

IllumiNations

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CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.



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

*Rabbi Yisrolik and Mushka Peles, Chabad of Ariel
Sharon, Nahariya, Israel*

Supporting Our Soldiers, Chabad of Nahariya Part I

By Chaya Chazan

From a young age, I was raised in the spirit of shlichus — to live for the Rebbe and to give everything for his mission.

Many of my siblings moved on shlichus as well, so it was a natural step for me when I envisioned my future. My wife felt similarly, so, three months after we got married, we started the search, looking forward to the challenge of striking out on our own and building a community from the ground up. Since so many communities in Israel already have established Chabad houses, we needed to comb through the country, searching for a location as yet “unexplored.”

We opened Google Maps, making our way up the shore. It was exciting to zoom in on each city, recalling the shluchim who've done so much good work in each place. The fact that it was a challenge to find even a small community that still didn't have a shliach was an awe-inspiring reminder of the depth of the Rebbe's vision, and how close we must be to Moshiach! We were almost at the border of Lebanon before we found a promising location - the beautiful coastal city of Nahariya.

Rabbi Wilhelm, the director of Chabad of Nahariya, were happy to welcome us to the team, and completely understood our desire to establish a Chabad house in “new territory.” While our original research led us towards one specific area, we were told we were need-

ed more somewhere else. Of course, as shluchim, we know it's not about what we want, but rather doing what needs to be done. Although we knew nothing about the developing area of Ariel Sharon, we immediately set out to look it over and agreed to move on shlichus.

Even now, the Ariel Sharon community is constantly besieged by hammering jacksaws, beeping tractors, and ever-climbing scaffolding. When we first moved, the area was in its early stages of development, and we were one of the few families actually living in the buildings that still smelled of fresh paint and newly cut wood.

As more residents began to arrive, we realized we'd have a very diverse crowd. From the chilonim to dati le-umi, we had Jews from every walk of life.

We'd wanted the challenge of building a community from the ground up and we got *exactly* that - literally! It was up to us to *create* a shul, shiurim, and community activities. We had the blankest slate possible.

I had left my phone on over Simchas Torah. To this day, I cannot tell you why - that isn't common practice for me at all. But obviously, everything happens for a reason. When I woke up on the morning of October 7th, my phone was buzzing like crazy.

Usually, I have my notifications set to let me know when there are sirens in Ashkelon and Kfar Chabad. Ashkelon is where both of my brothers live, and my mother is in Kfar Chabad. Since, unfortunately, sirens in the south of the country are not unheard of, I simply assumed that's what I was hearing.

With a quick tefillah to Hashem that all my family was safe, I headed to the school building that hosted our shul to begin davening. I remember looking out the window at one point during davening and thinking,

Huh. The streets are pretty empty. That's weird. Things are usually quiet in our small, growing community, but that morning, there was utter silence.

The unusual silence seemed to stretch into shul as well. Certain people had committed to attending shul, and I couldn't understand why they were so late. *Maybe they partied a little too hard last night*, I chuckled to myself.

When Ohr* finally showed up, his face was ashen. He filled me in on the terrible news, but I refused to believe what I was hearing. I was sure it was an exaggeration. But as the rest of my congregants stumbled into shul, each was telling the same story. They had updated statistics with horrifyingly huge numbers of casualties. It couldn't be! As the story was repeated, yet again, it finally sunk in, and I stumbled blindly into a chair. A few minutes later, my wife ran into shul.

“Everyone, go home now!” she shouted. “The neighbors came to tell me that there are bands of terrorists roaming the streets, murdering everyone they see. Go home and lock your doors!”

Of course, we were too far up north to face the terrifying reality of murderous bands stalking our homes that so many of our brothers and sisters down south had to endure. In the chaos of the moment, it was impossible to get correct information. Also, it was still Yom Tov, so we couldn't look anything up.

We tried our best to dance despite our despair; to celebrate the joyous festival with trust in Hashem and hope. As the day progressed, it was harder and harder to ignore the teeming masses on our streets. Hundreds of soldiers were arriving in our area, preparing for the inevitable onslaught from Lebanon. Men were being called to miluim left and right. Before Shabbos had even ended, five of our good friends were already in Gaza.

That Motzei Shabbos was the first night of many that we ran to support and aid our soldiers, many of them still reeling from the news themselves, dazed and confused after being pulled so suddenly from their homes, families, and shuls in the midst of Simchas Torah. They'd had no time to take leave of their wives, children, parents, and siblings. Unfortunately, there was little we could do to help with that. Most had also not had time to pack even the barest necessities - and *that* we were only too happy to provide.

The first chance we got, we started shopping and shipping supplies. The night after Chag, we started gathering and making food. The army was underprepared for the number of reservists that showed up, so we took it upon ourselves to help in any way we could. We would



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spend all day cooking and then all night delivering hot meals.

With the advent of winter, we knew we had to reassess to see what was needed. The winter rains pounded on the soldiers stationed under nothing but the starry sky. Tents were a necessity.

It was upsetting to realize that the rains had ruined some of the soldiers' tefillin. We knew it would be difficult to ship that many tefillin quickly, but I was determined to do everything I could to repair the tefillin that could be fixed. Many of the soldiers had also lost their tzitzis, but, baruch Hashem, those were much easier to replace.

There were many soldiers who came from unaffiliated backgrounds. They'd never owned a pair of tzitzis or tefillin, and, even if they had, they never thought twice about them. When they saw their friends receiving these precious spiritual gifts, they asked for some of their own. They were inspired to strengthen their connection to Hashem and their people.

We were blessed to be in a really strategic position when it came to our work with the soldiers. Normally, the army maintains a 2-kilometer distance between any soldiers and residential neighborhoods. But because our community is so new, they miscalculated and ended up quite literally on our doorstep.

This gave me the really rare opportunity to form relationships with these boys. I came by on Shabbosim, made kiddush for them, and made sure they had challah. I ensured they always had a minyan and that someone could make havdalah.

I met one young man, Baruch*, who was incredibly excited to see us. He grew up going to Lubavitcher schools in Montreal, even though he wasn't necessarily from a Chabad home. As he grew up, he drifted away from the traditions of his home. Over the years, he had even developed a resentment towards religion.

But when I ran into him the day after Simchas Torah, he was filled with a renewed faith.

"God isn't giving up on me," he declared. "Somehow, wherever I seem to go or whoever I seem to meet, I keep hearing about Chabad or the Rebbe. He won't give up on me!"

One evening, my wife and I drove to an army base near the border to deliver hot, kosher meals to some soldiers. We were greeted with happy smiles, jovial jokes, and general gratitude and appreciation.

A scant few moments later, someone shouted, "purple rain!" The atmosphere shifted immediately. The soldiers, who'd looked like young, carefree teenagers just moments before, now snapped to attention and assumed professional, military procedures. My wife and I were bewildered and scared, and some soldiers had to push us onto the ground, face first. A minute or two later, the evening sky was streaked with eerily beautiful flares of angry red and orange as rockets flew overhead and exploded with thunderous force.

It took a few minutes until the all clear sounded and we were allowed to get up. We were shocked and jittery, but the soldiers around us resumed their usual, easygoing chatter without a second's thought. A newcomer to the scene would be amazed to hear we'd all just survived a near death experience.

Apparently, someone had been as shaken by the close call as we had. While other soldiers filled their dinner plates and talked easily with their friends, one soldier approached me, a serious look on his face.

"Rabbi, can we sit for a few moments? I'd love to hear some wisdom from the Rebbe."

"Of course," I agreed, quietly. We repaired to a nearby couple of rocks, where we sat to discuss the Rebbe's thoughts on the weekly parshah.

It was definitely the most memorable dvar Torah I've ever shared!

For various reasons, we couldn't post an advertisement in the city paper informing everyone of our presence and various services we offered. Instead, we had to make noise the good, old-fashioned way.

As our first Chanukah on shlichus approached, we went all out on pirsumei nisa. We placed two large menorahs at the entrance of the city and did a public lighting every night. I remember one night, around 50 children attended. While it was less than we were hoping for, we celebrated like we had 500. We went all out, one night after another, celebrating as fully - and loudly - as we could. The exuberant music and dancing, sweet, crumbly suganiyot, and plentiful foil-wrapped chocolate gelt passed through the city by word of mouth, and we began to get lots more attention.

On Tu B'shvat and Purim, we followed the same formula: plan the best, most exciting event, regardless of how many people were or weren't attending.

For Pesach, in addition to inviting people over for the seder, we visited every house in the neighborhood, delivering a box of shmurah matza to every family. As the community grows, so does this project. This year, we delivered over 1,100 boxes of matzah!

This strategy helped us form relationships with many different types of people: the personal, door-to-door interactions allow for a deeper connection, while the hyped up holiday events introduce *Chabad* to people who'd never otherwise show interest. Once we meet them, whether through the "big work" or the "personal work" as I call them, we are able to interest them in Yiddishkeit beyond that first interaction, encouraging them to come to our regular, weekly events as well.

**Names changed to protect identity*

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87 Maftir Yonahs — \$41,000+

106 Chosson Torahs — \$53,000+

84 Chosson Bereishis — \$33,000+

65 Tefillas Geshem — \$24,000+

73 P'sicha Neilah — \$24,000+

+ Plus dozens more kibudim sold!

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TOGETHER, WE RAISED \$213,000 THIS YEAR (UP FROM \$104,000 LAST YEAR!)

🙏 **THANK YOU FOR HELPING SHLUCHIM ACROSS THE WORLD!**

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