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Dedicated in Memory of Harav Moshe Kotlarsky - Pioneering A Generation of The Rebbe's Shluchim

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The Dollar Bill That Kept on Giving

By Chaya Chazan

**"As soon as I saw the Rebbe with my own eyes, I became a chassid."
I can still hear my father repeating the story that convinced him to
change his way of life.**

My parents learned about Yiddishkeit through a shliach, and very shortly after, decided to become Chabad chassidim as well. By the time I was born, their transformation was complete, and I grew up with a typical Chabad upbringing.

Since both my wife and I grew up with role models that were committed to the Rebbe and Chassidus, it was only natural for us to find ourselves following these same paths. After our marriage, we moved to a few places before settling in France, close to our families. I couldn't see myself running a Chabad house, so I figured shlichus wasn't for me. We joined the Chabad kehilla and were perfectly content.

My mashpia wasn't so satisfied. He insisted that I push myself to do shlichus - Chabad house notwithstanding. "There's plenty to do from the comfort of your home!" he would tell me. I let some local shluchim know I was available if they ever needed help, and I soon saw how right he was! I got texts and calls every day. There was always something to be done! I didn't need to travel to a foreign country to be a shliach. My fellow Frenchmen could use some help as well!



I began working closely with another shliach near S Maurice. We worked together for 12 years, before finally opening our own Chabad house.

We're located right in the center of France, but we're a five-hour's drive from the bustle of Paris, so it can feel pretty isolating. Usually, the people that choose to live in the French countryside are looking for quiet and privacy, but recently, many young couples and families have tried to stay together. That, coupled with similar arrangements in other towns around us, keeps us busy enough.

We have a number of kosher restaurants and grocery stores, and we've created a community where people feel safe wearing kippot outside. We have minyanim every day, two daily shiurim, and a strong community. I think back to when I first opened the Chabad house, and my anxiety then seems futile. We're shluchim of the Rebbe, and our success relies not on our own power or capabilities, but from the Rebbe's strength.

I was already familiar with the S Maurice community from my years working nearby, so when they asked me to organize and lead Yom Kippur davening for them, I was happy to oblige. Of course, the first priority was to find a hall or hotel, and I called around for weeks, looking for the perfect place. Finally, about two weeks before Yom Kippur, I found it.

I reached out to the owners of the hall, and reserved the space for our davening. The owners weren't Jewish, but I easily explained what we planned to use the space for and they added me to the schedule.

Rosh Hashanah came and went, and I dove head first into preparations for Yom Kippur. I got machzorim, a mehitza, and everything else I would need for the minyan. The Friday before - Yom Kippur was on a Sunday - I called up the hall to see when I could start organizing my things and bringing chairs over.

"What are you talking about?" the owner of the hall asked me. "We don't have you on our schedule."

"What do you mean?" I countered. "We spoke weeks ago!"

The owner wouldn't budge. "I have a week-long event here, and that includes the dates you're referring to. I don't know what to tell you, but our hall is occupied."

I didn't know what to do. Shabbos was quickly approaching, and Yom Kippur would follow in quick succession. Even if I could rent a place on such short notice, when would I find the time? It was impossible! I decided to keep the news to myself for the time being, not knowing what I would say to the dozens of people relying on me.

I closed my eyes and davened from the bottom of my heart. "Rebbe," I whispered. "Please ask Hashem to help me make this community a minyan for the holiest day of the year! Enable me to fulfill your shlichus!"

On Sunday morning, erev Yom Kippur, I woke up at five in the morning. I davened, went to the mikvah, and did kaparos. The holiday was mere hours away, and I still hadn't mentioned my predicament to anyone.

A couple of hours later, Jakob* told me he had something for me. I knew he was planning on coming to davening that night, and I wondered if he'd heard something somehow. I waited anxiously until he returned with an envelope.

"It's a dollar from the Rebbe," he said. "For you."

"But - but - but how?" I asked, flabbergasted.

Jakob took out his phone and showed me a picture of himself with the Rebbe. "The Rebbe gave me a few dollar bills," he explained. "I've kept some for my family, but I wanted to give this one to you."

I accepted the bill with shaking hands. I couldn't have asked for a clearer sign that the Rebbe had the situation well in hand. I knew I didn't need to worry any longer. I headed straight for the hall where I'd soon have 100 people gathering to daven.

I expected some pushback, but it was as if my conversation on Friday had never happened at all. Everything seemed to be in order, and I was welcome to begin setting up at any time! As I bustled through the lobby back and forth, schlepping in chairs, mechitzahs, machzorim, and more, the girl at the reception desk eyed me with curiosity.

"Is this for Yom Kippur?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied. "Why? Are you Jewish?"

The girl shrugged. "Sort of. My mother is Jewish, but I haven't kept anything in years."

"You should join us tonight!" I urged her.

In just a couple of days, I'd gone from having no venue, to having everything I needed *and* an opportunity to help another Jew! It was a clear miracle.

The Rebbe dollar stayed with me, tucked away securely into my phone case. I often thanked Jakob for his timely gift, explaining how much it had already impacted me.

Six weeks later, I flew to New York for the International Kinus Hashluchim. As I was walking down Kingston Avenue, I passed by a man sitting on a bench. Suddenly, I was overcome with an urge to give him my miraculous dollar. Without

thinking about it too deeply, I opened my phone and handed him the Rebbe's dollar. It had been living there for the past few weeks.

"This is for you," I told him.

His eyes widened in shock. "I can't believe it," he said, staring at the dollar, eyes welling up with tears. "This is incredible!"

"What happened?" I asked him.

"I visited the Ohel a couple of days ago, and wrote a letter with many important questions. I also asked the Rebbe to give me a sign - to let me know he was listening. For the past few days, I've been on high alert. Every time the phone rang or someone came by, I imagined it was the Rebbe, giving me my sign. But nothing happened. Here I am, a day before my flight home, and a stranger is handing me a Rebbe dollar, out of the blue!"

I still don't know what inspired me to part with the dollar bill. It had come to me when I needed it most. I'm just happy it was able to do the same for another fellow shlich.

Once we knew we'd be making S Maurice our permanent makom hashlichus, the first priority was finding a place to serve as our Chabad house. I had very modest expectations - all I needed was a place that could fit about 15 people, so we could have a minyan. When I heard that Msr. Sousan*, a Jewish camp director, was moving to a new office, I asked if I could take over the lease on his current place.

"Sure, I guess," he responded. "But I don't see how you'll manage here. It's too small!"

"I don't need anything grand," I assured him. "This will help us get started."

As soon as I had an address in hand, I began advertising our upcoming Shabbos services to everyone I knew. I was pleased with the turnout that first Friday night, and expected a similar crowd the next day. Early on Shabbos morning, we had a few men straggle in, until, a short while later, we had our minyan and could begin davening. When I turned around before Borchu, I was surprised to see that even more people had joined, and the room was beginning to get quite crowded. Soon, we were spilling out into the street!

We kept that tiny-but-cozy office space for two years. We had a committed group of about 30-40 people who never missed a single week. Despite the consistent overcrowding, I was told again and again that they preferred davening with us more than at any other shul. *The davening here is happy, they explained. This is where we want to be!*

Clearly, we needed a larger space. I asked nearby shopkeepers if any of them had an available space, and, eventually,

one of those inquiries panned out. The shop four doors down was moving to a new location, and was happy to sublease his store to me. After some renovations, our new and expanded place was ready to use! Since the two properties were so close together, I was able to keep both running simultaneously, with minyanim in both locations.

Even so, I knew this was another temporary measure. We needed a much larger space, especially for chagim. Baruch Hashem, we eventually found a perfect location with plenty of room!

A bigger location meant a bigger budget, and, for a while, the financial worries overwhelmed me. I had to remind myself that I was a mere cog in the Rebbe's machine, and I had to stay focused on my mission of making Yiddishkeit accessible to all.

It was a timely reminder. Shortly after moving into our new building, the local government began to interfere, citing us for absurd issues. It wasn't unusual for the police to interrupt our minyan, searching the premises for issues I could never have foreseen.

It got so bad, I felt I couldn't continue much longer. There were many times when I threw my hands up in the air and just cried out to the Rebbe for help.

I took the lesson of *lechatchila ariber* to heart - instead of solving problems with conventional methods, a chassid needs to try to overcome obstacles by jumping over them. Instead of waiting for the police to knock on the door, I went down to the station and collaborated with the municipality to preemptively solve any potential issues. Within a year, everyone was ironed out to our mutual satisfaction. We received our construction permits right in time for Rosh Hashanah!

Yosef and Dina* had been married for seven years. They desperately wanted a child, but the months passed by with no answer to their whispered prayer.

"Why don't you go to New York and ask the Rebbe for a bracha?" I suggested.

Yosef sighed. "We've been to many tzaddikim and received countless brachot already. Nothing has helped."

I explained how the Rebbe is a *nefesh klali* - a soul which contains the souls of the entire generation. I also told them many miracle stories, including from some of our community members, who miraculously had children following a visit to the Rebbe.

It wasn't hard to convince them. Almost exactly a year after they visited the Rebbe's Ohel in New York, they were blessed

with their eldest child. Baruch Hashem, more children have followed, and they now have a beautiful family.

Yosef and Dina make sure to visit the Ohel regularly to thank the Rebbe!

Recently, a group of my friends traveled to New York together. One of my friends in the group, Moshe*, had been waiting years for a son. When we visited the Ohel, he spent a long time by the matzeivah, davening fervently from his tear-stained Tehillim.

Nine months later, we celebrated his baby boy's bris.

He traveled back to New York on the anniversary of our visit to thank the Rebbe for his bracha.

We love hosting our community at our home. It doesn't feel like Shabbos or Yom Tov without a table filled with guests. The only exception was Sukkos. We couldn't build a sukkah in shul, so I was forced to rely on others in the community, or rented spaces in restaurants. I wanted to show my community a *real* Sukkos, and the beauty of hosting meals in a sukkah.

When we started looking for a house, my main focus was the yard. I barely cared what the rest of the property looked like - all I wanted was a yard large enough for a *massive* sukkah! Baruch Hashem, we soon found our dream home, complete with a huge backyard. It was my happiest moment - hammering nails into our sukkah boards, seeing with satisfaction that the completed structure could comfortably seat 60 guests!

We had a constant stream of guests throughout Yom Tov - and we wouldn't have it any other way!

**Names changed to protect privacy*

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