

# IllumiNations

Issue 36 | Parsha Ki Savo 5782

CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.



DollarDaily.org

*Rabbi Yossi and Mariashi Groner, Chabad of Charlotte, North Carolina*

## Shlichus Ripple Effect

*As a bochur, I visited North and South Carolina a few times on Merkos shlichus, a shlichus for bochurim who travel to small cities during the summer.*

One time after I returned, Rabbi Chadakov, the Rebbe's secretary, told me to stay in contact with the Jews I met since neither state had an official shliach yet. I continued visiting for yomim tovim and brought other bochurim with me.

In 1980, when the Carolinas were ready for their own shliach, Rabbi Kotlarsky, on behalf of Rabbi Chadakov and Merkos, suggested we move there. I already had a strong connection to the Carolina communities, so we wrote to the Rebbe, who agreed, on the condition that we build a mikvah immediately after moving. The Rebbe wanted to emphasize that it is improper to live in a city without a kosher mikvah.

This meant we needed to acquire a property right away, rather than renting a home. It was challenging, but we bought a house with ample room in the basement for our mikvah, and within a year, our mikvah was built.



Dr. Paul Goldstein, a young professor at Charlotte, NC's *University of North Carolina*, was running late. He'd been doing research in a Manhattan university and needed to catch a train back to his parents' house in Long Island. It was a typical Sunday afternoon in the city. He was fighting his way through crowds of noisy tourists, bustling businessmen, and New Yorkers out to enjoy the day. He felt a sudden tap on his shoulder.

"Excuse me sir, are you Jewish?"

Turning around, Dr. Goldstein saw a teenager dressed in a black hat and suit, standing outside a converted RV with "*Mitzvah Tank*" proudly decorating its perimeter. Dr. Goldstein looked at the young man's earnest and hopeful face to the tefillin he held in his hand. A quick glance at his watch told him he had very little time to catch his train. He quickly weighed his options. Saying yes would mean a lengthy conversation. He'd insist he had no time, and the Chabad teen would promise that it "*wouldn't take too long.*"

"No, I'm not. Sorry," Dr. Goldstein replied, choosing the easy way out.

As he rushed towards the train station, he could practically *feel* the young man's disappointment. Once he boarded and settled in his seat, he replayed the short interaction in his mind.

*I just denied my past, my heritage, my religion, he thought to himself in horror... How could I reject G-d like that? The thought gave him no rest, and he started to cry. The next Jewish opportunity that comes my way, I will accept, he vowed. I'll make this right.*

The next morning, he flew back home to Charlotte. He opened his letter box and sorted through the accumulated mail. One brightly colored flier caught his eye: "*Chabad of Charlotte invites you to join us for a series of classes on the Chumash.*" Dr. Goldstein, remembering his oath, attended the class, which happened to be scheduled that very night. To his delight, he enjoyed it quite a bit.

The entire trajectory of his life shifted in that one hour. He came with me to the Rebbe's farbrengen (12 Tammuz 5744), registered his children for our Jewish day school, started keeping Shabbos, kashrus, tefillin, mezuzah, and more. We learned together often, and he grew more and more committed to the frum lifestyle.

One day, he approached me with a worried crease in his forehead.

"I was just offered an important position at a university in El Paso," he told me. "Career wise, it's the perfect opportunity - but I'm just starting my journey to Yiddishkeit. How can I move somewhere without Jewish infrastructure?"

"Write to the Rebbe and explain your dilemma," I advised him.

"*M'Hashem mitzadei gaver,*" read the Rebbe's reply. "Everything is ordained by hashgacha pratit. Clearly, Hashem wants you to go to El Paso and illuminate it with the light of Torah and mitzvos."

Dr. Goldstein cried reading the Rebbe's reply. He was humbled and honored to have received such clear direction - but now, he would have to leave us.

I called Rabbi Lazaroff, the head shliach of Texas, and told him about Dr. Goldstein and the Rebbe's letter. Back then, it was rare for a Chabad house to be established in a small community. Rabbi Lazaroff, following the Rebbe's instruction to print a Tanya in every city, had done so in El Paso - but until this point, that was the full extent of Chabad's influence there. The Rebbe's response to Dr. Goldstein changed everything.

Dr. Goldstein moved to El Paso, befriending any Jews he found there. He collaborated with Rabbi Lazaroff to raise the funds for a local Chabad House. Thanks to their efforts, a short while later, Rabbi Yisroel Greenberg and his family became the shlichim to El Paso.

Our lives intertwined further when one of the Greenberg boys married my daughter.

I always wished I could find that bochur who stopped Dr. Goldstein on the streets of Manhattan. I'd like to tell him the power of *mitzvah gorreres mitzvah*, and how much good had come from one man who said "*no.*"

"I'm really worried about my brother," confessed the woman on the phone. "He's not frum, he's never been married, and he just ran off to South Carolina with a non-Jewish woman! We've reached out to him, but he's completely cut us off. All we have is the name of the town. Do you think you can help?"

The town she'd mentioned was tiny. It didn't even have a single traffic light! It was the early 80's, and



DollarDaily.org

South Carolina didn't have shlichim of its own yet, so it fell under our jurisdiction. It took some detective work, but because he, a white man, had run off with an African American woman, it was easier to trace them than you would think. In those days, an interracial couple in the deep south was... *unusual* enough for me to pick up their trail. The town sheriff was able to furnish me with her name, but not her address.

I looked her up in the phonebook and found a few matching entries. I dialed number after number until I hit paydirt. Unfortunately, they were not happy to hear from me.

"Leave us alone!" the man warned me. "I want my family out of my life. I *definitely* don't need a rabbi sticking his nose in my business! I'm not interested - so don't call again."

The family was pressuring me to speak with their brother in person. I knew I couldn't show up dressed as I was. One guy loaned me a red baseball cap, another gave me a brown shirt, and, thus disguised, I was ready. His sister told me that deli on rye was his absolute favorite, so I made sure to pack a few kosher sandwiches as well.

The drive took about three hours. I stopped some kids and asked if they knew where this woman lived. They directed me to a house three blocks away. When the man came to the door, he took one look at me and said, "You must be a Lubavitcher! I told you to leave us alone!"

"What gave it away?" I asked, looking down at my impeccable disguise.

"It's written all over your face! Get out - I told you already, I'm not interested." He was about to slam the door in my face.

"I brought a deli on rye!" I said, holding up my cooler.

His eyes lit up. "Now, *that* I'll take!" he said.

"Sorry. It's a package deal," I answered. "You'll have to let us *both* inside."

He couldn't resist, so he invited me in. We spoke for hours; I don't really remember what we talked about, but it must have had a profound effect on him. The next week, his sister told me he'd left his non-Jewish partner and returned to his job in New York.

fascinated with Yiddishkeit. She loved watching Rebbe videos during playdates with our kids.

She kept urging her parents to take on more observances, but they were hesitant. Their son was also very involved, and he begged his parents to let him wear tzitzis at home, just like he did in school.

Antonio approached me and asked, "What is this *zit*? I know it's not an Italian dish. My son asked me to buy him a pair, but I want to know what it is first."

I explained to him exactly what tzitzis were and what they meant.

He came back a short while later.

"I feel inadequate in my marriage," he told me. "Sheila is Jewish, sure, but I'm not. My kids are so passionate about it. I want to help and support them. I'm thinking about converting. Can you help?"

We started to learn together, but as I described the conversion process, Antonio balked.

"That's so much work," he said.

Looking for an easier way to achieve his goal, he converted through the Reform synagogue. A few months later, he asked to meet with me privately.

"I don't feel any different than before," he admitted. "Sunday was switched with Saturday; *church* is now *temple*... but nothing's really changed. I don't feel connected to Judaism like I did when I was learning with you. Can we pick up our classes where we left off?"

We began learning together again, and after a year or two, he was ready to undergo a *giyur k'halachah*. Antonio was a successful business executive, so committing to Shabbos and kashrus were difficult, but his determination and love for Yiddishkeit overcame it all. He had a proper *giyur* and kosher re-marriage to Sheila.

The entire family became completely frum. After a few years, when he was offered a job in another city with a larger Jewish community anyhow, we urged him to take it. They joined the Chabad community there and fully settled into their new life.

Their daughter, the little girl that started it all, is now a shlucha in Europe.

them. My wife was overwhelmed and poured out her heart to the Rebbe. Although she usually wrote in Yiddish, this time, she expressed in English, "I feel like a complete mess!"

The Rebbe responded by annotating her letter, circling the word "mess."

*You (together with your husband) have already had tremendous success in your holy work. You call that a "mess?!!!" May you share good news. I will mention you at the Tziyon of my father-in-law, the Rebbe Rayatz.*

The start of the school year was two weeks away, and we couldn't cut through the red tape that surrounded our building. Parents were calling, trying to figure out what was going on, and we were all very nervous about the situation.

We wrote to the Rebbe, detailing the issues and asking for guidance.

"Hashem will fulfill all that you need. May you share good news always. I will mention you at the Tziyon of my father-in-law," was the Rebbe's response.

We called the parents and told them not to worry; we had a place.

"Where?" they all wanted to know.

"We aren't sure," we answered, truthfully, "But the Rebbe promised everything would work out."

It was incredibly complicated, but within two weeks, everything fell into place. The red tape miraculously unraveled, and we got our permits in record time. The building we found was perfectly suited for our needs.

*\*Names were changed to protect privacy*

**DollarDaily.org**  
a Project of  
**YadLShiach.org**  
and **COLlive.com**



Sheila\* was unhappy with the public school system, so she decided to send her children to our school instead - even though her husband, Antonio\*, wasn't Jewish. Her daughter was particularly

Trying to set up a new school, while also being a busy shlucha, as well as a mother and wife can be a tough balancing act. Our children were very young, and it was hard to find proper childcare for

## THINK YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING WITH A DOLLAR? THINK AGAIN.

- Your dollar will help Jewish communities all over the world.
- Your dollar will show shlichim in communities near and far that their dedication is valued and appreciated.
- For less than the price of a cup of coffee, you can make tzedaka part of your day.



**\$403 +**  
DONATING PER DAY

**\$89293 +**  
ALREADY DONATED TO ORGANIZATIONS

**\$147095 +**  
TO BE GIVEN OVER THE NEXT 365 DAYS

**JOIN US FOR JUST \$32 A MONTH! [www.dollardaily.org](http://www.dollardaily.org)**