

IllumiNations

CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.  **DollarDaily.org**

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

Rabbi Aron and Mushka Teleshevsky, Chabad of Playa del Rey, California

Judaism With Lasting Impact

By Chaya Chazan

One might think growing up in Sydney, Australia meant I rarely saw the Rebbe. It's a testament to my father's deep connection with the Rebbe and his astounding penchant for going "*lichatchila ariber*," disregarding challenges and forging ahead with single-minded determination, that I have many memories of time spent in 770.

My father paid no attention to the prohibitive costs, not to speak of the long, 20-hour flights, and made sure we all visited the Rebbe a few times a year. Once, at a local farbrengen, he encouraged everyone to visit New York for an upcoming chassidishe Yom Tov, and promised to buy tickets for anyone who wrote their names on the tablecloth, right then and there. On another occasion, one memorable Simchas Torah, he even *scaled a wall* to reach the Rebbe's balcony and exchange a few words!

My father led by example, teaching me that nothing should stand in a chassid's way while fulfilling the Rebbe's mission.

After my wife and I got married, we moved to Australia for a while, before taking up her parent's offer to join their shlichus in Brentwood, California. My in-laws, Rabbi Boruch and Channa Hecht, are truly dedicated shluchim, and have achieved amazing results throughout their years on shlichus. It was an honor and privilege to work alongside them for two years,

and we learned a lot under their tutelage. After a while, we felt ready to strike out on our own.

We began with Chabad Youth, where we bring Judaism to life for kids with interactive shows and experiences. There are certain workshops more connected to Yomim Tovim, such as the olive press demonstration, live matza bakery, and shofar-making, but we have many other fascinating experiences throughout the year, including havdalah candle-making, Sefer Torah writing, and more. As a professional educational director, our programs appeal to a much wider audience than a traditional shliach can access. We're asked to set up in schools of all denominations, so we can impact Jews from every walk of life throughout the city.

In 2020, my wife's uncle, Rabbi Tzemach Cunin, passed away. It was a tragedy that moved the entire community, not least of all my wife's grandfather, Rabbi Shlomo Cunin, the head shliach of California. To honor Tzemach's short, but fruitful 43 years in this world, Rabbi Cunin announced that Chabad of California would be starting 43 new Chabad houses and organizations. We were honored to be one of those, and moved to beautiful, beachside Playa del Rey.

Our apartment was in a complex of sedate middle-aged and elderly retirees. They didn't appreciate having young - and loud - children around, so we knew it was time to look for another place. It wasn't easy to find a place that fit our needs, but the pressure to move was mounting, and we were starting to get desperate.

One day, we decided to take our kids to the park. As we walked across the lot to the swings, we saw a flier tacked up on a nearby lamppost: *House for rent. Call Stanley**. The listed rent was an incredible price for Los

Angeles, and I immediately punched the listed number into my cell phone.

"Hi Stanley! My name's Aron. I saw a flyer about the house you have for rent, and I'm very interested! I'm willing to sign the lease now, sight unseen!"

But Stanley was eccentric, and refused to let the house without showing it to me first.

"Come on Sunday at noon," he told me. "But I have to tell you - you're the fourth person to call me. I'm showing the house in order of the calls I received, and offering it on a first-come, first-served basis. If the first three people don't want it, then it will be up to you."

We need this house, I thought to myself. I sat down and penned a letter to the Rebbe, explaining the necessity, and advantages of the house. I placed my letter on a random page in a volume of *Igros Kodesh*, a collection of letters from the Rebbe. On that page, the Rebbe was answering someone about moving to a new location, and gave many brachos as they began anew.

With the Rebbe's brachos and assurance in mind, we went to see the place on Sunday at noon.

Stanley had double-booked. He was in the middle of showing it to the first couple on his list, and as we waited at the door, we could hear the excitement in their voices as they oohed and ahhed over the large backyard, and how much they loved the layout and location. Our hearts sank as they turned to Stanley and said, "We'll take it!"

"I'm sorry, but it seems like these good folks will be renting this house," Stanley told us.

I pushed my card into his hands. "Please call me if anything changes," I told him.

We were disappointed, but the Rebbe's bracha gave us hope that not all was lost.

I called Stanley to check in a few times, but he didn't answer. A few weeks later, he finally picked up.

"Aron! It's good to hear from you. Are you still interested? That first couple seemed all excited, but they never came back with a deposit, and I haven't heard from them since. If you still want the house, it's yours!"

Stanley was a terrific landlord, and we were even able to buy the house after he passed. It was a clear miracle, a fulfillment of the Rebbe's promise that he would take care of his shluchim.

The summer was fading into autumn, and schools were polishing their floors to welcome students back on the first day. I was busy preparing my first ever Shofar Factory, but I took advantage of the dwindling summer days to take my kids to the park.

My son sat on the swing, squealing for me to push him "*higher, higher Tatty!*" As I laughingly obeyed his re-



quest, the father beside me, also pushing his child in a swing, smiled in sympathetic understanding.

I introduced myself and he reciprocated, and I asked him what he did for work.

"I'm in finance," he answered. "How about you?"

"I lead a factory demonstration for kids, explaining how shofars for Rosh Hashanah are made," I said.

He was thoughtful for a moment.

"It's funny," he began, hesitantly. "When I was a kid, my mom signed me up for Hebrew school. I only attended for a short time, so I didn't get a chance to learn much, but I *do* remember participating in a Shofar Factory and making my own shofar.

"That shofar sat in my room until I left for college. I'm still not sure why, but something compelled me to pack it in my suitcase and take it along with me. I kept it throughout college, and brought it along after graduation.

"I'm now married, and my wife isn't Jewish, but the shofar has a place on our mantel. It reminds me that I'm a Jew whenever I see it."

I was moved by his story, and it gave me all the inspiration and motivation I needed for beginning my new shlichus. If a single Shofar Factory could have made such an impression on this man, I knew the work on which I was about to embark was important and could change lives.

Baruch Hashem, our youth programs had been successfully integrated in many schools throughout the city, but there was one Jewish school, Oheb Shalom*, that kept giving me the polite runaround. It was frustrating, because I knew how much of an impact even the Matza Bakery could make, but there was nothing else I could do.

I was scheduled to bring the Matza Bakery to a certain Chabad house, so I loaded up all my paraphernalia and ordered an Uber Pool. I hoped that I'd be lucky enough to get a solo ride, but my driver picked up not one, but *two* additional riders. My arms were filled with awkward, bulky items that took up precious space in the small car, and it was hard to ignore. One of my fellow riders, a sweet elderly woman, asked where I was "headed with all those tools." I gave her a brief explanation, and she nodded, pleased.

"Have you ever brought one of these programs to Oheb Shalom?" she asked.

"Funny you should ask," I replied. "I've been trying to contact them..."

"Say no more," she said. "You're in."

As it happened, she was an influential member of the board, and managed to convince the school with one short text. The school loved the Matza Bakery so much, they also booked many of our other experiences.

"It's the strangest thing," the woman commented, pocketing her phone. "I'm on my way to the dentist, but I didn't mean to order an UberPool. I can't figure out why I made such a mistake!"

"I can," I said, with a smile.

Every shliach understands the struggle of finding and meeting people in their neighborhood, but moving during Covid gave us an extra challenge to overcome. People were suspicious of strangers knocking on their doors, coming within their 6 feet of safe space, even if those strangers offered them freshly-baked challah. Nevertheless, one way or another, we managed to meet *some* Jews in the area.

I found out that the neighborhood hosted a block concert every Friday afternoon, so throughout the spring and summer, when Shabbos started late, I went to the concert to mingle and meet people. It was an excellent way of introducing myself in a very friendly, nonchalant way.

One Friday, I brought my daughter with me, and before I realized what was happening, she'd slipped up to the front and handed the drummer a challah.

"Rabbi!" I heard, coming from the speakers. "Come up here and bless this bread!"

To the appreciative cheering of the crowd, I made my way up to the central stoop and wished everyone a *Shabbat Shalom*.

"Why don't you sing some Shabbat songs?" I suggested to the drummer.

He shrugged. "Cuz I don't know any!"

"I can do it," I volunteered. He raised an eyebrow, but silently handed me his drumsticks and stood up to give me his place. "A one, two, three, hit it!" I sang, and banged the sticks with abandon. "Shabbat Shalom,

hey! Shabbat Shalom, hey! Shabbat, Shabbat, Shabbat, Shabbat, Shabbat Shalom!" the entire crowd sang with me and cheered every time I hit the drums.

"Give it up for the Rockin' Rabbi!" the drummer announced with a flourish when the song was over.

It was an incredible experience, and for weeks after that, people came up to me in the street, calling me the "Rockin' Rabbi," and telling me how much they'd loved the performance.

Ronnie was feeling lost. She was doing her best to fight cancer, but it had already advanced and she was so, so tired. She desperately needed guidance. She felt a yearning for something spiritual, but had no idea what - or where - she should be seeking.

She was riding an elevator one day, when a woman entered and pressed the button for the lobby. Completely unprompted, she asked Ronnie, "Are you Jewish? There's a fabulous ladies class at Chabad every Wednesday. You should check it out!"

The next Wednesday morning, Ronnie was there, and so was the stranger from the elevator - although she didn't recognize the woman on whom she'd made such an impact.

As my wife began the class, Ronnie felt a sense of peace descend upon her, soothing the spiritual ache she'd been harboring for weeks. She began coming every week, never missing a class, and became more involved in other areas as well. The words of Torah and the embrace of the community help her face her challenges, and we continue to daven for the complete refuah shleima of Rochel bas Gittel.

**Names changed to protect privacy*

DollarDaily.org

a Project of

**YadLShliach.org
and COLlive.com**

COL LIVE

MAKE CENTS OF YOUR NEW YEAR \$1 a day keeps the mitzvahs on the way!

ILLUMINATIONS, A PROJECT OF DOLLARDAILY.ORG, SUPPORTS CHABAD HOUSES WORLDWIDE:

- Provide Tefillin for Yitzhak, connecting him to his Jewish roots.
- Empower Miriam through Mikvah visits, fostering spiritual growth.
- Help the Rabbi's family with new clothes, supporting their selfless service.
- Sponsor Shabbas experiences on college campuses, creating vibrant Jewish communities.

\$727+

DONATING PER DAY

\$728532+

ALREADY DONATED TO ORGANIZATIONS

\$264990+

TO BE GIVEN OVER THE NEXT 365 DAYS

Join 700+ people giving just \$1 a day at DollarDaily.org and make a lasting impact!



DollarDaily.org

HELP JEWS.

ALL JEWS.

IN ALL PLACES.