

IllumiNations

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CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.



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Dedicated to the Memory of Henya Federman - beloved and devoted Shlucha in the Virgin Islands

Rabbi Tuvia and Chaya Teldon, Lubavitch of Long Island, New York

In For the Long Haul

By Chaya Chazan

Neither of us grew up in a religious home, but we were both fired up to join the Rebbe's shlichus brigade! I was plucked from Kansas and brought to the newly formed Yeshivas Tiferes Bachurim in Morristown in 1972.

My wife, Chaya, who grew up in Detroit, attended Beis Rivka in the 60's before Machon Chana existed, and we both received a strong education. We knew we wanted to join the Rebbe's army.

On Yud Shevat, 1977, one day before our wedding, the Rebbe sent notice that he'd be sending off the 2nd delegation of new shluchim to Tzfat. Of course, we sent in our names for consideration, but were not chosen. The couples who merited to be chosen had two weeks to pack up their homes, get their passports in order, and prepare for their new life in Eretz Yisroel.

I was passing by 770 a few days later when I was stopped by Rabbi Yosef Chitrik, who'd just been chosen to join the new group of shluchim to Tzfat. He asked me to take over his weekly learning group in Long Island. We didn't know each other at all, so I'm not sure what made him ask me, but I agreed nonetheless.

After a few months of weekly classes, the members of the group asked us to open a summer camp for their chil-

dren. At that time, there were many active Jewish communities on Long Island, but very little Orthodox Jewish activity, and no Jewish day camps at all.

The summer camp was a great success, but the community soon faced a worrisome issue: a national missionary group was specifically targeting the children at SUNY Stony Brook. Desperate, they called Chabad for reinforcements - as quickly as possible! Seeing as we already had roots in the area, we were offered a permanent shliach position in Long Island. We wrote to the Rebbe, who gave us his blessings, and we were excited to accept.

During that period, the concept of shlichus primarily revolved around sending individuals overseas or appointing them as leaders of states. The idea of having a shliach in the New York area, particularly in the bustling metropolitan centers of the tri-state vicinity, was virtually unheard of.

In those days, embarking on shlichus meant venturing to distant lands. Therefore, being the first shluchim under

Tzach was a new step, which eventually had a profound impact on the broader Jewish community in Long Island, Westchester, and across the five boroughs. The current landscape of Long Island, NYC, and New Jersey is teeming with shluchim.

While it was a privilege to be among the first shluchim sent on this type of shlichus, it brought with it a set of challenges. Our biggest worry was finances. We left Crown Heights with whatever was left of our wedding gifts, \$20,000 in pledges, and few other resources. I didn't have the first clue about fundraising or budgeting. Although we were just a short drive from Brooklyn and its centers of Jewish life, we were marooned on an island. It was just me, my wife, and almost 400,000 non-Orthodox and mostly unaffiliated Jews.

We started off at Stony Brook University. The first order of business was locating a house close to campus. We explored a few viable options, but each time we wrote to the Rebbe for a bracha, we received no answer.

Our new friends, Sue and Larry Michel a'h, saved our shlichus. "You probably haven't received an answer from the Rebbe because you're supposed to have *our* house!" they told us. "We'll move to Crown Heights for a year, and you can take over our home."

That year-long grace period allowed us to establish our shlichus without the added expense of monthly rent. If we'd rented any of those other houses, we probably would have been in the red in a matter of months, and would have had no choice but to pack up and move back to Crown Heights.

Early on in the shlichus, I approached Tzach, the organization founded by the Rebbe to further Yiddishkeit amongst established Jewish communities, and asked for support. I wanted to know if they'd "have my back" when times were tough.

After deliberation, I was told, "When the Jews were conquering Eretz Yisroel, they were advised to stage a three-fronted attack, and to leave the fourth side open. The enemy, knowing they had an avenue of escape, would fight half-heartedly, and be easier to vanquish. You should consider yourself surrounded on all sides. You have no escape route. You're in this shlichus for good! Give it your all, or come back to Crown Heights!" In other words, they were not going to bail me out.

Before agreeing to lend us their house, Sue and Larry stipulated that we host them whenever they wanted to return from Crown Heights. Of course, we agreed. So, when Larry called me one day to tell me he and some bochurim would be visiting that night, I immediately agreed and asked what I could do to prepare for them.

"Don't worry about it!" Larry told me, hastily. "We'll bring all our own stuff. Don't wait up for us!"



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Ignoring this last piece of advice, I settled on the couch. I nodded off, but was awoken by the arrival of a car around 2 AM. I jumped to open the door, and stood there, shocked and speechless.

Two bochurim swiftly leapt out of a windowless cargo van, forcefully swinging open the back doors. My eyes widened, as I beheld a body bag, lying motionless on the van's floor. To my *immense* relief, the bag began to stir, indicating signs of life. The bochurim carefully maneuvered the bag downstairs into the basement. Mesmerized, I observed as they pressed down on a concealed section of the wall. Like a secret passageway, it swung open, revealing an intricately hidden room that had eluded my knowledge until that moment.

It was then that I discovered the purpose of this clandestine chamber – it served as a “deprogramming room,” meticulously constructed by Sue and Larry to aid their endeavors in rescuing Jewish children from the clutches of cults. Rabbi Shea Hecht, renowned for his involvement in such efforts, was intimately connected to this undertaking.

During our first year, we concentrated on combating the many missionaries and cults preying on susceptible Jewish students. I set up a table on the quad, alongside the Moonies and missionaries. Whenever I spotted a Jewish-looking student talking with one of them, I made sure to approach, introduce myself, and try to correct any misconceptions they may have just been told.

The 70's were a wild time, especially on college campuses, but we tried our best to be proactive. We opened *Noah's Ark*, a kosher coffee house and hangout where Jewish students were encouraged to gather, meet other Jews, ask their questions, and have meaningful discussions.

When Mrs. Schifren* called me, sobbing about her daughter, Julia*, she told me she was being influenced by one of her professors. He was a cult member, and was recruiting his students to attend the cult's meetings. Julia had already attended a few, and her mother was terrified she'd soon lose her daughter completely.

After much searching, I managed to track Julia down.

“I heard you're a gifted violinist,” I told her. “Could you perform a small piece for us at *Noah's Ark*?”

Julia agreed, and came to perform at *Noah's Ark* the next week.

“That was wonderful!” I praised her. “Do you play any other instruments?”

“Yes; the piano,” she answered.

“Perfect! My wife has been wanting piano lessons for a long time!” I said, excitedly, casually “forgetting” that my wife was already quite a proficient pianist. “Would you come to our house once a week and give her lessons?”

Baruch Hashem, Julia agreed, and visited our house every week. Each time she came, we drew her into deep discussions about religion, G-d, and Judaism. We lost touch after a while, but we're sure the impact of those weekly visits weakened the cult's influence on her neshama.

Although Long Island today boasts dozens of flourishing Jewish enclaves, in the 70's, it was a different story. As per the Rebbe's instructions, we tried to form relationships with the existing communities and augment what was missing. Baruch Hashem, we soon made many new friends and supporters. When I found out we could reach thousands of Jews through public access TV - channels that broadcasting companies were required to air for nonprofit organizations - I was thrilled! The Rebbe always emphasized the importance of using every tool at our disposal to spread Yiddishkeit. What better way to reach the masses than a cable TV show? We hosted a successful weekly, “*The Jewish Spotlight*,” for six years, with re-runs continuing to air to this day. Guest speakers were invited to share their thoughts and inspiration. I received great feedback from many who enjoyed the educational programs we broadcast over the years, and many of the shows are now on Chabad.org.

We were also facing deeply personal troubles. We were ecstatic when our eldest son, Boruch Nisan, was born in 1978, but the doctors looked at us, sorrowfully.

“It's Cystic Fibrosis,” they said, shaking their heads. “The mortality rate is high. However long his life is, it will be impeded by many struggles and challenges.”

We cried, and promised we'd give our son everything we could for however long we were chosen to safeguard his neshama. But the doctors weren't finished yet. “There's a 25% chance that any future children will also suffer the same condition. We advise you not to have any more children.” This felt like a blow almost too hard to bear.

Baruch Hashem, I was zoche to receive the Rebbe's guidance for my son's treatment. It is purely due to the Rebbe's advice and influence that my son underwent a double lung transplant when he was thirteen years old. Tragically, our son passed away at a young age, leaving us, young and inexperienced ourselves, to pick up the

shattered pieces. Those years were incredibly difficult and full of challenges, but they also brought us amazing opportunities to meet people we never would've met otherwise. It forced us to rise above it all, to continue to give to the community when we felt we had nothing left for ourselves. It pushed us to be better shlichim; better chassidim; better parents. Thank G-d, with the Rebbe's bracha, all our children since have been healthy, and, for the time we had with him, our son was a blessing all his own.

Thirty years after all this, I compiled the insights I gained during that challenging period of my life and transformed it into a compelling self-help book that encapsulates personal growth through a deep purpose. Titled “*Eight Paths of Purpose*,” this book serves as a guide for individuals seeking direction and fulfillment through life's greatest challenges.

Despite the hardships and personal challenges, we soldiered on and continued to grow. After six years in Stony Brook, we moved to Commack, in Suffolk County, and opened a shul. We had bochurim visit often, and, eventually, one of them, Leibel Baumgarten, moved here and opened his own Chabad house. Forty years later, there are now 55 incredible shlichim and shlichos couples and forty beautiful Chabad Houses serving Long Island!

It's been a long road, but reflecting on the last forty-six years, I am amazed and inspired to see what a beautiful garden has blossomed. While other synagogues close for lack of members, Chabad continues to grow and flourish all over Long Island! We will not stop until we reach every Jew on Long Island.

*Names changed to protect privacy

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HOW MANY CHABAD RABBIS DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB? JUST ONE, BUT HE WON'T ACTUALLY CHANGE IT. INSTEAD, HE'LL INSPIRE THE LIGHT BULB TO FIND ITS OWN INNER ILLUMINATION AND SHINE BRIGHT!

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