

IllumiNations

Issue 23 | Parsha Behaalotecha 5782

CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.



DollarDaily.org

We're not just a shul; we're family

*Rabbi Mordechai and Sorale Rodal
of Norwood, Johannesburg, SA*

*I had been to South Africa on shlichus as a bochur and even then,
I noticed that South Africans are quite traditional.*

So many of them came to shul out of guilt or obligation, although they sat in the back and talked about sports. I wanted to open a shul for non-shul goers; an American style Chabad house. When I opened my shul, that became our motto: "the shul for non-shul goers." We placed an emphasis on personal connections and explained the davening in simple English. We started in a rented classroom in the local public school. Then we moved into our home, eventually bought a property, and Baruch Hashem we now have our own beautiful building. Our motto now is, "We're not just a shul; we're family." Over the years, we've influenced a number of people, and with the Rebbe's brachos, our Chabad House has produced two or three minyanim of shomer Shabbos Yidden.

I have a minhag that when someone gets an aliyah, I allow them to choose between pledging a monetary gift or a mitzvah. Although this makes



our financial committee members uncomfortable, the results speak for themselves.

One of my guys was going to America before Pesach. Before he left, he came up for an aliyah and I asked him to commit to selling his chametz. He promised to do so, but as time passed, he forgot about it. He was walking in Manhattan on Yud Alef Nissan when he saw two young men dressed in black suits, white shirts, and black fedoras. It reminded him of me and he suddenly remembered what he had promised. He called out, "Hey Jews!" and ran to catch up to them. He was a huge, balding, imposing fellow. They took one look at him and quickly ran in the opposite direction. He continued running after them yelling, "Hey Jews!" They ran into their mitzvah tank (RV) and shut the door in his face. He started banging on the door, screaming, "Hey Jews, open up!" They must have been absolutely terrified. He finally shouted, "Open up! I need to sell my chametz!" Those were the magic words. "Well why didn't you say so to begin with?" they asked, as they finally opened the door with relieved smiles.

When the minyan got too big for my home, we rented premises at the other end of the main avenue in Norwood. It was a busy boulevard, full of restaurants, bars, and shops. I made a point to say "Good Shabbos" to each person as I walked down the avenue on my way to and from shul.

There was one woman who I saw often, and week by week, we started to talk more. She told me that her husband was terminally ill and wanted to talk to a rabbi. As it was Shabbos, there wasn't much I could do, so I told her to call me during the week. The call never came. She couldn't bring herself to do it because it would

be confirmation that her husband was actually dying. Every week I urged her to call me, hoping that she would before it was too late.

One evening I was in the hospital visiting another congregant. As I exited his room and walked down the hallway, I saw a frum family that looked agitated. While they waited for their family member to be treated, the father, who was in aveilus, had already missed Mincha and now needed a minyan for Maariv. Their family had seven men. I was the eighth. The man I had just visited was the ninth. We looked around for the tenth, but none of the doctors, nurses, or patients seemed to be Jewish or available.

One nurse finally said that there was a Jewish patient, but he's too sick to leave his bed. However, he agreed to be part of the minyan if everyone would gather in his room. When he told me his name, I recognized it from the mishebeirach list. I asked him, "Are you David Goldblum? I'm Rabbi Rodal!"

He was dumbfounded. "Rabbi Rodal! I've been asking my wife to call you for weeks!"

I arranged to visit him the next day and he finally got to ask all his questions. He passed away shortly after, having met the rabbi he asked for due to a stroke of clear hashgacha pratit.

Clive ate in the same place in the same restaurant every week. As I continued to wish him good Shabbos week after week, we got to know each other, although I wasn't sure if that was a good thing. Clive had been convicted of murder and had served a jail sentence. He was a dangerous man with a short fuse and was known and feared throughout the city. He hated organized religion and rabbis, but for some reason, we hit it off.

As Rosh Hashanah was coming up, I urged him to hear the shofar. "Ain't gonna happen Rabbi," he answered. "I hate rabbis and religion and I'm definitely not going to any shul."

I assured him, "You don't need to go to shul. Come to my house at 4:00 and I will blow the shofar for you."

Sure enough, at four o'clock on the dot, he came to my house to hear the shofar.

We were finishing up our meal, so I invited him to join us for tea. He was usually very talkative, but now he was absolutely silent. You could see the effect the shofar had on him.

From that day, Clive was a changed man. We had a set learning session once a week where



DollarDaily.org

we would discuss Chumash (minus Rashi because he was a rabbi) and he was really enjoying it.

He would often boast about his great health and strength. He had only been in a hospital once in his life, and that was to remove bullets from his body. Out of the blue, this infallible man was struck with cancer that did not care how robust he had been before. During his illness he became more committed to Yiddishkeit, jumping out of his hospital bed to show me how eager he was to put on tefillin.

Clive passed away on Rosh Hashanah, exactly two years to the day since he started his spiritual metamorphosis.

A girl in our community fell at school and hit her head, causing her to lose consciousness. Her case was so critical, she had to be airlifted to the hospital. The doctors examined her and said they would attempt to wake her from her induced coma in a few days time, but there was no telling how much damage happened and what she would be like.

That night, my wife and I went to visit her in the hospital. We spoke with the girl's mother for a while and then I asked if it would be alright if I went in and said some Tehillim at her bedside.

Within two minutes of my sitting down and starting to say Tehillim, she opened her eyes and smiled at me. She recovered quickly and was discharged from the hospital well before the time they were going to try to wake her! .

David was held up at gunpoint as he was driving into the Chabad House property, about to attend a shiur for the first time in his life. Boruch Hashem the hijacking didn't scare him off, and as he became more involved with us, he became increasingly more observant.

A little while later, David got very sick, but the doctors didn't know what was causing his illness. In addition to the excruciating and constant pain, the illness was affecting his eyesight. He went to the country's top specialists, but no one could help him. I remember him sitting in our lounge which then served as our shul, writhing in pain and endlessly massaging his pressure points in an attempt to alleviate some of his suffering.

The doctors told him that total blindness wasn't a question of if, but when. David began to prepare for his future. It was heartbreaking seeing a young guy having to use a stick to get around and refusing to get married so that his wife wouldn't be "stuck" with taking care of him. And things were just getting worse.

I advised him to write to the Rebbe. I explained to him how some people open a sefer of Igros to get answers from the Rebbe. He called me excitedly and said, "I got an answer! You won't believe this!

"I asked if I am doing the wrong thing regarding religion. It seems that the more involved I get, the more I suffer. Maybe I am not meant to be religious. There were two letters on the page that I opened. One letter spoke about not getting depressed despite having difficulties. That was clearly about my health. The next letter spoke about the fifth son at the Seder. The Rebbe described an unaffiliated Jew that doesn't even know what Pesach is. Rabbi, the description fit me to a tee. It was like reading about myself! At the end of the letter, the Rebbe said that when the fifth son finds out about the Seder, he should jump in and get more involved with his Judaism."

After receiving such a clear answer from the Rebbe, David accelerated his involvement in Yiddishkeit.

I don't usually attend the Kinus Hashluchim in New York, but that year, I did. My first stop is always the Ohel. I take in my shul list and think about each person and what they need. When I got to his name, I said, "Rebbe, you've gotta come through for this guy. I don't know what to tell him anymore." That Monday morning, David woke up without any pain at all! I didn't even know about it until I arrived back in South Africa and checked in with him.

Months later, I told David's story in shul. Mark was in the congregation and as usual, he couldn't let something go without challenging it. He stood up in front of everyone and brashly said, "Rabbi, I don't believe you."

David gave him his doctor's phone number and challenged him to call and see for himself. The next week, we all pressed Mark to see what had happened. "The doctor didn't want to say it's a miracle, but he did say he couldn't explain it," Mark admitted.

About 4-5 years ago, a local shliach decided that he would make a mitvta to have a menorah in every Jewish home. I told my congregation. "I want each person to think of a family they can give it to who would not have a menorah otherwise."

One family couldn't think of someone who fit the bill. "What about Jack?" the wife suggested. Jack's wife and child had died and he was all on his own. He didn't have much money, and lived at the animal shelter where he worked. Although he lived some distance from Johannesburg, the family drove out and delivered the menorah to him.

A few months later, Jack was informed that he was being let go. As he lived on the premises, this would leave him not only jobless, but also homeless. A friend of his knew of an open position in a shelter in another town, but Jack had no money to travel there. He started out on foot, walking the entire distance. He was exhausted when he finally got there, only to find out that the position had already been filled.

Jack felt completely despondent. He had nothing and no one. He tried calling some rabbis whose names he found on the internet, but no one answered his calls. He could see no way out. He decided it was pointless to go on, and selected a sturdy tree that would hold his weight. Suddenly, he remembered the family that drove such a distance just to give him a menorah. He phoned them to get my number.

I had a friend who lived in the area, and asked him to drop whatever he was doing and meet with Jack. He spoke with him, gave him some money, and gave him renewed hope for his future.

The menorah saved his life.

DollarDaily.org

a Project of

**YadLShliach.org
and COLlive.com**

COL LIVE

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 shluchim 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.


DollarDaily.org

\$334 +
DONATING PER DAY

\$61933 +
ALREADY DONATED TO ORGANIZATIONS

\$121910 +
TO BE GIVEN OVER THE NEXT 365 DAYS

JOIN US FOR JUST \$32 A MONTH! www.dollardaily.org