

ILLUMINATIONS

CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.

Rabbi Levi and Leah Lipskar, The Shul at Hyde Park, Johannesburg, South Africa

Returning Home, Chabad of Hyde Park Part II

By Chaya Chazan

My father sat by Michael's* bedside, holding his limp hand and reciting Tehillim fervently. It was heartrending to see this vibrant young man who'd already accomplished so much, pale and lifeless in the hospital bed.

Suddenly, my father felt Michael's listless hand squeeze his. It was faint, but unmistakable.

"That's the first movement he's made since he slipped into his coma!" the nurse cried excitedly. "That's an excellent sign!"

My father departed from the hospital and flew to the Rebbe's Ohel in New York. He took a moment to daven for Michael and say a few kapitelach of Tehillim for him.

It was the summer of 1994, and cell phone ownership was still new and uncommon. My father had a mobile phone, but there weren't many that had his

number. So he was surprised when the ringing of his cell phone shattered the silence. Annoyed, my father muted the call and replaced it in his pocket. A moment later, his phone rang again. Once again, my father muted it, shooting apologetic looks at the people around him. The mystery caller refused to give up. The phone rang over and over, until my father finally stepped outside and answered.

"Rabbi, Rabbi!" Michael's father cried. "He woke up! Michael woke up!"

"Baruch Hashem!" my father exclaimed, his face breaking out into a joyful smile. "When did this happen?"

"Just a couple of minutes ago!" Michael's father answered.

"Unbelievable! That's exactly when I was praying for him!"

"Michael refuses to speak to anyone until he's spoken with you," Michael's father explained. "When will you be back?"

"I'm on my way to the airport now!" my father said, grabbing his things and running outside. "I'll be back in South Africa as soon as I can!"

When my father visited Michael, he was delighted to see him sitting up in bed, with renewed color in his cheeks.

"I need to tell you what happened before I woke up," Michael said, his voice earnest, but low from disuse. "A man with a white beard and piercing blue eyes came and told me to get up. He told me I have a family and a business to care for that would give me the opportunity to do so much more good. *But I'm too weak, Rabbi*, I complained. The man took me by the

hands and pulled me up. At that moment, I regained consciousness."

My father sat silent for a long moment. Then he fished out his wallet and revealed a picture of the Rebbe.

"Yes! That's him!" Michael cried.

"This is the Lubavitcher Rebbe," my father explained. "I was at his gravesite, praying for your recovery. It was exactly while I was praying for you that the Rebbe appeared to you and pulled you awake."

Sam* called, asking to meet with my father.

"Welcome! How can we help you?" I asked, as he approached me and my father.

"I'm not sure," he answered. "The Rebbe sent me."

Of course, my father and I asked for clarification. He told us he was having business trouble and was at a loss. The night before, the Rebbe appeared in his dream and told him to seek his representative in South Africa.

That was the beginning of a long and fruitful friendship, as Sam soon became an active member of the community.

"It's the strangest thing," he remarked, a few months later. "For many years now, I've seen the number 770 pop up throughout my business dealings. The total of one order would inexplicably be \$7,700. A rare item would be auctioned off for \$770,000. It was everywhere, but I never understood the significance. *Now I do!*"

Baruch Hashem, after following the Rebbe's advice, Sam's business took a turn. Now, whenever Sam has a big deal coming up, he calls and pledges a generous donation to tzedakah.

"I don't need the Rebbe to tell me twice about the connection between financial and spiritual success!" he jokes.

I was extremely motivated to buy a property and build a Chabad house there in honor of Warren, who'd already donated a substantial amount and wanted it so dearly. But if I needed any further motivation during the long months and anxious moments ahead, there were so many instances of hashgacha pratit that felt like Hashem's special message to me to carry on.

Jay*, the son of our chairman, was the one who found the property. He remained involved throughout the process, even though he was also busy planning his wedding.

He saw the building at auction for ten million rand. When I Googled the owner and managers, a familiar name popped up - a former classmate of mine from Torah Academy.

"Hey, Chaim*!" I said, after calling him up. "I see you're in the big leagues now!"



Chaim laughed. "The auctioneer told me a rabbi placed a bid for the building. I was waiting to see which rabbi it was. I'm glad it's you! How much can you pay?"

"Knocking it down from ten million to six million would be nice," I answered, half jokingly.

"The board wants eight," Chaim replied. "But if you can give a down payment of six, we can work out a deal for the other two million rand."

Having a friend at the company in the perfect position to help us - it was a Divine sign we were on the right path.

Warren had already started the fund with his initial one million rand deposit. Now, I needed to collect the other five.

Although the contract expected the full payment within 30 days, the company gave me all the time I needed to collect the six million. It took half a year, but I was finally able to call and let their lawyer know he could transfer the property ownership to us.

While a property transfer usually only takes a few weeks, the months were dragging by without any word from the lawyer. I was also worried about the remaining two million rand, and how we'd afford the monthly payments for such a large mortgage.

Just then, I heard that Mr. Lewis* was back in town. He was a successful businessman who'd moved to London years before. I asked for a meeting, hoping to catch up, offer him tefillin - and ask for a donation for our new Chabad house.

I wrote a short letter to the Rebbe, asking for the meeting to be a success.

Mr. Lewis greeted me warmly and we chatted for a while, catching up on the last few years. Before I could even bring up the topic of our Chabad house, Mr. Lewis leaned forward and asked, "How much do you still owe on the property?"

A little taken aback, I answered, "Two million rand."

"No problem. Consider your property paid off in full," Mr. Lewis offered.

I thanked him profusely - and offered a silent thanks to the Rebbe for answering me so speedily!

The day of Jay's wedding finally dawned, and I flew to Cape Town to attend. As I drove to the venue, I received a message from the lawyer that the property had finally been transferred.

As I stood under the chuppah to officiate the wedding, I wished the bride and groom a hearty mazal tov.

"I have a surprise for you, Jay," I announced. "As some of you may know, Jay has been instrumental in helping our Chabad house find its new home. Jay, I'm happy to announce that *today* - the day of your wedding - we are finally the owners of the property. After months of no movement, it's your zechus that pushed it forward!"

Another astounding instance of Heavenly assistance and love.

There was no question who our builder would be. Redmond* had built my father's first Chabad house in Hyde Park, he'd remodeled the garage we were using as our temporary shul, and he'd also built an extension onto the school building. He and our family had a long standing friendship, and we were excited to ask him to join our latest venture.

One day, a shliach from the head office of Chabad Lubavitch approached my father, nonplused. "I overheard Redmond speaking with the HR manager. Apparently, they grew up in the same area and attended the same school." He took a breath. "She asked if he attended such-and-such church. Redmond said his family never went to church - because his mother is Jewish."

My father told Redmond about it, explaining that Judaism is traced through matrilineal descent. "That means *you're* Jewish, Redmond!"

When Redmond told me how much building our shul meant to him, I explained that he now held a chazakah - a halachic special claim, earned after three repetitions of a certain action. Redmond was moved and delighted to hear that his partnership meant as much to us as it did to him.

The next day, I had my regular, weekly gemara chavrusa with Harry.* Since we were deep into Bava Metziyos, I shared the story of Redmond's chazakah with him.

As we turned the page to begin our chavrusa, we both gasped in amazement. Right there on the page, for the first time in our masechta, was a full discussion about - chazakah.

It's been a long road, and although the building is nearly complete, there's still more to do. But these little instances of hashgacha pratis - so clear for those willing to look - are proof that Hashem is guiding every step.

"Rabbi, can you help?" Brenda* was sobbing on the phone.

My heart sank. "Is it your mother?" I asked.

In reply, Brenda sobbed louder. Her mother, Erin*, a long time member of our shul, had been in a coma for a long time. Through her tears, Brenda explained that the hospital had given them notice that her time was quickly approaching.

"Can you please visit her?" Brenda asked. "Say the prayers with her, or whatever it is you need to do? Help her soul transition peacefully."

Of course, I agreed and visited Erin the next day. It was clear, just from looking at her, why the doctors had numbered her days.

I sat beside her bed, and recited Tehillim and viduy. It was just a few days before Rosh Hashanah, so I asked the nurse if I could blow the shofar.

"Don't worry; I'll do it as quietly as possible," I assured her.

"She's in a coma," the nurse pointed out, looking at me strangely.

"I know. But her soul can still hear these holy sounds."

In deference to the restful, quiescent atmosphere, I muted my breaths so the shofar's powerful blasts were reduced to quiet, but still poignant, soulful calls.

As I began the third series of blasts, Erin's eyes flickered open. She abruptly sat up in bed, causing me to fumble and nearly drop the shofar, while the nurses stifled their screams.

Blowing the shofar is meant to serve as a wake-up call - a literal one in this case!

Erin recovered and enjoyed a few more years with her family before returning her neshama to its Maker.

**Names changed to protect privacy*



OCTOBER 2026 DAILY DONATIONS

October 19
8 Heshvan

\$633

Donating to:
Chabad of South Lake County



October 20
9 Heshvan

\$636

Donating to:
Chabad of Greater Gainesville & Manassas, Virginia



October 21
10 Heshvan

\$632

Donating to:
Chabad S. Cruz



October 22
11 Heshvan

\$632

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Chabad Uganda



October 23
12 Heshvan

\$632

Donating to:
Chabad of the Central Valley



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13 Heshvan

\$632

Donating to:
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October 25
14 Heshvan

\$631

Donating to:
Chabad Har Nof, Dimona

