

IllumiNations

Issue 19 | Parsha Behar
/ Lag BaOmer 5782

CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.



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We Are Just Partners

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In 1976, when my in-laws first came here, things were pretty scary. The Soweto riots, the youth uprising, was just a few months later and many people were scared there would be a civil war. But the Rebbe consistently blessed the community here.

In 1990, on the day that Nelson Mandela was freed from prison the Rebbe told Rabbi Koppel Bacher to tell the community here that "Mashiach is coming soon. It will be good here until then and even better thereafter." Spreading the Rebbe's message has been one of the most beautiful parts of our shlichus!

One of the greatest gifts of our Shlichus was around the time of our ten-year anniversary on Shlichus when we were blessed to be joined here by partners in Shlichus, Rabbi Avi and Chanee Shlomo. Rabbi Shlomo is the head of the Cape Town Torah High School and Chanee is head of Jewish Studies at our Sinai Academy Jewish International School.

A few months after moving to Cape Town there were two bochorim who came to us to help out and walking one day in the street, someone stops them and says - Shalom! Though he himself wasn't Jewish, he said that his wife is and "We have two little kids. One of them, a little boy, is just nine months old!"

Realizing this meant the children were Jewish we quickly organized a bris for the young baby in our home. I remember sitting with the baby in



my lap as he looked into my eyes, and was just astonished how Hashem had sent this Yid to us and we were lucky enough to welcome him into the Jewish nation.

Over the years we stayed in touch with the family and were sad to hear of the father's passing. Boruch Hashem, the children are blessed with an incredible mother who does her best to raise her children in such a remarkable way.

These young boys studied in our elementary school and we watched them continue on to high school growing in Yiddishkeit and reconnecting to their roots. And then, just last year, the older brother of the young baby we had given a bris to all those years ago got a CTeen scholarship to study for a year in yeshiva in Israel. Today, he is learning Torah in a respected yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael.

About two years after we started, it was on a Yom Kippur day, and I was speaking before Yizkor about the importance of bringing Yiddishkeit into practical reality. Towards the end of my talk I said the following:

"Many people say to me jokingly, "Rabbi, should I come to Shul on Shabbos if it means that I will be driving or should I stay home?" I usually don't answer the question because people aren't usually looking for an answer. But if you are asking the question seriously, should I stay home and keep a proper Shabbos or drive to Shul the answer is definitely and clearly - stay home and keep Shabbos! It may seem like a crazy thing for you to do, so do me a favour, try it just once. Just keep one Shabbos properly"

I remember there was a stunned silence after that.

On the way out of Shul after Musaf I called over one fellow and said I would like to talk to him

about something. "It's okay rabbi. If you wanted to discuss what you mentioned in your speech, I think my wife and I are already convinced."

And so they were. A few weeks later, on Shabbos Parshas Noach, they kept Shabbos for that week. And the week after, and the week after that too... and for the many years since then their home has become fully Shomer Shabbos, Kashrus LeMehadrin, etc.

But there's more.

Two other families said to me "Rabbi, we would like to do it as well, but let's do it together, a few families keeping Shabbos for that week."

Boruch Hashem, in Cape Town we are blessed with an an incredible Achdus between all of the Rabonim from every Kehillah/Hashkafa/Nusach and so at our next monthly rabbis meeting I raised this idea which was unanimously accepted and supported and we began to prepare for a city-wide "Shabbat Across Cape Town." The idea was to encourage as many people as possible to take this one Shabbos and keep it properly together.

Boruch Hashem, it was an incredible success and after a series of three weeks of shiurim at Shuls across town giving people a crash-course in Hilchos Shabbos, over 120 people joined that weekend across Cape Town keeping the very first Shabbos of their lives.

Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein, who was then just beginning his tenure heard about the project and was very excited about it, so two years later he expanded it and created Shabbos Across South Africa which was renamed The Shabbos Project and today draws in millions of Jewish people to a stronger awareness of keeping Shabbos - all from two families in Cape Town who said let's do it together.

For the Rebbe's 120th birthday I made a resolution, 60 days before, to put on Tefillin with 120 people. For some Shluchim who are really focused, an average of two Tefillin a day might seem like all in a day's work but for me it was quite a stretch.

Those 60 days really changed me and gave me an incredible gift of focus on remembering what my Shlichus is. Every shiur, hospital visit, fundraising meeting, wedding or walk through an airport became an opportunity to meet Yidden and connect with them.

Mivtza Tefillin has always been a part of my life as it should hopefully be for every Chossid.



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In fact, our early days of Shlichus got a huge boost from a Brocho we received through that.

My wife and I started the preschool a year after we moved in. We knew we wanted a place for Jewish children to be educated in Yiddishkeit. However, given that we didn't have a Chabad House, the preschool was being run from a renovated garage. We knew we needed to expand and started looking for new properties.

This was shortly after we had come on Shlichus and the next year I was on my way to the Kinus Hashluchim in NY when walking up and down the aisles to see if there were any Yidden who would put on Tefillin, I found one Yid who was very excited to do so. When we got to JFK he asked me for my number so we could stay in touch. "If there's anything you need, I'd be happy to help!"

I thanked the man, wrote down his number, and saved it on my phone. Miraculously, the next week my wife and I found the perfect property for our expansion. Immediately I called this man up and asked him to donate.

"I'll cover the cost," he said. "I've been very blessed and would love to share any way I can!"

Filled with gratitude to this man and Hashem, I called up the sellers and immediately made an offer. It was quickly accepted. For two weeks we signed on dotted lines and waited for the transfer, eager to start building. Unfortunately, two weeks after signing we got a call from the man apologizing profusely.

There's been a huge change in my industry and the business deal I was working on fell through," he said. "I'm so sorry, but I don't think I can afford the house right now!"

With no other options, we turned to the bank and were astonished when they handed us a mortgage with the complete amount. We never expected to get a full loan. The miracle may not have happened in the way we expected, but we never would have made the offer without this man's pledge - that he had made after putting on Tefillin on a flight. Thanks to him we have a beautiful shul and preschool!

As our community grew, we started looking to purchase more properties. A realtor contacted me one day, telling me the house two doors down had just gone on the market. I told her to bring me an offer and then promised to have a down payment in 12 days. At the time, I had about \$5000 in the bank and needed an even \$250,000.

My first thought was to contact donors. I made some calls but was consistently met with disappointment. It seemed my fundraising efforts weren't working that well.

There was a Lubavitcher family from Johannesburg, Reb Shraga and Leah Jameson, with whom we had previously arranged that they would come to us for the Shabbos of Chai Elul that weekend. Shraga is a Yid with incredible chayus in Mivtza Tefillin and his stories of Yidden that he's brought closer to Yiddishkeit around the world are unbelievable so we were excited about having him participate in the Farbrengen.

"We need to be in Cape Town on Sunday regardless," he had told me when I originally asked him about coming. "My wife and I are looking into purchasing a vacation home in a beautiful Nature Reserve on the water so it will work out for us to spend Shabbos with you."

A beautiful Shabbos was celebrated and the Farbrengen was indeed truly uplifting. On Sunday morning after davening I asked Shraga and his wife if they would come take a tour of our existing school..

We walked through the building, pointing out any and all of the beautiful details in each classroom that we were so proud of. Then, standing in a classroom on the second floor I pointed out the house two doors away that we had put an offer on.

"Maybe you'll buy us that house so we can expand the school - for your vacation home!"

There was a silent moment and then Shraga said quietly, "Okay, we'll see what we can do!"

The next day he called me back and told me they decided not to buy the house on the water. "We just decided against it," he said. "We figured your Chabad house was more important!"

I was shocked. Their generosity was unlike anything I'd ever seen and I realized that these are true partners of the Rebbe in giving their heart and soul to bring Yidden closer to Hashem

Boruch Hashem, we have since been able to purchase the middle property as well and are now developing plans to build a proper campus.

You never know where you might find Jews. About a month ago I was in the airport when I heard a man yelling in Hebrew. He was frustrated and trying to stop someone from getting into his Uber.

"Hey," I called.

The frustrated Israeli turned towards me and seemed to lighten when seeing my attire.

"Have you put on Tefillin today?" I asked.

The man laughed. "No, I haven't."

I grabbed a yarmulke and Tefillin from my bag and helped him perform the important mitzvah. Then I snapped a picture of him and took his number to send it over. He thanks me and we go our separate ways, and I did not expect to hear from him again. But, Hashem had other plans.

The next day I get a call from the Israeli.

"I can't find my great-grandfather's grave," he told me. "The Uber driver wouldn't drive me into the cemetery and I don't know where else to turn."

"You came to the right place," I assured him. "I'll meet you with my driver tomorrow. Together we'll find his kever!"

The next day, the young Israeli directed me to a small Jewish cemetery I never knew existed. Vines grew wildly and fallen leaves covered the ground. I had driven by this cemetery for years and never knew of its existence.

"Your great-grandfather lived here?" I asked him.

The Israeli nodded. He told me about his great-grandfather traveling to South Africa and then passing away at 46. He shared stories about his life in Yerushalayim and how most of his family isn't religious anymore.

"I wanted to find my roots," he said. "I needed something to connect to."

I drop the Israeli back off at his hotel and sit in the car in silence. His story moved me. The next week I take my community back to the small cemetery and introduce them to the Jews of our past.

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