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

Rabbi Shmueli and Chavie Lieberman, Chabad Jewish Student Center at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY

The Unexpected Dean and the Donut Contest

By Chaya Chazan

We were lucky to be amongst the first wave of campus shluchim, moving out to Long Island in 2005. Although I grew up in a more traditional Chabad house shlichus, I always saw myself on campus, meeting people from all walks of life.

I was pleasantly surprised when the dean warmly shook my hand, and told me he owed his current position to the Rebbe. Back when he'd been nothing more than a humble professor, a chassid had taken him to visit the Rebbe. The Rebbe gave him a bracha to become the head of the school - a goal which then seemed impossible. However, a few days later, contro-

versely erupted amongst campus staff, and the department head was dismissed. This man was appointed in his place, and soon was promoted to dean of liberal arts and science.

At the very beginning, we continued living in Crown Heights, making the hour-long commute each day to table on campus and meet students. We hosted Friday night meals every other week, which was a little more complicated to arrange. We rented out a high school gym and set up long tables in the spacious arena. After the meal, we'd return to our lodgings in West Hempstead, accompanied on the hour-long late night walk by a police escort driving slowly behind us.

A short while after we took the position, Hofstra promoted one of their well-liked, Torah-observant professors as dean of the law school, and he was immensely helpful to us. He was instrumental in establishing a daily mincha meeting in the newest - and nicest - hall on campus. Although the hall's novelty has since been overtaken by other, newer and nicer buildings, it still hosts the daily mincha minyan.

Like many campus shluchim, we met a lot of students through "tabling" on campus. Our table was one of many on the quad, all offering student enrichment through various extracurricular clubs and societies. We tried our best to stand out - one memorable Chanukah, we held a contest to see who could finish a donut first, without using their hands. Having a cute baby happily squealing at every passing student definitely helped as well! Now those cute babies, all grown up, have found a new niche in our shlichus. While we're the old-fashioned, out-of-touch millennials, they can relate to the students as peers, and influence them in ways we can't.

his Hebrew School. Everything was working well - except for the oldest boys' class. The rowdy preteens were challenging to engage, and she thought they might do better with a man as their teacher.

From the very first moment I walked into the room, I was able to pinpoint Nolan* as the chief troublemaker. He loved calling out, especially when his comments were off-topic, and more often than not, disrespectful. But I also recognized he was a good boy, just looking for attention in the wrong ways.

I knew playing flag football with the boys at recess was just as important as teaching them the alef beis. Slowly, we built a rapport, and even Nolan was settling down!

As I started the painstaking process of teaching each letter of the alef beis, Nolan yelled out, "Rabbi, I already know how to read Hebrew! Can I go play outside?"

When I tested him, I saw he was telling the truth!

"This is amazing, Nolan!" I complimented him. "Who taught you to read Hebrew?"

"My grandpa," he answered. "He was, like, super religious, and he wanted me to, like, know something about it, I guess."

It was the perfect way to give Nolan the attention he needed in a positive way. He became our Alef Beis Champion. Instead of struggling along in the basic readers, I began teaching him how to lein his bar mitzvah parsha.

Nolan proudly read from the Torah, his voice ringing clearly throughout the shul. For many kids, that would be the end of their Jewish education. Baruch Hashem, Nolan felt such an affinity for Yiddishkeit, he asked his parents to enroll him in a Jewish high school.

I kept in touch with Nolan over the years, and was present at his wedding to a wonderful, Torah-observant girl.

"I'd like to keep kosher, Rabbi," said Cory*, one of our students. "But I can't commit to the whole nine yards. Can you give me a list of cuts to avoid? I won't buy filet mignon or sirloin steak if I can help it, and I'm sure there are others. I know it's not *kosher* kosher, but it's something I can do for now."

I was happy to help Cory with this small step on his way to kashrus. Although he still wasn't buying properly shechted and kashered meat, restricting himself to even these basic constraints made kashrus a conscious part of his life. From there, it was a lot easier for him to make the next leap into buying only kosher meat, and even easier to broaden his commitment to include all foods.

Throughout his years in Hofstra, Cory was a regular visitor in our Chabad house. By the time he graduated, he was well on his way to a Torah-observant life.



For the first few years of our shlichus, we spent every Sunday in the neighboring town, helping the shliach run

He now lives in a large Jewish community, and is raising a family with Torah values.

Even a tiny bit of Yiddishkeit in one's life is like a glowing flame, whose warmth and light cast a greater effect than one would imagine could come from such a small source.

When I first met Karin*, I wasn't even sure if she was Jewish. She told me her father was Indian, but her mother was Jewish. As I got to know her better, I grew to admire her incredible ability to remain firm in her Yiddishkeit, while still maintaining utmost respect for her father and keeping in touch with all her paternal relatives.

I couldn't help but be curious - with her many Indian aunts, uncles, and cousins, and all their family and cultural celebrations consuming so much of her childhood and life, from where did the tenacity to stick to Yiddishkeit come?

"My grandmother," Karin told me, when I asked. "She wasn't able to teach me much, but she always insisted on having a Passover seder, and had a very strong Jewish identity. She's been a tremendous influence on my life."

Karin was eager to learn all she could. She took on one mitzvah after another, never phased by the challenges she accrued from family, friends, professors, or society by doing so. In fact, she faced every obstacle head-on, standing proudly for her Judaism.

When she took on the mitzvah of tzniyus, she switched to an all-female gym and purchased tzniyus athleisure wear. The gym threatened to revoke her membership if she continued wearing skirts on the machines, citing safety concerns. Karin successfully took the case to court, fighting not just on her own behalf, but for Jewish women everywhere.

Karin is now raising a beautiful, Torah-observant family. Her journey has been a mesmerizing inspiration to Jews everywhere.

Shlichus demands your *everything* at all times. "Recharging" and constant reminders of your "why" are imperative to keep going. For me, my location gives me the ultimate bracha. I'm just a quick ride from the Rebbe's Ohel in Queens, and I can go there at any time. I've made a set schedule, visiting every Friday morning.

I daven Shacharis with a minyan, and enjoy a few hours of learning with bochurim in the yeshiva. I look forward to those few hours as the highlight of my entire week. As I leave the Ohel to begin preparing for Shabbos, I am rejuvenated and motivated to continue my shlichus.

I became quite friendly with David*, who owns a mechanic shop nearby. He inherited the business from his father, who passed away when he was just a teenager. It was traumatic, having his childhood aborted so abruptly, but David rose to the occasion.

He knew little about Yiddishkeit when we first met, but was extremely open and eager to learn. When he got married a little while later, it was with the understanding that they'd keep Shabbos, and move to a Jewish community.

One day, when I visited David, I noticed he looked anxious and withdrawn.

"What happened?" I asked, concerned.

"I hardly even know!" he wailed. "The commission - they say my shop had a gas leak or something, and it polluted the whole area! They closed my shop and are suing me for environmental damages. It's hundreds of thousands of dollars! I don't know what to do!"

I tried comforting him as best as I could, but I hardly knew what to say.

A few weeks later, on my next visit to David, he handed me a couple of small, but heavy sacks.

"These coins have been collecting dust in a bucket in my shop for a long time," he explained. "Use them for tzedakah. Maybe it will be the zechus I need."

I gave the contents a cursory glance. It was mostly filled with coins of all sizes, but, here and there, I spotted a dollar bill floating around. One dollar bill, right on top of the pile, caught my eye. There was handwriting on the top, and I realized it was a dollar David's father had received from the Rebbe.

"Your worries are over!" I assured him, ecstatically. "Look at this! Did you not just say this should be a zechus for you? You've gotten a clear bracha from the Rebbe that everything will work out!"

A couple of weeks later, with absolutely no explanation, the charges were dropped.

I attended the law school's graduation ceremony, cheering on the students we'd come to know and love over the past few years. After the ceremony, while families milled around and graduates excitedly promised to keep in touch, a father approached me, a huge smile on his face.

"Thank you so much for all you've done!" he said, pumping my hand enthusiastically.

I replied politely, but I was confused. I'd never met him before, and wasn't sure I'd even met his child.

"Excuse me, but whose father are you?" I finally asked.

"Pete Brandon*," he answered. "I don't think he's ever really spoken with you."

"Oh," I couldn't keep the confusion from my voice. "I wish I could've done more for him, then. If we've never met, what exactly are you thanking me for?"

"You don't need to meet people to have an impact," he said. "All these kids are about to head into the high-pressure world of law. They'll be one minion amongst hundreds, all competing with each other for the same few spots. In such a world, it's easiest to conform - not stand out and make waves. Many of them are scared they'll be dismissed out of hand if they walk into an interview with a yarmulke, let alone wearing one in court. That's where you come in. You walk around in conspicuously Jewish clothing, and you're completely unapologetic. You wear your yarmulke with *pride*. You're setting an incredible example for our young ones, without having to say one word."

**Names changed to protect privacy*

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