

# IllumiNations

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CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.



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## Rabbi I'm even more Chassidic than You

*Rabbi Chalom & Esti Loeub – Campus Shluchim to The University of British Columbia in Vancouver*

*As a bochur, I volunteered at the Chabad of Florida State University. It was the first time I experienced true connection. I knew I wanted to spend my life doing this and luckily my wife held a similar dream.*

We spent the beginning of our marriage looking at different cities and trying to find our place. I, a Montreal native, didn't even consider Canada. But after some time of coming up empty, we heard of an opportunity at the University of British Columbia.

I reached out to an old friend of mine - Rabbi Schneur Wineberg - who put me in touch with his father, Rabbi Yitzchok Wineberg, who is the Head Shliach of British Columbia.

My wife and I were living in New Jersey at the time and since he traveled to New York a lot, we had made up to meet when he would be in Crown Heights.

Unfortunately, a few days before our intended meeting, my good friend's grandfather (his father's father) passed away. Naturally, I assumed everything would be on hold until after the Shloshim.

However, Rabbi Wineberg called me a couple of days later asking where I was,

"I thought we were getting together," he said to me. "It's been days and you haven't come by to see me."



I was taken aback. I couldn't imagine sitting down to talk business at such a difficult time. But Rabbi Wineberg insisted. He promised me I would be fulfilling his wish. So hesitantly, my wife and I piled into the car and made the trip to Rabbi Wineberg's shiva house.

We sat among the mourners and offered our condolences. Then we sat with Rabbi Wineberg and thanked him for seeing us.

"Nonsense," he said. "This is for a worthy cause. Now, sustaining a Chabad house is no easy feat and after doing my homework, I know I can trust you."

Silence hung between us while my wife and I racked our brains. What did he mean?

"I need you to raise \$100,000!"

Rabbi Wineberg's words weighed on me like a stone. Most Chabad houses don't need more than \$50,000 or \$60,000 to start. To a seasoned fundraiser, 100 grand may not seem like much more. But to me and my newly married wife, \$100,000 was more money than we could imagine.

But I knew I wasn't going to let this stand in my way. With sweat threatening to spill out of my every pore I accepted Rabbi Wineberg's condition and threw myself into the work. Six months later, my wife and I had the full \$100,000 ready to open our dream Chabad house right at UBC!

My first step when starting at the University of British Columbia was to find Jewish students. So I set up a table on campus and spoke to students as they walked by. I knew my approach could come off as aggressive and might turn some students away, but I also believe in Hashgacha Pratis. I knew Hashem would send the people I was supposed to meet my way.

One particularly warm day, a young man walked by and I called out to him.

"Are you Jewish?" I asked. The student stopped in his tracks and looked over at me. His eyebrows were furrowed in frustration.

"And what if I wasn't?" he shot. "Would you ignore me? Am I worthless then?"

I put my hand out to him slowly. "Of course not," I answered. "I happen to be looking for Jewish students but that doesn't make anyone else worthless!"

The man mulled over my words for a few seconds. I could see his eyes move while his brain worked.

"This is as bad as any other form of discrimination," he told me. "And I don't think it has any place on a college campus. You know, that's the problem with organized religion, they always think they're better than everyone else and the rules don't apply to them. Don't discriminate. Why does that have to be so hard? And you know what Rabbi, I'm even more Chassidic than you are!"

I stared at him, completely dumbfounded. His entire rant slipped from my brain while his final words settled in.

"More chassidish than I am?" I asked calmly. "How so?"

The boy flung his backpack around quickly. He then slammed it to the ground and rifled through the contents. It was two minutes before he handed me a folded piece of paper.

"What's this?" I asked.

The man narrowed his eyes. "Proof!"

I unfolded the paper and couldn't believe my eyes. Before me, was a detailed tree of family history, tracing this young man back to the Baal Shem Tov.

"It's Hashgacha Pratis," I exclaimed. "Divinely driven! I was supposed to meet you today."

The student took a step back and lowered his gaze. His muscles relaxed. I had expected another attack but instead, the boy started asking me questions. We spent some time discussing the meaning of his lineage and then scheduled to meet for coffee.

That coffee was the first of many. I stayed in touch with this young man all throughout his graduate degree and even saw him off to Eretz Yisrael where he found work as a professor in one of Israel's prestigious universities. I supported him in his growth in Yiddishkeit and have been lucky enough to see great success. Although his outward appearance isn't always so frum, inside, this man holds deep faith and devotion to Hashem.

Today, this young man has started keeping kosher, is working on keeping Shabbos, and sends me pictures of the Rebbe anytime he sees one hanging!



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When I began my shlichus, I heard a point that remains with me always – the epitome of a successful shliach is not the quantity of the people, but rather the quality. Torah teaches us that inside every person is a world, so if we treat just one person like they are the most important person, it is Tikkun Olam. Given this, I treat every person who passes through my door like my shlichus is solely for them.

A great example of this happened two years ago. A student came to my home for Shavuot. He wasn't affiliated - barely even knew what observing Judaism looked like - but since he was invited, he came. That night, he and I spent hours together learning. It was 4 am before he stopped asking questions.

"David," I said. "You have got to go to yeshiva. Look at all the questions you have; no way you're going to be able to get them all answered without learning!"

But Sam came from a secular life and had very little interest in giving up his freedom.

"I've got school Rabbi," he said. "And after school, I've got Birthright."

"Then give Mayanot a try," I answered. "It's in Israel and requires no commitment."

David shrugged his shoulders and dragged his feet. But I had stayed up all night answering his questions and wasn't about to give up. For every excuse he gave, I gave an answer. The sun began to rise when David finally agreed to give yeshiva a try.

After the chag and with the help of Chabad on Campus International, David booked his ticket and secured his spot at Mayanot. His plane was scheduled to leave on Feb. 28th, 2020. He packed his bags, checked in for his flight, and landed in Eretz Yisrael on March 1st - just days before the country locked down due to the start of the pandemic.

David was stuck in a foreign country, quarantining in a lonely dorm room. He called me, panicked.

"I don't know what to do Rabbi," he said. "I need to leave."

"You'll be okay," I answered. "I promise it will all work out. Hashgacha Pratis, David. Hashem wants you there!"

I hung up the phone, hoping what I said was true. David was at the forefront of my mind. I spent days worrying about him in quarantine. But when the two weeks were up and David was able to go down to the Beis Midrash and learn, everything changed. His phone calls became much lighter and his tone always held a smile.

"I'm learning so much, Rabbi!" David exclaimed. "So many of my questions are being answered. I finally feel like I'm understanding!"

I started looking forward to David's calls. I was excited to hear his updates and ecstatic to hear he was happy.

"Rabbi," he said one day. "Check your Facebook! I sent you a message!"

I logged onto the social media site and was stunned to find a picture of David sprawled out on a silver platter.

"What is this?" I asked.

David laughed. "My Pidyon HaBen!"

I laughed with him.

"And guess what else I did?" David said. "I had a bris!"

I felt such pride course through the phone. This man had walked into my home completely secular and was now officially a part of the Jewish nation. I couldn't have been prouder.

A few months later David eventually returned to the East Coast to finish his studies. At first, I was a bit worried, but I shouldn't have been. David is a strong member of Klal Yisrael and still today, he continues to flourish as he simultaneously continues his graduate school work and learning in Yeshivas Hadar Hatorah.

I truly believe Hashem has a plan for all of us - mostly because I've seen it time and time again. A few years ago, I saw it on the first day of school. Every year at UBC starts with Imagine Day. Imagine Day is a day when all the clubs on campus congregate and set up booths to attract new members. Naturally, since the beginning, we've been taking part in Imagine Day hoping to find Jewish students.

A few years ago, we had won a raffle for a small-time slot on stage. This was our chance to present Chabad to the campus on a much wider scale. My wife and I brainstormed ideas and eventually decided to spend our minute blowing the shofar.

Imagine Day comes, I climb onto the stage, give a small introduction to the shofar, and blow. About 20,000 eyes stared at me as they were passing by. I descend from the stage, not surrounded by the group of Jewish students that I had hoped to attract. With my ego blown, I weave through students to return to my booth and a voice calls from behind me!

"Hey Rabbi!" the voice calls. "Wait up!"

I turned around to a sweaty and out-of-breath young woman.

"Chabad?" she asked. "Do you run the Chabad table?"

I nod and lead her back to the booth. There I gave her cold water and asked her to take a seat. We wait a few minutes for her to catch her breath before speaking.

"I'm from Paris," she said. "I was walking around hoping to find a Jewish sorority or something when I heard the shofar."

"Not a sorority," I answered.

The woman laughed. "No, but Chabad is Jewish too!"

That year this young woman became a regular in my home. She came for chagim, Shabbos, shiurim, the ever-so-famous Sinai Scholars course, and everything in between. We became her home away from home. When the year ended, my family was sad to see her go.

We organized a short goodbye party for our graduating class and my wife and I wished her our best.

"Thank you for being a part of our family this year," I said.

The woman shook her head. "No, Rabbi, I have to thank you. When I heard your shofar that day, you saved me!"

I looked at her confused.

"I was on the phone with my mother back in Paris. I had spent over an hour walking around the clubs and hadn't found a single Jewish one, so I told my mother I would take a year off. I didn't want to be religious alone. Naturally, my mother was upset, but there was nothing she could do from so far away. Anyway, I hung up the phone and as I was slipping it into my bag I heard the shofar."

I shook my head, not believing what I was hearing.

"I was ready to walk away," she continued. "But your shofar blowing hit me so hard I knew it was a sign from Hashem!"

Not many people get to see the work of Hashem so clearly, but here was proof, Hashem truly is everywhere!

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