

JEWISH LATIN PRINCESS
CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV, CEO OF LEVIEV USA &
PHILANTHROPIST
EPISODE 88

You're listening to Jewish Latin Princess Podcast by Yael. Every week get your dose of inspiration from the world's most uniquely talented Jewish women and from Yael herself. Seeking profound and practical ways to live a joyful, richer Jewish life? Welcome to Jewish Latin Princess Podcast.

And now, Jewish lifestyle expert and bilingual blogger at www.jewishlatinprincess.com, your host, Yael.

[Theme Music]

Yael Trusch: Do you like to talk about money? I do. If you've been listening to this show for a while, you already know that about me. I love money I love what it can do for us and for our communities. I love making it, investing it, or using it to help others. And, I am obsessed with helping women gain a better understanding of what money and wealth is really all about. Because, no, according to Judaism, money is not the source of all evil, even if we've been conditioned to have those beliefs, that is not a Jewish belief by any extent of the imagination.

Today's guest will share with us the Jewish view on wealth, from first-hand experience. You're listening to Jewish Latin Princess, I'm Yael Trusch, your host. I have Chagit Sofiev Leviev on the show.

Chagit, is the CEO of Leviev USA, a Group of Companies founded by her father, renowned businessman and philanthropist, Mr. Lev Leviev, with investments in a wide range of dynamic industries including real estate, mining, energy, diamonds and jewelry. Chagit is a graduate of Bar-Ilan University, with a B.A. in Economics and Business Administration. In her role as CEO, she has led many high stakes transactions such as the sale of the former New York Times Building in Times Square, you know that building? – for nearly \$300M in 2015, I think it was actually a part of the building.

She is also a dedicated wife and a mother to four children and she follows on the footsteps of her parents' philanthropic spirit. She dedicates much of her time and resources to help organizations that focus on the community, on Jewish education, and on women empowerment.

Was working for her father something that she always expected to do? Chagit takes us behind the scenes and gets real with us about the juggling act. She also tells us that for her, as challenging as it may be, it is well worth it, not just because it fulfills her personally, which it does, but as soon you'll hear, it's also part of a bigger view on life – contributing to a broader mission and continuing the legacy that her parents built.

What were the financial lessons that she learned from her parents? What could men and women do better when it comes to women empowerment and women in the seats, suites and the boardroom? And what does Judaism mean to Chagit? This is not a reality show, or an episode of Crazy Rich Asians, this is so much better! This is an episode of true Jewish wealth – one which is dictated first and foremost, by God's Torah. And you'll hear that from the lovely, Chagit Sofiev Leviev.

[Theme Music]

Yael Trusch: Chagit Sofiev Leviev, welcome to Jewish Latin Princess. It's such a pleasure to have you on the show.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Thank you! It's such a pleasure to be here.

Yael Trusch: It is really an honor just to brag a little bit about you, you are the President of Leviev USA, the US Branch of your father's conglomerate of companies and in that role, you've had to manage multimillion dollar businesses in many different industries, but you arrived at this role after having a career in your own right, having had extensive corporate finance experience and really, one could say that this career move of working on what your father's so aptly built is one of the most important career steps in your life.

You had to relocate your family from Israel to New York which is not an easy choice to make for anyone. You had your own thriving career, but you decided to take this ambitious move to preside over this huge portfolio of your father's business. I would love for us to get started by you walking us through the process of making that decision. Was this something that you and your father always saw in your future? Was there a concrete plan? How did that come about, Chagit?

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: It wasn't and concrete plan at all. It was actually very spontaneous decision surprisingly. I mean, when I just graduated from Bar-Ilan University, I was really debating what I should do. I said, should I start working for my father? Everyone's going to look at me and like, this little girl who wants to come to work to her father's business or should I just go work in a different firm to get experience, to be just like anyone else, just try to work my way up and I've decided that this would probably be the better way for me, the latter, and I was working for a company named Deloitte in Israel.

I was working there for two years as a financial adviser and later I joined a company of my father's in Israel. My father said, "Chagit, I think this role is going to be good for you," and I was like, are you sure? I don't think I can do this. I was really hesitant but I wasn't afraid, I said, you know what? Let me just try, what can happen? I will learn and I will observe and it's going to be okay.

Baruch Hashem, I guess I didn't do such a bad job and you learn a lot and you gain experience and it's a very slow process. It's not like you come and you know everything and you're the boss and you make the decisions, it doesn't work like that. It takes many years until you understand. You give respect to people who have been in the industry or in the company many years before you came and have much more experience than you do. I'm always willing to learn and to listen to other people.

Even today, my employees, I'd always take their opinion and consider it. It's not like my way or the high way. Sometime in 2011, my father

reached out to me and he told me, “Chagit, I’m expanding my business in the US and I really need there an extra pair of eyes, of someone I trust. I want someone that I trust to be there to look over the business.” That’s all he said. I was like, Dad, are you suggesting I should move to New York? He said, well, your husband is American. My husband, he was born and raised in New York and when we got married he moved to Israel. We lived there for about four and a half years.

I was talking about it with my husband and we had to young girls and we said, Greg or we take this opportunity right now when the kids are still small and we consider it; if anything we can always be back to Israel, what do you think first? First, I said, I can’t do it. I just had a baby, it’s too hard. I’m so busy with the business in Israel and then when my father reached to me again and he just said another word, I was like, I guess he really wants me to do it. He just didn’t want to pressure me, he wanted –

Yael Trusch: Right.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: It’s a big decision and it’s so different from everything that I was used to and everything I knew because America, I mean it’s on the other side of the world, it’s a different time zone, it’s different measurements, different temperature – everything different from what I know. It’s really... starting in a new country without my family there and we’re a very warm family. We’re nine brothers and sisters, always Shabbat with parents, flying together, vacations together... we’re very, very close and for me to leave my entire family, it was, “Should I do it? Should I not do it?” but, you know what? We really didn’t think about it too much, I was like, “You know what? Let me just go check it out, let me look at a few properties for a house.” Next thing I know, I’m on a plane going to check New York City and literally three weeks later, we packed out stuff and we moved to New York just like that.

So it really wasn’t something that I always knew that I was going to do. It wasn’t on my plan, in the radar at all. New York was never on my radar

but working for my father definitely was on my radar because I think the biggest proud feeling of a parent is when you know that your child is coming into your business and he's taking control and he's doing a great job at it, I think that's a really big nachat for a parent.

Yael Trusch: Yes, absolutely.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: And I see so many friends of ours that have really successful businesses and their kids, just one of them, they want to pursue to completely different careers and I see that the parents are really frustrated because they want their kids to be happy but on the other hand, they feel like I built this beautiful business and I have no one to leave it to. I hope that I made my parents nachat of trying to help in the business a little bit.

Yael Trusch: I'm pretty sure you've given them a lot of nachat. Really, it's such a beautiful story. Although nine children... are any of your other siblings involved in the family business?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Yes, almost all of us are involved in the business. Over the years, when the family was growing, I had a sister that lived in London, she ran some assets. I have a sister in Russia, she runs one of the largest malls in Russia that we owned there. I have a brother in Moscow that lives and runs a big operation of retail jewelry stores, about four hundred stores – so we're like all worldwide right now.

Yael Trusch: Beautiful.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: And everyone is his own industry and in his own business, like ones responsible and independent in the business that they're controlling.

Yael Trusch: That is so beautiful because it's really like all of you are taking concrete steps to just continuing the legacy of what your parents built, so it's really amazing.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Yeah, it's a very slow process. None of us just became a big manager just one day. We start as coming to work

with dad and helping picking up the phone calls, I mean that's how we literally start and you just join some meetings here and there, it's a very slow process until you're entitled because it's not something that you just... is just given to you. You have to be trusted and you have to be capable of handling all these responsibilities.

Yael Trusch: This is such an amazing lesson and to continue with the theme of your father as a mentor and as a role model, he is to many, I heard a beautiful thing that you said that you learned from your father the following, and I'm quoting you, "While we make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give." This struck me as such an important and meaningful, powerful lesson that one would wish would be imparted in every Jewish child from early on, so I would love for you to... though you already gave us a little bit of a glimpse of how you get to be taken under your father's wing, but take us back a little bit to your childhood and your young adult years and aside from just having I'm sure an awareness of your father's generosity, where there any moments that stand out for you, Chagit, as poignant financial lessons from your father whether it be about charity or just money management perspective that you feel were instrumental and tangible for you at an early age?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: There are so many lessons that I learned not just from my father also from my mother, everything as a family. I think my parents designed our character and designed us to become who we are so everything from my father is not the type of person who talks a lot about the things he does. He keeps everything he does very quiet so a lot of that's the quote that he did. I still see people sometimes and they tell me, you know how your father saved me? He did this and this. You know how your mother saved my daughter when she was in the hospital? She came, she read Tehillim with me. You know, he did this – I hear stuff that my parents are doing and I'm like, oh, my god! Wow, wow! I'm so proud of them. I think also as a child, obviously, we grew in a very business oriented family and business is in our blood –

Yael Trusch: Right.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: But the charity was so... it's something that I don't even know how to explain it but it was... it's not something that I can ever take for granted because I think my father was, in his entire life, he was on a mission to teach other people the power of giving because he didn't just want to give by himself, he went and he made sure that everyone in our community would help build this. He's like, I'm putting the first million down who is joining me? Let's do this together.

It's very important for everyone to give to teka, the money is not yours. Ten percent is not yours, where it's just the pipeline to transfer the money. You give money in order to become more rich, Aser Taaser bishbil she titaasher. So many life lessons and values that we as little kids, we went to all these events where he is publically speaking and we're like, this is what we grew on. This is what we know. We've met throughout our life, we met so many obviously successful rich people, but I never appreciated someone for his wealth. It's not something I appreciate. I appreciated person for the person he is and what are people doing with their wealth.

Yael Trusch: Right.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: What do they give to other people? How do they help other people? It's amazing and inspiring to see how people who actually have want to give to others because there's so many people today that are still not aware of the importance of giving and helping others.

I think one of the strongest memory that I remember as a child was that sometimes my parents would treat one of the kids and take them with them to a tour that they used to go worldwide, so one time they took me with them to some Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. I remember going to this place and walking into a school and there were like 500 children dressed up with their most beautiful clothes singing beautiful welcome song to my family and kids go on the stage and say thank you Mr. Leviev and Mrs. Leviev; because of you, I am Jewish and because

of you this had happened and because of you, I made brit milah, and because of you –

Yael Trusch: Oh, I got chills!

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: I was like, oh, my, god, I can't believe that all these schools and all these community and all these things and all this Lechud and all these amazing things happened because someone did something to help the Jewish community somewhere else. I mean, it's not the country that I live, it's not the community that we live – it's like such a far country that my father had to go and make time to go see what he actually built, that was for me as a child to come along those trips was the most inspiring and amazing experience I experienced as a child.

Yael Trusch: I just got chills listening to this story and I just want to recap for listeners because what you've said is so powerful. It's about living what you're teaching to your children about the powerful of charitable giving and the importance is something that we need to take extremely seriously; this is what we need to be doing with our money, period. And the Tzenua way, of your parents, it's also such a beautiful lesson for us to really take home with us and also the leadership point, as you said, his ability to inspire and try to empower others to really take this on as well and that's what makes a leader – somebody who can make other people also be leaders in their own right, right?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Yes, people reach out outwards the cold all the time it's not just about like take this check and leave me alone. It's about a bigger plan and a bigger involvement and how we can all do something together.

Yael Trusch: Together.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: How we can get the whole community involved?

Yael Trusch: Right.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: If it's like building a school... people feel more involved even if they give a small check or – they feel like they're a part of something.

Yael Trusch: A hundred percent.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: And they feel like they did something – they feel like they did something right. It's very important to get people involve with the mitzvah of giving and that's how it is.

Yael Trusch: Yeah, you know what? You'll appreciate something very beautiful that I heard Mr. George Roar say in the name of the late Rabbi Gordon. He said, one time also, he was being honored for, again, his charitable giving and he said a lesson he learned from Rabbi Gordon was that you give 10% and Hashem guarantees the 90%; that Tzedakah is the guarantee of your 90% and that is such an incredibly powerful which is exactly what you were saying before, that we use... you used the word pipeline.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Yes, amazing!

Yael Trusch: Amazing, so beautiful. Let's shift a little bit to your role as a mother because you're a mother of four children which is in and of itself a fulltime job and you're also a committed Jewish woman. As you and I know, that it has its own demands on time, so, let's talk about that juggling act: parenting, CEO, wife – can you share with us some lessons you've learned from the trenches?

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Yes! You know the older the kids are getting, I see how it's much more difficult for me. They really like they call me every day at exactly 4:32, the second they walked in the house, says, "Mommy, when are you coming home today? Are you coming home early?" And it's like a daily struggle of trying to find the balance. There's really no perfect formula or a recipe to balance everything every day, but I try to make it work for me and my family as much as I can and I believe that every women needs to find her own way to make it work with whatever let's say with whatever ingredients you have because I mean I

think that for being a working mom, you most definitely need to have help because you know the kids are at home and Baruch Hashem I'm blessed to have help and family help and my husband's family which is amazing and supportive.

I mean, I do also sacrifice. I do sacrifice Fridays for example, I don't go to work. I just cannot. I have to be... I'm still a wife, I'm still a mother, I'm still committed to my family and to being a Jewish mother and I want to give my family this amazing Shabbat feeling that used to experience Shabbat at home and I want them to have an amazing meal that I'm cooking myself and I'm home with them so I'm sitting with 20 pots on the stove and making conference calls and the babies screaming in the background – it's a whole nightmare but it's a very... it's a moving feeling because I'm excited to give that feeling to my children and they're the most happy kids when they come home Fridays like, "Mommy's home!" And they get to try my cooking, and this is a really fun feeling. So Friday I'm home, Saturday I'm home, Sunday of course I'm home with the kids... so this is my time to make up for the very busy week that I'm going through at work –

Yael Trusch: Right.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: And am less available to the children. So, I'm not saying this is a balance that would work for any mother but this is the balance that I found to be working for me. By the way, the question that most women ask me is, how do you do it... how do you do it... and I really don't have a concrete answer –

Yael Trusch: Right.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: But I believe that bottom line, whatever you're doing at the moment you're doing it just focus and give your hundred percent of yourself to whatever you're doing. So if I'm at work, I'm trying to focus hundred percent on work and what's going on. I know that my kids are at school or at home with someone that is taking good care of them. I don't want to think about it too much, I'm giving a hundred percent of myself in the office and when I'm home, I give

hundred of myself to the kids. I try to focus at the time of where I am a hundred percent to my mission.

Yael Trusch: Wow, thank you for taking us behind the scenes. Yeah, it's like you said, it's for all of us. It's a real balancing act and there is no right answer like you said. We have to, each one kind of make it work for ourselves. But it can work and I'm sure there have been many gratifying times. There's a lot of challenges, it's not easy. You have to figure things out but I'm sure there's a lot of gratifying times.

What's been the most gratifying? If you had to pinpoint something that you like, you know what? This has been worth it, like all the juggling has been worth it. What would you say that would be?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Listen, I am definitely thinking that juggling is worth it. I would – if it wasn't worth it I wouldn't be doing it. I love to work and I love being a mother and I don't think I would be able personally to be home the whole day. This is just not who I am and but I feel like... I feel privileged that I could actually go and achieve stuff and do stuff. I mean that's an amazing self-development for myself and I'm grateful for the opportunity because it is an opportunity and not everyone gets that.

I love doing it! This is why I don't feel too much – Oh, I am sorry. I should have done that... I should have been there...

Yael Trusch: Right.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: I don't let that guilt guide me or I don't let that even bother me.

Yael Trusch: Good for you.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: I'm focusing on whatever I'm doing.

Yael Trusch: Good for you!

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Trying, you know! We're all trying.

Yael Trusch: We're all trying our best. I had a wonderful guest earlier, Chana Weisberg, she's the editor of Chabad.org and I asked her

about this whole question of having it all and she said to me something so beautiful, she said, “You know what, Yael? I don’t know if we can actually have it all, but we can give it our all.” And I thought that was spot on.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: This is really true and this is amazing. It’s a good point.

Yael TRUSCH: Yeah.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: But I think that because we have so much on our plates and so much to handle the time that we devote to whatever we are doing is so much more focused and devoted rather than if you’re not busy and you have the whole day to do this and this, so you were like taking your time, whatever. If I know I have one hour in the office right now before I run home to finish one, two, three, four, five... I give it my all.

Yael TRUSCH: I agree with you.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: And if I’m home in the evening, right before my kids go to bed after I haven’t seen them the whole day, I give them my all and I’m like, “Okay, kids, who wants to hear a story? Who wants to do this? Who wants to do this?” You’re more with them rather than I’m home the whole day. Guys, go to bed. Shower and you know you’re just less available to them.

Yael TRUSCH: Yes.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: So I guess because I’m so limited with the time every minute that I have is fully dedicated and fully used.

Yael TRUSCH: Amazing, amazing. Aside from time off on Shabbat like you mentioned and obviously you have Sundays and Jewish holidays, are you able to carve out any time for your own spiritual nourishment like is there something that you do personally that to recharge spiritually aside from Shabbos, obviously?

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Recharge spiritually – it’s a good question. I mean, I don’t necessarily do anything to take off other than Shabbat, I think Shabbat is enough to charge me for the whole week, but –

Yael Trusch: Thank God for Shabbat, I’m telling you.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Yes, yes! But one day is totally enough for me. I think what charges me spiritually is I keep praying all day for everything so I don’t take anything for granted. Prayer is a part of my life every single day so even like, Hashem, please help me today do this and this. Hashem thank you so much for everything that I have in my life right now. I mean I don’t want to be tested and I don’t want to be asked only when it’s bad. I’m honestly grateful all the time.

Prayer is something that also is very strong for me in my business. I pray all the time. Hashem, please help me achieve this and this goal. Hashem, please help me that this challenge is going to turn out to be an amazing miracle. Prayer is something that takes me... something that really I take with me to achieve all my goals also in business, also in personal life.

Yael Trusch: It’s so beautiful because what I hear from you is this ongoing conversation that I think it’s so important to stress because people often think that prayer is just to open the seder and you say a few words but really like I always tell people, really? The real prayer, the real service of the heart is having that presence of Hashem constantly throughout your day and having that ongoing conversation, which is what I’m hearing from you.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: It is, it has to be. I’ve been through so much things here in business and I’ve got to see so many characters and people who have done so many things good and bad; and the only thing that can basically keep me going and believing that things that are happening is for the best is only the faith that I have in Hashem that everything is going to happen for the good and Baruch Hashem, I was lucky enough to witness so many miracles that I felt like Hashem

listened to my prayers all these years like this was correct, this was – Hashem, thank you for this. Thank you for helping me this.

It's just a way of how I do business, I guess. I'm really a believer that even if we go through really hard times sometimes and be like, why did this happen to us? Why did this challenge come? I believe that eventually it's just Hashem has given us a challenge in order to give me a solution for something else in the future and it's just something that it's an obstacle. Eventually, it's... everything is from Shamayim, everything is for the good and all I can do is just trust Hashem that he'll lead us in the right way. I mean, what are we in this world? We're powerless.

Yael Trusch: Yeah.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: So we just have to pray, I guess, that's it.

Yael Trusch: Yeah, we need to trust the one above like I always say, he has very, very, broad shoulders; he can handle a lot. We just have to rely on him.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Yes.

Yael Trusch: Chagit, if you had to describe Judaism in one word, what would you say?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: It's going to be three words but it's a way of life for me. Judaism is – when I used to be young I used to think that Judaism is like it's such a burden like I can't eat this non-kosher ice cream. I mean, we lived in Belgium for a few years and as a child I was always like a was looking at all these non-kosher deserts that people were eating and my eyes were like, how can they eat it and I can't? What's the point of being Jewish? What's wrong with this ice cream?

Being more serious when I grew up and I got to see what Judaism does to my marriage for example, what a power it has of telling me how to be with my husband, what type of a wife I should be, how I should be... it's giving me a guidelines for life. What type of a person to be, you know all the things you're not allowed to do and it's – I'm in the business

world, believe me I, unfortunately I'm exposed to people's misbehavior all the time and you know when the Torah's guiding you how to behave in... I mean it's just the way of life. If it's telling you –

Yael Trusch: A hundred percent!

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: What a wife to be? What a mother to be? What a person to be with other people? You know it's telling you to rest at Shabbat because your body needs it more than your minds knows it. I guess when only when I grew up and as I became a mom I saw the importance of how amazing it is to become a Jew; to be a Jew and to raise your family on the Jewish values.

Yael Trusch: A hundred percent. It's a full on way of life and on that note, you reminded me that last night I was studying with my son, he's taking the big exams for Chidon 613 in New York, there's a big competition where they learn the 613 mitzvahs of the Rambam, and we were learning for the test and he was on the Mitzvah of not –altering your measurements, your scales, and I said to my son, you realized how Torah's involved in every single detail that if you're a businessman, in your shop, you are not allowed to have a scale that is on even that Minutia of how Hashem helps us be straight human beings.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Amazing, it's true! It's really, really true.

Yael Trusch: It's really, really amazing. I want to shift a little bit to women empowerment because I know this is a cause that is very near and dear to you. You are advocate for women in the corporate world. By the way, the fact that you are the daughter of one of the most influential and powerful businessman in the world speaks volumes incredibly high of your father and let's be honest of your husband as well, an amazingly supportive husband; because you've worked for so many years in a male dominated environment, I'd love to hear from you what do you think we could be doing better, both men and women with regards to female empowerment, with closing the pay gap, female representation at the sea level in the board room; I mean and the overall recognition of

those different valuable attributes that both men and women frankly bring to the table when it comes to business.

I'd love to start with the women because I think the men get a lot of heat when it comes to this topic, but I'm sure, we, as women, can also do better in terms advocating for ourselves and for each other. So what do you think we could be doing better?

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Listen, it's very tough because women they have so much going on and for them to be fully available to a business it has a price so a lot of my friends that are very successful business women for example don't have children or they're not married. It's very difficult to have it all together. It is, for me, it was very hard to see that they were very little presence of females in the business world. It's something that is rare for me to see and I would get really excited like if I would go to a lawyers meeting and I would see a female in the room –

Yael Trusch: Yes.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: And I actually, through my business deals, I actually have got to know amazing women – they're amazing! They are out there, but there's not enough of them. There should definitely be more women presence in many industries it's just really hard for the women and unfortunately the men that are in charge of the company's who are in hiring, they're just afraid to give the women these opportunities, but today, I have come to see so many amazing companies that give so many opportunities to women and women environment and I hope this is going to keep growing. And –

Yael Trusch: Yeah, I hope the trend... I think the trend is here to stay and I think we're going to see a lot of positive results from the more equal representation because the truth is the world needs both our insights.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: They definitely need a lot of our effort and insight. As I told you, the women are so focused at what they do and they have less time but so much more to give. No discrimination, I think

men are excellent in what they do but women are not less excellent at what they do, they just need to be giving the platform to show that.

I definitely feel that I was mostly empowered by my father and by my husband, you know? My father, to trust a girl -- I was 25 years old...

Yael Trusch: Yes!

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: When I came here to New York, I was very young. I was a very young mother, obviously, I think my father was the biggest feminist and empower to giving me this opportunity and this job and to trust me so much until today. And same for my husband, I'm so grateful for my husband because I think that it takes a very confident, self-aware man in order to support your woman, your wife and to let her be whatever she wants to be and to let her be successful and let her rise and shine; only confident men would let his wife be that.

This trend is what we women and men need to be working on empowering other women that are struggling between they want to fulfill themselves, they want to do something with their life. They don't just want to be home all day long. It's very, very tiring and challenging to be a fulltime mother and I think for the time at least when the kids are in school, women, they want to do something with their time, they have so much to give, it's a very big challenge because, you know, her husband does not want that, she wants that. It's a really tough topic like what do you do in situations like this?

Yael Trusch: Right, right... yes!

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: So I think this is definitely a phenomenon that needs to be taken care of.

Yael Trusch: Yeah.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: I'm not sure how exactly but it's a problem.

Yael Trusch: Well, you know what? Just even having these conversations I think it's one of the most important steps and we need to recognize and we need to recognize like you said that there is

tremendous value in women trying to fulfill their aspirations and living that part of their creative... being a creative force and for husbands to have the self-confidence to allow for that because ultimately, a happy wife, happy life! You have a very... it just... it all fits into each other.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: I'm the living truth to that. I'm the living proof. No, no! Two hundred percent true, I told you.

Yael Trusch: You mentioned your father as a feminist and on that note, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, whom your father has obviously has a strong connection to and yourself was also a huge feminist, a huge proponent of women really transforming the world and being out there doing their part, right? So I'd love for you to take us to the connection and how this beautiful relationship between your family and Chabad and the Rebbe – how did these all originate?

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: So all the way back in Russian when my father was born there was a Chabad presence at that time and the Rabbis were belonging to the Chabad Movement. I think that in the 80s when my father met the Rebbe, my father was asking him a question about some type of a business, if he should invest in this business or shouldn't invest in this business and the Rebbe looked at him and he said, you're going to be very successful but you have to promise me that you're going to take care of the Jewish people in Russia.

Yael Trusch: Wow!

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: You're going to succeed in all your business but your shlichut in this world is to make sure that the Jewish... that the Jews in Russia are going to be taken care of.

Yael Trusch: Wow.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Yeah, that was my father's life's mission. I mean hundreds of schools and mikvahs and shuls and –

Yael Trusch: Right!

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Children, it was all the Rabbi's blessing and the Rabbi's mission.

Yael Trusch: Wow, what tremendous nachas to the Rebbe to see all that came because a lot of people go and they don't necessarily listen to the call of action but –

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Oh, no!

Yael Trusch: But the Rebbe gave your father a call up to action and he definitely has fulfilled it, Baruch Hashem.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Yes, I was never lucky to meet the Rebbe, but I go to the ohel very often to pray. It's a very, very special spiritual place.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: I go there and I get so fulfilled and empowered and strong and confident and hopeful.

Yael Trusch: Yeah.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: I really feel like this place is such a special place and I encourage all the women that are listening, whatever struggles you're going in your life, really, if you need anyone to talk to just go and be there and write a letter and read some Tehillim and talk to Hashem – this is such an amazing place.

Yael Trusch: I definitely couldn't agree with you more. Every time I go to the ohel I feel like when I'm finished and I walk out like a heavy weight has been lifted off my shoulders it's like I'm an entirely new person. It's a –

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Yeah, I feel like the Rebbe personally taking care of me.

Yael Trusch: Yeah!

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: I really feel that.

Yael Trusch: Yeah, yeah, beautiful. Chagit, let's wrap it up with a game that I do with all my guests where I'm going to give you an open-ended sentence and you're going to answer with the first thing that comes to mind, okay?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Of course, yes!

Yael Trusch: I'm Chagit Sofieve Leviev and I feel most spiritual when?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: When I light Shabbat candles it's definitely the most spiritual like Friday is such a crazy day as I told you; and the second I light the Shabbat candles and I just take a minute with my girls around the candles to just pray and think of the week I had and just pray for the next week. It's such a shift all the son in the house is quite and that's it everything is ready and I could go from craziness to slink down on the coach.

Yael Trusch: Yes!

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: So I think this is the most special feeling for me.

Yael Trusch: Yes, my favorite mitzvah or one that I connect with the most is?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Definitely Shabbat. Shabbat for – it's the most amazing Mitzvah; maybe people might not understand it but it's making you connect with your family, disconnect from the entire world and just focus on sitting with your husband and children and family and host and have fun and spent time and play games and talk about your paschanua notebook and it's a really unifying feeling that we're blessed to have every single week.

Yael Trusch: Yeah and in this day and age, I think it's become all the more, not that it would ever be relevant but I think it's all the more important that we appreciate what it's giving us. We lived such a plugged lives with technology and with just being constantly on the

adrenaline rush, that what Shabbat is doing for our relationships, the deepening our relationship is just really priceless.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: A hundred percent.

Yael Trusch: My fondest sweetest Jewish memory is?

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: So, I think it was many years ago. I was a young child and my father took us for Chanukah to Russia to Moscow. It was in the red square in the center of Moscow, the Rabbi, a Chabad Rabbi was standing on a huge menorah in the center of the city and lighting the menorah and saying the Brachot and my father said a speech and he said, I feel like this is the best we've ever done in our life, to be able to stand here and dance in the center of Russia in the Red Square –

Yael Trusch: Wow!

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: And light the menorah in the same place that 60 years ago, they would execute Jews for being Jewish people. So I felt it was the most strong memory of being a Jew and to try to relate to what my father went through in Russia at the days they were growing up to try to be... they were hiding the fact that they were Jews because they were growing in a communist country.

Yael Trusch: Right.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: And just to hear those stories all the time and he felt so accomplished for being able to achieve that and I just felt like I got chills when I was witnessing it as a child, I was really a young girl and I still remember it.

Yael Trusch: Wow, incredible. Her memory of Jewish pride, it's something so beautiful. I'm going to ask you this, even though you alluded to it a little bit before when you were talking about your time in Belgium as a child, but I'm still going to ask you just in case you have something different also is, something I wish I had learned about Judaism growing up is?

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: Yes, definitely that it's a way of life and it's not coming here to challenge me or make my life more complicated, just the opposite. It's... the Judaism is here to make your life better.

Yael Trusch: Beautiful.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: That's how I feel it.

Yael Trusch: When I give Tzedakah, I like to give to?

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: We give to various causes and charities and families; but I think that most of our Tzedakah goes to our community in Queens and the school that I'm involved with – I'm the President of the Jewish Institute of Queens Organization. It's basically a school that my father started here in Queens about 16 or 17 years ago, yes, so at that time there were many families that couldn't afford the Jewish education. Obviously, it's very costly.

Yael Trusch: It is.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: And they would just send their kids to public schools they're like, we're Shabbat at home. They're going to get it when they grew up, don't worry. And my father was a believer that for in order to keep someone Jewish and instill the Jewish values, it's something that needs to be done from a young age and in school.

Yael Trusch: A hundred percent.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: They have to not to intermarriage and you don't want to lose the child you have to make sure they have Jewish education and it is what can you tell a family that says, well, I don't have so much money to pay for Jewish education.

Yael Trusch: Right.

CHAGIT SOFIEV LEVIEV: So we bought a building and we decided to open the free Jewish public school back at that time. It was hard to get the students because people thought well, here and there but today we're lucky we have 600 students, we had thousands of graduates

already since then, yes, and it's amazing to see so many kids that are... they are all very religious girls and marrying Yeshiva guys and it's amazing! It's just amazing to see the work that one person with a vision and initiative can change an entire community. So today I'm still very involved with the school and that's why I like donating there because I know exactly where the money is going. I know it's going to the causes, to the right places – it's just a great cause for me.

Yael Trusch: What a beautiful project. Finally, I'm Chagit Sofieve Leviev and today I'm most grateful for?

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: I'm grateful for everything that I have mostly for my husband and children and our health and I'm also grateful for the challenges because I know that Hashem is trying to teach us a lesson, trying to learn from them and become better people.

Yael Trusch: Chagit, thank you so much. You are such an inspiration. My Bracha to you right now, I'm so inspired by this interview. You should grow me hile au hile from strength to strength. Hashem should give you all the blessings and all success, and really, kol ha kavod. I can't tell you how much I appreciate that you've been so candid and open and genuine with me and with the audience. Everybody if you want to learn more about Chagit and hear more of her beautiful messages, she is on Instagram @chagit_leviev. Chagit, thank you.

Chagit Sofiev Leviev: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure, thank you!

[Theme Music]

Yael Trusch: Thanks Chagit for stopping by. You can follow Chagit at @chagit_leviev. Chagit is C-H-A-G-I-T and Leviev is L-E-V-I-E-V.

All of this and more back at www.jewishlatinprincess.com.

I actually want to take this opportunity to give a shout out to a listener who wrote to me on Instagram. Her name, her Instagram handle is Yehudit's Call and she said, "Hey, from London! Just stumbled across

your podcast and boy, am I grateful. I love that all of your interviews are light and interesting and nothing news related and about these hard times blah, blah, blah,” – that’s what she said! “That lots of people always like to talk about.” Bad enough that stuff happens, it doesn’t also have to be all over wherever you look and listen, so I love that you just focused on inspirational women for us to enjoy and learn from in a positive way. Thank you so much.”

Well, thank you Yehudit’s Call I am glad you’re enjoying the interviews and yes, we’re definitely not focusing on the negative here, but trying to highlight all the unique and different ways that we Jewish women are bringing light into this world. Great to know you’re listening all the way in London. I wonder where the rest of you are listening from? Drop me a message, let me know; and hey, if you’re enjoying the show why not drop a review on iTunes or share it with the other Jewish woman in your life; chance are they will enjoy it and benefit from it as well.

I hope you’re having a great week, everyone. I’ll see you here next time.

[Theme Music]

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