jews, compassion, tolerance, self-sacrifice, utter devotion and selfless dedication.

<sup>2</sup> I am a 25-year old, third year law student at Chicago-Kent College of Law.

<sup>3</sup> <http://jewishlawconference.com>

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Hecht is the Director of the Jewish Learning Institute (JLI) Chicago.

<sup>5</sup> <https://courts.michigan.gov/courts/michigansupremecourt/justices/pages/justice-richard-bernstein.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Currently Ari holds Lunch 'n Learns at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago-Kent College of Law, and at offices within the Loop. Reach out to Rabbi Ari for more information or to set up a lunch of your own. Rabbi Ari can also host courses for CLE credits.