

# IllumiNations

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 Dov and Chana Tova Mandel, Chabad of Fort Worth, Texas*

## Making Texas Worthwhile

By Chaya Chazan

**My mother and uncle learned about Yiddishkeit through Rabbi Shmotkin at Chabad of Wisconsin. I moved around a lot as a kid, but I have many fond memories of the Lubavitch House in Milwaukee.**

When we moved to a couple of places in New York, but when my mother remarried a Venezuelan, we moved to Caracas, where I spent the rest of my youth. Although we weren't actually shluchim, as one of the few Chabad families in Caracas, we helped out so often, it felt like we were shlichus-adjacent.

My wife's parents were influenced through another one of the Rebbe's shluchim - the Derens in Massachusetts. The family then moved to Chicago, where my wife grew up, surrounded by friends who were either shluchim themselves, or valued shlichus highly.

Fort Worth had already been home to two shluchim, although neither of them worked out long-term. A friend mentioned that Ft. Worth still had a vacant spot, so we looked into it. When we visited my parents, now living in Houston, Texas, for Pesach, we drove to Dallas on chol hamoad to meet with Rabbi Dubrawsky, the shliach of

the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area, to see if it would be feasible.

While Dallas and Fort Worth are combined into one area, divided by the airport in the center, there are many distinctions between the two cities. Dallas is home to a thriving Jewish community. It has plenty of shuls, mikvaos, kosher restaurants and groceries, and Judaica. Fort Worth has *none* of that. So while Dallas attracts more religious clientele, Fort Worth is home to those who don't know or care about the kosher amenities at all.

The first shuls were established in the late 1800's, or early 20th century, so many Jews here have deeply embedded roots.

We raised a respectable amount for our seed fund, but after renting an apartment, getting a car, furnishing our new home, and holding services and meals for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it was quickly depleted.

It was Thursday afternoon, and we only had \$200 left in the bank account.

"I need to go shopping for Shabbos," my wife said. "I'm sure I can make a very simple Shabbos on a strict budget."

"Let's do it properly," I suggested. "Buy whatever you need for Shabbos, and leave the rest to Hashem."

A short while later, I went to collect the mail from the mailbox. There was the usual assortment of bills and junk mail, but one envelope caught my eye. I excitedly opened it, and found a check for \$1,000.

"I didn't know we had a \$1,000 pledge!" my wife said, pleasantly surprised.

"We didn't!" I answered. I peered more closely at the name inscribed on the check. "Who is Martin Cohen?"

After thinking about it for a while, I remembered where I'd met Martin. A couple of months prior, I'd started a Tanya shiur in Arlington, a city next to Fort Worth. It was hosted at the home of a wealthy man who'd supported Chabad in the past. Hopeful of securing his patronage, I brought a prospectus and yearly projected budget. He promised me a check later on, and then, to my consternation, passed my booklet around the table. It was my first time meeting many of these people, and I was uncomfortable asking them for a donation without first building a relationship with them. There was little I could do, though, so I shrugged it off and continued with the shiur.

Martin Cohen was one of the men seated around that table. His unexpected check had arrived just in time to remind us of Hashem's constant hashgacha, and the Rebbe's promise to take care of his shluchim.

Anette\* was a friend of ours, so she made sure to tell her Jewish co-worker, Angela\*, to get in touch with me for her son's bar mitzvah. Anette also let me know she'd give Angela my number and told her to reach out.

Angela attended the local Reform temple, where her son's bar mitzvah was held on Simchas Torah. I expected her call shortly after that, but days passed, and Angela didn't call.

Taking the initiative, I called her and asked when she'd bring her son to put on tefillin.

"My husband is out of town this week," she explained. "Maybe we can come by next week, when we get a chance."

"Where will your son be at 5 PM today?" I asked.

"At home, doing homework, most probably," she answered.

"Great! See you then!" I said.

Dylan\*, the bar mitzvah boy, was happy to see me. I showed him a video about how tefillin are made, and helped him wrap the shiny leather straps around his arm for the first time.

"I heard you had a party on Simchat Torah," I said to Dylan. "Was that your Jewish birthday?"

"I don't know when my Jewish birthday is," Dylan admitted.

I typed in his secular birthday, and found the corresponding Hebrew date.

"Happy birthday!" I wished him. "Today is your Jewish birthday!"

"I was thinking about opening a kosher restaurant," I mentioned to a friend. Brad\*, another community member, overheard, and left a \$9,000 check on the kitchen table!



I was excited for such a great start on this new venture, but after some more research, I realized nothing less than \$50,000 would make my dream a reality.

"Can I use the money to open a mikvah instead?" I asked him.

"Of course!" he responded.

With a bit more fundraising, we were able to build the shell of the mikvah. I would've loved to complete it fully, but we'd run out of funds.

In a conversation with Rabbi Nochum Kaplan, he told me he'd met with Rabbi Ahron Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rebbe, and asked him to ask his chassidim to help shlu-chim build mikvaos.

"I can't tell them to do it, but if I'm asked about it, I can definitely give my encouragement," the Satmar Rebbe promised.

A short while later, a kosher slaughterhouse opened in Fort Worth. A delegation of Satmar chassidim flew in every week, to oversee the shechitah and hashgacha. I worked as a mashgiach there myself, so I got to know them fairly well.

One day, a wealthy Satmar businessman visited, specifically to check out the plant. After completing his tour, he still had many hours to go before his flight, so I offered him a tour of the Chabad house. When he saw the empty concrete shell of the mikvah, he looked around thoughtfully.

"I'll give \$1,800 for this mikvah," he pledged.

"Thank you!" I responded. "Without wanting to sound ungrateful, I can't do much with \$1,800. I need \$50,000 to get this mikvah beautifully decorated and functional."

"You'll get the \$1,800 for sure," he said. "I have to think about the rest."

A few days later, he called to tell me he'd fund the entire thing. "I asked the Rebbe, and he told me to go ahead with it," he explained.

The mashgiach from the slaughterhouse was instrumental in helping me raise another \$65,000 from the Satmar community, and we completed our beautiful mikvah - Mikvah Divrei Yoel.

The Satmar Rebbe visited the slaughterhouse twice a year to inspect it personally. When our mikvah was finally finished and functional, he graced our Chabad house with a visit.

Mason\* was already familiar with many aspects of Yiddishkeit from his time at ASU with Rabbi Tiechtel. He moved to Fort Worth for an internship at a pharmaceutical company, and stayed at the Chabad house. We became close friends, and shared many deep conversations.

I remember quite an intense discussion, where he grilled me on the finer points of the Rebbe-chassid relationship, and why it was so integral to a Chabad lifestyle. He determinedly pushed each point without mercy, and I answered his questions to the best of my ability.

After a couple of months, he returned to school in Arizona. The next time I heard about him was at the Kinus Hashluchim the following year. When Rabbi Tiechtel spotted me across a crowded room, he made a beeline for me.

"Dov, you don't know what you did for Mason!" he told me. "The discussion you had changed his life! With a Sefardi mother and an Ashkenazi father, Mason wasn't sure which path to follow. Now, not only is he determined to follow Ashkenazi minhagim, he wants to be a Chabad chassid!"

I heard a short while later that Moshe, as he is now called, wants to become a shliach!

For the first few years of our shlichus, we went to Houston for Sukkos, to celebrate with my parents. One Simchas Torah, someone in shul commented, "Why is the shliach from Fort Worth in Houston on Simchas Torah?"

He's right, I thought to myself. *Maybe this is a sign to stay home next year, and make Simchas Torah in Fort Worth!*

The next year, we went to Houston for Sukkos, but returned home for Simchas Torah to celebrate with our community.

On Shemini Atzeres night, I met Danny\*. He was on his way to Mexico, but his flight had been canceled and he was stuck in Fort Worth. A friend told him about us, and encouraged him to visit.

He came for every tefillah, and enjoyed himself immensely. Although we didn't have a minyan every time, I gathered everyone that showed up and learned Chasidus with them.

Danny told me it was the most inspiring experience of his life and had led him to decide to reconnect with his Yiddishkeit.

I lost touch with him for a while, until he texted me one day, years later, to tell me he was moving to Fort

Worth with his girlfriend. Although she wasn't Jewish, they came to shul very often. Even after they moved to a city a few hours away, they'd still come to Fort Worth for Shabbos every so often.

A few years later, in 2013, I was in the process of opening a school. Danny told me his wife, who he was separated from, had passed away after a battle with cancer. He sold the Manhattan condo they co-owned, and donated a large chunk of it to our fledgling school, enabling us to open.

His non-Jewish girlfriend converted according to Halacha, and they now live in a larger Jewish community in Texas.

*Looking for a sponsor for a pair of tefillin!* I posted on my Facebook wall.

Almost immediately, I received a DM from a Yaakov\*, a man from Dallas I'd never met in person. He offered to pay for the entire thing.

A few months later, another man in my community wanted to commit to putting on tefillin daily, but couldn't afford to buy their own set. Once again, I turned to my Facebook friends for help. To my surprise, Yaakov volunteered to sponsor another pair!

*This seems to mean something special to you, I wrote to him. Would you like to take this to the next level? If I let people know they could get a pair of sponsored tefillin if they commit to wearing them every day, I'm sure we'd get many takers!*

Absolutely! Yaakov responded. *I'd love that!*

Thanks to Yaakov's incredible generosity, over 40 pairs of tefillin have been distributed nationwide!

*\*Names changed to protect privacy*

**DollarDaily.org**

*a Project of*

**YadLShliach.org  
and COLive.com**

**COLIVE**

## 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!**

**ILLUMINATIONS, A PROJECT OF DOLLARDAILY.ORG, SUPPORTS CHABAD HOUSES WORLDWIDE:**

- Provide Tefillin for Yitzhak, connecting him to his Jewish roots.
- Empower Miriam through Mikvah visits, fostering spiritual growth.
- Help the Rabbi's family with new clothes, supporting their selfless service.
- Sponsor Shabbas experiences on college campuses, creating vibrant Jewish communities.

**\$809+**

DONATING PER DAY

**\$381796+**

ALREADY DONATED TO ORGANIZATIONS

**\$295285+**

TO BE GIVEN OVER THE NEXT 365 DAYS



**DollarDaily.org**

**HELP JEWS.  
ALL JEWS.  
IN ALL PLACES.**

**Join 800+ people giving just \$1 a day at DollarDaily.org and make a lasting impact!**