

# ILLUMINATIONS

CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.

*Rabbi Shlomo and Soshi Litvin, Chabad of the Bluegrass, Lexington, KY*

## A Kentucky Calling, Chabad of the Bluegrass Part IV

By Chaya Chazan

**“Rabbi, I really need advice!” Mrs. Kingsley\* cried on the phone. “Can I please come over?”**

I invited her over and listened quietly as she explained her predicament.

“I have this terrible... premonition, I guess, that my father is a bad person,” she shared. “I feel it deep inside, and I know it must be true. I just don’t know how to... relate to him anymore. Should I cut him off...? Tell people? What do I do?”

I heard her out and advised her to read Psalms with intention and care.

A few days later, my wife told me she’d joined the Louisville shluchim in their kosher food order. With Tishrei coming up and lots of guests expected, I understood exactly why she’d placed such a large order of fish, chicken, and meat, but my heart sank. I quietly called my father and asked him to cancel our order.



“We just don’t have the funds to cover it right now,” I told him. “I can’t ask other shluchim to lay out their own meager funds for a debt I can’t guarantee we’ll repay.”

“But what will you serve all your Yom Tov guests?” my father asked, his voice pitched as low as mine.

“I don’t know. Hashem will help.”

The next day, Mrs. Kingsley returned. “Thank you for your advice, Rabbi,” she said, her face shining. “Reading the Psalms calmed me and helped me find serenity. I’d like to show my thanks by giving some charity. Do you have a charity box around?”

My three daughters, sitting nearby, jumped up upon hearing the magic words and begged for the chance to put the money in the pushka themselves. Mrs. Kingsley smiled benevolently and handed them each something to put in the pushka.

My oldest daughter returned, holding Mrs. Kingsley’s donation. “Tatty, Mrs. Kingsley is so funny! She didn’t give me *money* to put in the pushka! She gave me a picture!”

Taking it from her, I was shocked to see it was a check for \$10,000.

“Tatty, you can go ahead and place our order!” I told my father in a choked up voice. “Hashem took care of Tishrei!”

For a few years, I hosted a radio show in Lexington, speaking about Judaism, current events, and the Rebbe.

One morning, a caller dialed in and told me she lived in our former home.

“I just got the strangest package,” she explained, on air. “Inside were thirty palm branches! When I looked at the label, I saw it was addressed to you.”

I thanked her and immediately called my father.

“Missing anything?” I asked, a slight chuckle in my voice.

“What do you mean?”

“Do you have lulavim for your community?”

“Actually, no!” he responded. “I ordered a bunch, but they still haven’t arrived, even though the website says they’ve been delivered. They must have gone missing.”

“Well, I think I found them!” I laughed. “They were shipped to the wrong Rabbi Litvin! Baruch Hashem, this woman called my radio show, so Louisville can have lulavim for Sukkos!”

During Covid, the radio program was shut down. Instead, I started a podcast where I interviewed a shliach from a different country each week, in alphabetical order. After interviewing an Argentine and Belgian shliach for “A” and “B,” I interviewed Rabbi Yisroel Bernath from Canada for “C.” After an inspiring podcast, he asked if I was on *Clubhouse*.

“I’ve never heard of it,” I answered, honestly. “What is it?”

“It’s an absolutely fantastic way to reach students!” Rabbi Bernath answered. “The app allows you to open a “room” for any subject you want. You can then start streaming any audio content you’d like, and users browsing the app can join your room and listen in, live. I’ve been using it for a short while now, and it’s amazing how much engagement you can get from students you’d probably never talk to otherwise - all from your living room couch! After talking to you for the last hour, I think you’d be uniquely suited for it.”

I didn’t need to hear more. A severe snowstorm that closed my kids’ school and left us all homebound gave me ample time to play around with the app and figure it out. Soon, I had a daily “room” scheduled, titled *Maimonadies’ Laws for Daily Life*, where I discussed the mitzvos of that day’s Rambam. I quickly built a following, and had over 40 people join my room every day to listen to the shiur.

I joined Rabbi Bernath and another shliach, Rabbi Shlomo Elkan, in opening another room called *Difficult Jewish Questions*, which opened every Thursday evening. We invited students and users of the app to come on and “stump the rabbi.”

One week, a girl named Ruth\* joined and shared she was “half-Jewish.”

“Which half?” I asked.

“My mom is Jewish; my dad isn’t,” she answered.

“That’s the right half,” I joked back. “Guess what, Ruth? You’re 100% Jewish!”

From then on, I often saw Ruth join shiurim on the app to learn more about her Yiddishkeit.

Soon, I started another room called *Jewish Mythbusters*, where I analyzed something many thought to be true about Yiddishkeit, explaining its origins, and the truth behind the legends.

One week, I dissected Shakespeare’s famous quote, *A rose by any other name would smell as sweet*.

I explained that in Hebrew, even the shape of the letters have meaning! When a table is called a “shulchan” and a horse is called a “sus,” the etymological significance bears direct tribute to the item, its nature, and its use. I pointed out how this was especially true of Jewish names.

“What’s your Jewish name?” I asked one of the participants.

“Joseph,” he answered.

“Ah! A great Biblical name!” I explained the root of the name and its significance, and even talked about some great Yosefs throughout Jewish history. I continued asking more users for their Jewish names, analyzing the meanings and history of every one.

As we talked, I noticed Ruth exit the room just a moment after joining. I asked the moderators to hold the room for a minute, and quickly messaged her.

“I noticed you got off really quickly,” I wrote. “Is everything okay? ...Do you have a Hebrew name?”

“No,” she responded.

“Well, if your name is Ruth, the Hebrew equivalent would be Rus. Do you know her story?”

“No,” Ruth/Rus admitted.

She listened, spellbound, as I told her about the princess who gave up everything to seek truth and find Hashem, and who was rewarded by being the matriarch of King David and all Jewish kings.

Ruth re-joined the room a few minutes later, proudly sharing her Jewish name and the special woman with whom she shared a legacy.

A few weeks later, I flew to New York to visit the Rebbe’s Ohel. I told my *Clubhouse* following that anyone who came to meet in person in New York would receive a mezuzah and a sefer of their choice.

There were over 30 *Clubhouse* users who joined me, Ruth among them. She received her mezuzah with obvious delight and chose *30 Days to Keep Kosher* as her sefer. We spoke for a few brief minutes, and promised to continue keeping touch via the app.

A couple of months later, Ruth told me she’d been let go from her job. I offered my sympathy, but she wanted more than that.

“I want to go to seminary in Israel,” she said. “I know it’s practically impossible to get visas and tickets in all this Covid mess, but I’m going to try really hard to get it done. I think this is my chance.”

“Give me a few minutes,” I told her. I quickly called the Israeli ambassador and explained the situation. “Can you help me get her a visa?” I asked him. An hour later, Ruth had a visa approved, waiting for her.

I didn’t hear from Ruth for a while, and I assumed she was busy in seminary. I was surprised when she messaged me a few months later to tell me she’d met a nice Jewish boy. We met over Zoom, and I was happy to see how well they suited one another, in personality and in excitement for Yiddishkeit.

Ruth invited my wife and me to her wedding, and although the timing was almost impossible with our schedule, not to mention the prohibitive cost of airline tickets, I knew it was important for Ruth to have someone there for her. Somehow, we pulled it off, and my wife and I made it to her wedding, where I read the letter the Rebbe sent her in-laws

At the reception, Ruth shared how we’d met, and how it had shaped her life.

“Rabbi Litvin helped me find my Jewish name, and I started learning more about Judaism. The next Friday night, I was about to leave for a party, when I thought to myself, *How can a girl with such a special Hebrew name from the Torah break Shabbos like this?* I stayed in. The same thought kept me home the next week, and the next, until I realized I’d become shomer Shabbos.

“When I met Rabbi Litvin in person in New York, he gave me a mezuzah, which I hung on my apartment door. The next day, I ordered food from my favorite takeout. As I was about to bring it inside, I thought, *How could a girl with such a special Jewish name and a mezuzah on her door defile that holiness by bringing non-kosher food through it?* Luckily, Rabbi Litvin also gave me a book about keeping kosher, so soon, I was keeping that, too.

“When I was let go from my job, I realized it was the perfect opportunity to embody my namesake’s lega-

cy by leaving behind all that was familiar, traveling to Israel, and deepening my connection with Hashem.”

For the Covid seder, we needed a space big enough to allow for social distancing. We rented a tent and set it up in our backyard. Unfortunately, just a few hours before Yom Tov, it fell over.

After speaking with a Rov, I quickly called the church down the street, which had a tent they only used for meals.

“It’s been 2,000 years since you hosted a seder,” I joked. “Want to host another, tonight?”

The pastor laughed and graciously agreed.

The church’s tent was far larger than our own, complete with lights and a stage in the front. I set up my family’s table on the stage, and dotted the rest of the tent with carefully spaced tables. It was a large space, and I knew we couldn’t have the homey feeling of everyone participating together in one communal seder. Instead, I led the seder for my kids, speaking as loudly as I could, and inviting everyone to participate with us from their tables.

On Chol Hamoed, I received an email from one participant who shared how much the seder had meant to him:

“We always had the Passover seder at my grandparent’s house, along with all the cousins. We children were relegated to the back table, with one aunt looming over us to keep us quiet. That’s the Judaism with which I was raised.

“What I saw last night was the complete reversal of that. You *involved* your children, encouraged them to ask, and empowered them to find their own joy and meaning in their Judaism. I learned what Jewish parenting looks like; what living a joyful Jewish life looks like. The joy I saw in your children’s faces says it all.”

*\*Names changed to protect privacy*



**APRIL 2026 DAILY DONATIONS**

May 27 11 Sivan 5786	May 28 12 Sivan 5786	May 29 13 Sivan 5786	May 30 14 Sivan 5786	May 31 15 Sivan 5786	June 1 16 Sivan 5786	June 2 17 Sivan 5786
<b>\$652</b>	<b>\$650</b>	<b>\$650</b>	<b>\$651</b>	<b>\$650</b>	<b>\$650</b>	<b>\$650</b>
Donating to: Chabad Jewish Center of Olympia	Donating to: Center for Jewish Life Arlington Belmont	Donating to: Chabad of Erie	Donating to: Chabad of South Bay	Donating to: Chabad of Sonoma Valley	Donating to: Chabad of Regina	Donating to: Chabad Of Oviedo-Winter Springs