

IllumiNations

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CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.  **DollarDaily.org**

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

*Rabbi Yitzchak and Esther Tiechtel,
Chabad of Nashville, Tennessee*

Giving the Rebbe Besuros Tovos

By Chaya Chazan

Both of us were lucky to grow up with a strong sense of pride in being the Rebbe's chassidim, surrounded by the charismatic magnetism of the Rebbe.

When I was a little girl of three years old, I remember attending a family yehidus. The Rebbe gave my brothers a bracha to "learn a lot of Torah," and gave me a box of matches for lighting Shabbos candles. From that tender age, I was empowered to live up to the potential the Rebbe saw in me - a lamplighter, passing the flame of Yiddishkeit on to others.

I was inspired by stories of my great-grandfather, a great chassid known as Reb Itche der Masmid, as well as my father's A"H close connection with the Rebbe. Throughout his life, he turned to the Rebbe often for guidance. He merited many personal letters and specific instructions from the Rebbe, including advice to continue his academic career as a mathematician. The Rebbe even told him that his mission in this world was to give shiurim to Seferdim, so they might tap into their naturally high level of emunah and bitachon.

My parents visited New York as often as they could, always bringing us along to every farbrengen. As a young girl who didn't understand much Yiddish, I wasn't able to do more than scribble down the few words I managed to catch. As I

grew, all those farbrengens left an impression that affected every aspect of my life - not least of which was my determination to go on shlichus and care for others.

As a boy, my grandmother often told me the story of when the KGB came to arrest her father, Rabbi Yitzchak Raskin, for the dangerous "crime" of spreading Yiddishkeit, he turned to his daughters and reminded them to "continue to live for the very things for which I'm being arrested!" That was the last time anyone saw him. For years, no one knew what had become of him. They weren't even sure if he was dead or alive. Forty years later, they found out he'd been sentenced to death by firing squad, shortly after his arrest. I am zoche to be the first to carry his name. My grandmother, Bubby Itkin, proudly inspired me to carry on his legacy.

Growing up in Crown Heights, with grandparents who lived right next door to 770, I was zoche to have many special interactions with the Rebbe, even as a young child. When I was a baby, the Rebbe peeked at me under the hood of my stroller, as my mother walked me down Eastern Parkway. I took part in many yehudisin with members of my family. At farbrengens, I would sit under the table, at the Rebbe's feet. Once, the Rebbe told me to sing "We Want Moshiach Now," the anthem of the newly formed Tzivos Hashem.

I felt a deep, personal connection with the Rebbe. I remembered dancing by the Rebbe's Simchas Torah Hakafof for children. Once, when I went by for Kos Shel Bracha, I proudly wore my Tzivos Hashem army hat. The Rebbe saluted me, and as the crowd went wild, I happily saluted back. I treasured the coins the Rebbe gave me for tzedaka. As I grew older, I watched my aunts and uncles go out on shlichus, waiting for the day when I, too, could join the ranks of the Rebbe's shluchim.

It was a Sunday during the winter of 1991. The Rebbe was distributing dollars, as he did every week, but, as I

was just a simple bochur, I didn't join the line. There was a group of high school students waiting, who looked unsure of what was going on. I decided to accompany them and guide them through the process. As I passed by the Rebbe, the Rebbe handed me a dollar and said, "Bracha V'hatzlacha," as he did to every person in line. Then, the Rebbe added, "Besuros tovos - good news." Not only was this an unusual phrase for the Rebbe to use during dollars, it was also uncommon for the Rebbe to bestow personal attention upon a bochur.

A short while later, the Rebbe's stroke prevented the recurrence of Sunday dollars. That was the last dollar I received from the Rebbe.

I thought about the Rebbe's cryptic words many times over the years. What did they mean? After hearing from many chassidim and shluchim how the Rebbe valued news of their progress, I decided to make a point to update the Rebbe with "besuros tovos" by writing a duch, a report to the Rebbe, about the work we do as his shluchim on a regular basis.

These daily accountings help me prioritize, focus, and remember that everything I do is in service of the Rebbe's mission.

The Friediker Rebbe sent Rabbi Zalman Posner to be the rabbi of *Congregation Sherith Israel* in Nashville in 1949. We were excited to join the growing team of Tennessee shluchim.

While Nashville may be the *musical* center of America, Jews are few and far between. We value each individual and every interaction. For us, it's not about the numbers; it's quality over quantity.

Nashville is a quintessentially Southern city, whose residents are extremely warm, welcoming, and friendly. They're also very traditional and wary of change. With Reform and Conservative congregations established over 100 years ago, the community viewed our entrance with caution. We had to work really hard to earn their trust. Many came from Germanic backgrounds, and strongly believed in being "a Jew in the home - only!" The very idea of putting up a menorah in public made them nervous.

Looking to the Rebbe for courage and inspiration, we were heartened by the Rebbe's response to shluchim in similar circumstances. Despite public disapproval, we put up menorahs all over the city.

We witnessed remarkable changes within just a few short years. One by one, each of the other shuls began displaying menorahs outside their own buildings as well. Today, nearly every congregation in Nashville has a menorah proudly standing in their front yard!

We started our first minyanim in our living room, and then rented a room below a bar. "Upstairs for the bar, downstairs for the mitzvah," we quipped whenever giving directions to our Chabad house.



Rabbi Tiechtel and Gov. Lee light the Menorah.

In the past few years, Nashville has exploded into one of the top cities to live in America. It's not unusual for 90% of our Shabbos table to be newcomers or recent implants. Baruch Hashem, this means we've expanded our operations as well, and will soon be ready to open a new, bigger building!

I find the biggest impact we can make is through connection to genuine Torah learning. That, and that alone, is what sets us apart from any other organization or community. The authenticity and spirituality we offer cannot be found in their temples or golf clubs. I try to forge as many connections as I can through Torah learning, the surest, realest way to form strong bonds.

Although I can't learn with everyone one-on-one, I try to set up a series of chavrusas, in addition to the weekly group shiurim I give. Charles* and I spent six years systematically learning through the entire Tanya. He published a book called, "The Tzaddik," chronicling a tzaddik's journey as described in Tanya.

Josh* and I learned through all five Chumashim throughout our study sessions. The tremendous sense of accomplishment he felt in finishing the entire Torah inspired him to dedicate a brand new Torah scroll to our shul. Josh poured his heart and soul into the project, insisting on top quality for everything, from the ink to the mantle. Each Shabbos, when we take out the Torah, Josh glows with pride, and is inspired to continue learning.

One year, I took advantage of the TV station's free 30-second PSA slots for nonprofits to advertise the upcoming Yamim Noraim. *Start your year on a high note*, the screen read, while a shofar blasted a tekiah. The station aired these PSA's at randomly assigned time slots, and I knew it wouldn't make it to prime time, but I figured even the early hours of the morning would be better than nothing.

That Rosh Hashanah, a man I didn't recognize walked into shul. I went over to greet him and ask him what had brought him in.

"It was the strangest thing," he told me. "Last night, I fell asleep on my couch while watching TV. Suddenly, at 1 AM, I was awakened by the blast of a shofar. I jumped up and managed to catch the last few seconds of the ad, where your information was displayed. So, here I am!"

That last-minute wake up call from the shofar led this man to becoming more involved with our community for many years.

I was invited to give a lecture on Jewish history for a Jewish organization in Tennessee. I began with the creation of the world, giving a brief sketch of all major historical figures over 5,000 years of Jewish history. I concluded with the beginnings of Chassidus, and a profile of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement.

"The Baal Shem Tov emphasized hashgacha pratis, Divine Providence," I explained. "Every person is sent to this world with a specific mission to accomplish, and therefore, every individual is of paramount importance."

After finishing the class, I circulated the crowd. One woman approached me, a haunted look in her eyes.

"I hardly know how to say this," she began. "I had every intention of going home and committing suicide. I already have everything prepared. I saw an advertisement for this class and figured it'd be the last thing I did before leaving this world." Her eyes sparkled with tears. "What you said about the Baal Shem Tov changed everything. How could I take my own life when there are those out there that believe I have yet to fulfill my mission on earth; that my life has value and meaning? What if all I have to do is dig deeper to find it? I've decided not to go ahead with my plans."

We helped her get the attention she needed, and kept in touch, guiding her towards her path in life.

Noam*, like many other Israelis in our community, was proud of his secularism. Although he freely admitted he would never attend a Shabbos table in Israel, being a stranger in another country engendered a sense of brotherhood that brought him back to our Chabad house, week after week.

While he enjoyed the camaraderie, Noam refused to commit to anything remotely connected to Yiddishkeit. He attended shul just once a year - sneaking into the back for the very last ten minutes of Neilah on Yom Kippur. He refused a yarmulke. "I'm not religious," he insisted.

The next year, I gently encouraged him to increase his commitment. "Why not come for half an hour?" I urged him. "And put on a yarmulke while you're here. Maybe you can even fast for a few hours."

A couple of years later, his wife told me he'd actually completed the entire fast! "But don't tell him I told you!" she begged. "He'd hate for anyone to know!"

Fast forward to this year, when Noam actually came for the entire hour of Neilah.

"Did you fast?" I asked him.

"How could I not fast on Yom Kippur?" he answered.

The simplicity of his answer blew me away. In just a few years, he'd gone from a ten-minutes-a-year Jew, to one who couldn't fathom not fasting on Yom Kippur.

As a conservative and deeply religious area, in the wake of the October 7th attacks, the Nashvillians' reactions have been supportive and loving. I've had many strangers approach me in the street, offering words of comfort and blessings. It's also been incredible to see the awakening amongst the Jewish community, many of whom never regarded themselves as particularly religious, or even Jewish at all.

Michelle* made the long trek from Eagleville, Tennessee, although she'd never done so before.

"What brings you to Nashville?" I asked her.

"I need to be with my people," she replied, simply.

This Chanukah, our public menorah lighting ceremony was graced by the presence of the governor of Tennessee, as well as five Israeli families from kibbutzim near Gaza. They miraculously survived the attack, and are now in Nashville for some respite from the trauma they've suffered. One of them shared her experiences with the gathered crowd. Her story, backlit by the flickering flames of the newly lit menorah, moved and inspired everyone with the message of "Am Yisrael Chai!" It was a powerful experience for the Israelis, as the governor shared his unwavering support for Israel, the people of Israel, and his friendship with Chabad of Nashville.

**Names changed to protect privacy*

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