

# IllumiNations

Issue 122 | Parshas Emor 5784

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 Avrohom and Shterna Simmonds, Chabad of Regina, Canada*

## Marching to Hashem's Beat

By Chaya Chazan

**Man plans, and G-d laughs. That's what I reply whenever I'm asked how we landed in Regina, Saskatchewan. My wife and I both grew up with a shared dream of one day moving on shlichus.**

We pictured ourselves finding an opportunity in an existing Chabad house, working together with other Shluchim. Hashem had something else in mind. None of the options we investigated worked out, so we decided to widen our search to include cities that didn't have shluchim yet.

I grew up in Winnipeg, so of course I'd heard of Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan, a six-hour drive from my hometown. As we started laying the groundwork for this option, we encountered many setbacks along the way. So, we crossed Regina off our list, and started researching the next city. We'd made plans to visit the new place for Pesach, which is when we learned all the challenges we'd met in Regina had been resolved.

So while we felt we'd been planning every stage of our lives, Hashem was really pulling the strings.

Jews have been in Saskatchewan for over 100 years, since the early 1900's. Farming colonies, remnants of which can still be seen in provincial heritage sites, were spread



across the province. In Edenbridge, an abandoned Jewish farming settlement whose name was Anglicized from *Yiddish* Bridge, you can still see the structure of the shul and the cemetery behind it.

After a series of droughts in the 1930's, the farmland dried up, and the settlements disbanded, their members joining larger Jewish communities in larger cities.

Nowadays, there are about 1,000 Jews in Saskatchewan, mostly located in Regina and Saskatoon.

Our first introduction to Regina was on par for how the shlichus came about in the first place. We had a house, but couldn't move until some renovations were completed. In the meanwhile, we spent time with my family in Winnipeg. What was supposed to be a few weeks turned into a couple months. Finally, just a few days before Rosh Hashanah, the house was ready.

We debated staying in Winnipeg, or traveling to Regina. If we went, we'd arrive just one day before Yom Tov started, so we wouldn't have any time to knock on doors or scavenge for a minyan. It didn't seem like we had any reason to spend Rosh Hashanah in Regina, so we decided to stay put.

An hour later, the phone rang.

"Shalom! Is this Chabad?" asked an Israeli-accented voice.

Giora\*, as he introduced himself, was part of a group of Israeli alarm salesmen. They'd be in Regina for Rosh Hashanah, and wanted to know if they could spend the first night with us.

"Betach!" I answered. "On one condition. If you daven with me, I promise to feed you!"

We quickly packed everything up, bundled our family into the car, and made the drive. Barely 36 hours after we'd ar-

rived in Regina, we held a minyan, the walls of our "shul" made from piles of unpacked moving boxes.

It was clear to us, as it was throughout the process, that Hashem's hand was guiding us, and that we were merely doing His bidding. Obviously, He wanted us in Regina for Rosh Hashanah.

One of the first programs we launched was *Kids in the Kosher Kitchen*, a cooking class for children, where we were able to teach them the laws of kashrus, yomim tovim, and more.

One day, I received a call from Delfina\*.

"Buenos dias," she began. "I'm calling from Argentina. My family is considering moving to Regina soon. I see you offer cooking classes for kids. Can I register my children?"

We were ecstatic to hear about another Jewish family coming to Regina, and offered our help finding a place and getting settled. They took us up on the offer, and they chose a place nearby. They came over often, and we soon developed a close connection.

They moved just as summer began, and we offered them a place in our newly formed Camp Gan Israel.

"It sounds great," Delfina said, hesitantly, "but our kids don't speak English."

By hashgacha pratis, I'd hired a bi-lingual counselor. "Don't worry!" I assured her. "We have a counselor who speaks fluent Spanish!"

So Delfina's children attended camp, and our families grew even closer.

It was around the Shabbos table one week, a couple of months later, when the topic of bris came up. Delfina and her husband admitted their sons had not had brissim.

"We wanted to give them the choice when they got older," she said.

We tried explaining the significance behind having a bris at 8 days old, and how it differs from the Muslim custom of waiting until 13. They listened with polite, but detached attention.

A few years later, Delfina's husband, Mateo\*, bounded into my office, a smile shining on his face.

"You'll never believe it, Rabbi! Delfina is expecting!"

"Besha'ah tova!" I wished him, thumping him heartily on the back. "That's great news!"

"We found out it's a boy," he said, grabbing a seat. "I remember a while ago, we talked about having a bris. I know what we said then, but time has a funny way of changing your perspective. Delfina and I talked, and we want to give this baby a bris when he's 8 days old!"

That was in September of 2019. When Delfina gave birth to a healthy baby boy in April 2020, the world was a very different place. Strict Covid restrictions prevented any gatherings, and Delfina and Mateo were worried about

the baby's health. Unfortunately, the bris was postponed. Finally, a few months later, their baby was given a bris, and joined in Avraham's covenant.

Once they'd already started down the path of giving their sons brissim, we thought it would be a good time to bring up giving their older two sons brissim as well.

"Go for it!" Mateo agreed. "If you can convince them to undertake the procedure, we'll go along with it."

I'd never attempted to convince an 11-year-old to have a bris before, but shlichus calls on us constantly to go beyond our comfort zones. When I brought it up to 11-year-old Benicio\*, as gently as I could, he declined emphatically.

"There's no way they're going to put me in front of a room full of people, like they did to my baby brother!" he argued.

Even after I explained how his bris would be different, Benicio was still hesitant. He vacillated back and forth, first agreeing, and then changing his mind. Under the shadow of his uncertainty, the entire idea slowly fizzled out.

A year and half later, his parents approached me, asking about preparing for Benicio's bar mitzvah. I began learning with him weekly, and as we developed a closer bond, I gently brought up the idea of having a bris again, emphasizing how great an opportunity it would be to start off his journey to Jewish manhood by joining the Jewish nation in body, mind, and soul.

Benicio finally agreed, and I then began the search for a mohel. It wasn't easy to find someone who was not only an expert in adult brissim, but who'd also be willing to travel to Regina. I finally found a mohel, and we set a date for the exciting event.

With just hours to go, we found out the mohel's flight had been canceled. Benicio was also starting to get cold feet. I feared it was all over.

Things were put on hold, but it was only temporary. After speaking with Benicio, I realized he just needed assurance and support. We got another flight for the mohel, and set another date. I sent Benicio a list of Jewish names, encouraging him to look through it and pick a new name for himself.

"How's Alter Zushe?" he asked me, after studying it for a few days. "I like how it sounds."

"It's a great, chassidische name!" I agreed.

Benicio's younger brother had his bris directly after his brother's. Since it's unusual and challenging to find an

adult-bris expert, we were also joined by a family who were planning to convert. In the end, the mohel performed six brissim in one day - and not one of them on a baby!

Chester\* was originally tentative about committing to our weekly parsha class, but he and his wife soon became regulars. They attended religiously, only absent on weeks the roads were too icy to drive.

While Chester loved the classes' intellectual challenges, they didn't inspire his practical observance of the mitzvos. I couldn't even convince him to put on tefillin!

As Shavuot approached, we tried to get a minyan for Kriyas Hatorah so we could read the Aseres Hadibros. I already had eight commitments, and racked my brains for a ninth.

*What about Chester?* I thought to myself.

He flatly turned me down.

I left it alone for a few days, but when I still couldn't find a minyan, I decided to try Chester again.

"I'm sure you meant you couldn't come for the all-night learning session," I said, a desperate edge to my voice. "But you can come that afternoon, right?"

"Rabbi, you understood me perfectly the first time," Chester replied, brusquely.

*Uh oh. He really sounded annoyed,* I thought as I replaced the phone. *I hope that wasn't the last I'll ever hear from him!*

On Shavuot afternoon, I began preparing for our ice cream and cheesecake party, disappointed we couldn't find just one more person to complete our minyan.

"Am I early, Rabbi?" a voice asked from the main room, interrupting my reverie.

I hurried to the door. It was *Chester!* Why was he in shul, *fifteen minutes early?*

"What are you doing here?" I asked him in total shock.

"We've been learning about G-d giving us opportunities in the last few classes," he explained. "I realized this was G-d giving me an opportunity, and I didn't want to give it up."

I was giving out matza across town, and I needed to run into a store I don't usually frequent. As I was perusing the aisles, I heard someone say, "Shalom!"

"Are you Jewish?" I asked the man who'd greeted me.

"I sure am! Are you Chabad?"

"I sure am," I answered in turn.

We got to talking, and I invited him to join us for the holiday. Although he was out of town for Pesach, he joined us for Rosh Hashanah, and has remained in touch ever since.

When we sent out informational fliers and invitations to the community, asking *them* how we could best serve them, Solomon\* asked if we had Kabbalat Shabbat services. Kabbalat Shabbat, Yom Tov tefillos, and Pesach were the mitzvos he loved. However, for some reason, when it came to tefillin, he refused every time I offered.

While Solomon was hospitalized, I visited him frequently. Although I knew he would say no, I brought my tefillin each time and offered him a chance to put them on.

One morning, when I walked in, he noticed my tefillin and asked, "So, Rabbi. Are we going to daven today?"

I was surprised that he *initiated* the request, after so many denials, but I was more than happy to oblige. I helped him wind the leather straps around his arm and say Shema.

"Solomon, will you be placing your usual Pesach order?" I asked him, as I put the tefillin away. Every year, Solomon placed an order for kosher le'Pesach food and matza. "I hope you'll be out of the hospital by then."

"Nah. I won't be needing any this year," he said, almost casually.

I was confused, but Solomon was entirely correct. He passed away a few weeks later, just before Pesach.

*\*Names changed to protect privacy*

**DollarDaily.org**  
a Project of  
**YadLShiach.org**  
and **COLlive.com**



## 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.



**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!**