

IllumiNations

Issue 145 | Sukkos 5785

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

Dedicated in Memory of Harav Moshe Kotlarsky - Pioneering A Generation of The Rebbe's Shluchim

Rabbi Menachem Kutner, Chabad Terror Victims Project, Israel

From Tragedy to Hope, Part I

By Chaya Chazan

My shlichus was born of tragic necessity. In 2001, the second intifada resulted in hundreds of terror attack victims all over Eretz Yisrael. At that time, I was on Sabbatical from an 8-year teaching position, looking for a shlichus that spoke to me.

After the Six Day War, Mrs. Shafra Morozow of Kfar Chabad contacted the Rebbe, asking for help and guidance. Her husband was a casualty of the war, and she felt lost, unsure how to navigate the new life that had been forced upon her.

The Rebbe told her that, as a widow of war, she had a responsibility to help other widows in similar circumstances. The Rebbe instructed Chabad in Israel to form an organization, with this woman at its head, to help war victims and their families cope.

For many years, the Chabad Terror Victims Project helped hundreds of people adjust to their new reali-

ty. But as Mrs. Morozow got older, she couldn't be as active in the organization, and many of the programs fell by the wayside.

When the second intifada swept through Israel, claiming over 1,000 victims to senseless terror, the leaders of Tzach, Chabad in Israel, knew it was time to restore the imperative program to its former presence.

They offered me a leadership role in the revitalized organization. I was very nervous. Of course, I wanted to help people, but knowing I'd always be seeing them at the worst, most vulnerable moments of their lives made me doubt my abilities.

I agreed to try it out for three months to see if I could handle it. Somehow, those three months turned into over 23 years!

Our work relies heavily on the network of shluchim throughout the country. Last year, before the war started, I had 4,000 families on my list - all of them victims of terror attacks or families of wounded soldiers. I personally visit every single family at least once a year to see how they're doing and how we can help. I make sure the nearest shliach has their name and number and will keep an eye on them throughout the rest of the year.

The Rebbe specifically mentioned that every Tzahal widow should receive a mishloach manos package on Purim. In fact, one year, Tzach gave a report of their Purim activities to the Rebbe. They mentioned that finances were very tight, so they'd skipped the widow's mishloach manos. The Rebbe asked how much it cost to put the packages together, and mailed a *personal* check to cover the *entire* cost.

Knowing how important it was to the Rebbe, I make sure to organize mishloach manos for every family every year. As much as I would love to hand deliver every package, I can't be in 4,000 places at once. Instead, I deputize the local shluchim, providing them with names, addresses, and mishloach manos for families in their area.

Since the organization started so long ago, many women on our list were widowed in the Yom Kippur War or the Six Day War. As they age, they move into nursing homes. Every year, during the weeks preceding Purim, we receive dozens of phone calls from these elderly widows, reminding us of their change of address, and begging us not to forget them. I know they're not just antsy for the small bottle of grape juice and chocolates in the package. They want the connection, the feeling that someone remembers and appreciates how much they sacrificed for the Jewish people, even so many years later.

I always try to remind myself that what I do is not "normal." I shouldn't have to visit victims whose only crime was being Jewish at the bus stop at the wrong time. Unfortunately, terror attacks are so prevalent that I was able to create a routine each time one happened. Usually, there are a few victims, and I'm able to visit every family in that first shiva week.

October 7th, the largest scale attack on Jews since the Holocaust, changed all that. In just a few hours, over 2,000 families became new members of our "community". I try to visit at least one family every day, but it will take me two years to personally visit each and every victim. I'm relying on the local shluchim to visit and help where I cannot, although many of them are dealing with refugee and victim influxes of their own. The entire country is bleeding, and there aren't enough band-aids in the world to stop the flow.

I remember how awkward I felt when I first started, and how I wasn't sure what to say, or, even more importantly, what *not* to say. So when I ask shluchim to visit families sitting shiva, I send them a list of *dos* and *don'ts*, culled from my years of experience.

On September 19, 2002, a suicide bombing took place on Allenby Street in the heart of Tel Aviv's business district. The attack targeted a Dan bus, packed with passengers during the busy afternoon hours. The bombing claimed the lives of six civilians and left approximately 70 others injured.

It was a normal summer day for Yossi Mimistlov, the bus driver, as he neared the busy intersection of Re-



chov Allenby. He noticed a passenger wearing a thick jacket. The heat was unbearable, so it immediately raised Yossi's suspicions. He also noticed a heavy backpack, and that the stranger looked unaccountably nervous. Yossi immediately pulled the bus over, and threw the suspicious stranger off the bus. He tackled him to the ground, and struggled to keep him there as the man fought back with all his strength. Despite Yossi's best efforts, the man managed to reach his backpack and the detonator. Yossi died a hero's death. His intervention prevented the bombing from claiming the lives of many more victims.

When I attended his shiva, I noticed a young boy sitting beside the widow.

"Is this your son? What's his name? How old is he?" I asked.

The widow looked over at him with a sad smile.

"This is Ariel*," she answered. "He's 12. He's turning bar mitzvah in two weeks. We had a whole party planned, but obviously, that's... out of the question now."

"There's no reason for Ariel to suffer twice," I said, quietly. "He already lost his father. Let's not make this the year his bar mitzvah was canceled, too. Since his bar mitzvah is so soon, and will still be within the shloshim, we can't have a regular party, with a DJ and dancing, but there's no reason he can't have a celebration of some sort! The bar mitzvah is really about the spiritual significance of the day, and *that* we can definitely honor. Don't worry; we'll take care of everything!"

On the day of Ariel's bar mitzvah, we rented a bus to take him, his family, and his classmates to the Kotel. There, I helped him put on tefillin and receive an aliyah for the first time. I lifted him on my shoulder and we all sang and danced with him. Ariel was beaming from ear to ear. We took him to a nice restaurant, and treated him and his family to a celebratory meal.

Of course, we stayed in touch with the family for many years after that memorable day. A couple of years ago, I was privileged to officiate Ariel's wedding, and stand in for the father he'd lost. A year ago, I was the sandek at the bris of our first shlichus "grandbaby," Ariel's newborn son!

After a terror attack, most are quick to offer their help and condolences, but after a few weeks or months, everything goes back to normal. Not so for us. We're

there for the family from the second we hear of their plight. We're there throughout shiva, arranging logistics, foods, and accommodations. We're there *after* shiva as well, helping the family readjust to life without their loved one, or with a newly disabled person to care for. *We maintain that connection for years! We never "drop" our families - they remain a part of our community for as long as they'd like.*

When I first met Uri*, he was a young man. He was an important, hotshot officer in the Duvdevan division, an elite special forces unit in the IDF. He was driving his jeep when terrorists lobbed a grenade straight through his window. In the ensuing explosion, Uri lost both his legs.

It was a very difficult adjustment for someone so young, so bright, and so promising to make. We helped Uri as much as we could, and he soon learned to love his new life. He received two prosthetic legs, and sharpened his wits and battle experience at his new job with the Mossad.

I kept in touch with Uri throughout the years, and we maintained a close friendship.

One day, about twenty years later, Uri called.

"Rabbi Menachem! I just bought a new house!" he told me.

"Mazal tov! Mazal tov! Yishuv tov!" I congratulated him.

"Can you come over and help me make a chanukas habayis?" he asked.

"Betach! It would be my pleasure!" I assured him.

Uri was a confirmed bachelor. In all the time I'd known him, I'd never seen him with anyone, and he'd never introduced me to a significant other. So I was extremely surprised when a woman opened the door and invited me in. Her name was Sharon*, and she and Uri had been dating for a few months.

We ate and drank lechaim together, and learned a short dvar Torah. I helped Uri hang mezuzos on all the doors, and we chatted for a while, catching up. As I was getting ready to leave, I asked Uri to accompany me to my car.

"Uri," I said, clapping him on the shoulder, "I've been watching Sharon closely. She's a keeper! She seems to really understand you, and brings out the best in you. I know I only met her a half hour ago, but I can see she has many good qualities. I give you my blessing!"

Uri shook my hand with a wide grin.



A few weeks later, Uri called again.

"Mazal tov, Rabbi Menachem! I'm engaged! Sharon said yes!"

"Mazal tov! Mazal tov!" I shouted excitedly. "Baruch Hashem! This is great news!"

"Sharon wanted to reserve a date as soon as possible, but I told her I have to call *you* first to check *your* availability. You *must* officiate at my wedding! If the date doesn't work for you, we'll book a different one!"

I was very touched and assured him that the date worked for me.

I look forward to celebrating our 20-year friendship in Kislev, when Uri and Sharon will be getting married.

Israeli politics and media have painted a strong line between the dati'im and the chilonim. But no one can outdo a kibbutznik for animosity against any and all religious folk. Black hatted persons are denied entry to many kibbutzim, and most of them don't even have the faintest notions of Torah and mitzvos.

Somehow or other, I've managed to worm my way into some kibbutzim. It was a slow and uphill battle, but baruch Hashem, they've managed to look past my beard and black hat.

During the 2014 Gaza war, known as Operation Protective Edge, a brief ceasefire was declared. However, the ceasefire was violated when terrorists continued

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.

\$719+

DONATING PER DAY

\$618800+

ALREADY DONATED TO ORGANIZATIONS

\$264625+

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!

to launch rockets into Israel. On August 26, one of these rockets struck Kibbutz Nirim, located just over 2,000 feet from the Gaza border. The attack tragically killed Ze'ev Etzion, the kibbutz's security chief, and Shahr Melamed, a volunteer.

I went to be menachem avel a widow, Ayala*, and spoke with her for a while.

"I have a present for you from Chabad," I told her. I pulled a mezuzah out of my pocket and presented it to her. "I can hang it up for you right now!"

"I appreciate the gift, Rabbi," she replied. "But I'm not ready to hang it up just yet. I'll just hold onto it for a while."

The next time I came to visit her, I noticed her doorpost was still bare.

"I think the mezuzah is feeling neglected," I joked. "It doesn't like dark, gloomy drawers!"

"Rabbi, you're right," Ayala agreed. "Let's put it up now."

She called her kids, and we hung the mezuzah on the doorpost.

A few weeks later, Ayala called.

"The media always says such terrible things about religious Jews - especially rabbis," she said. "But you, Rabbi Menachem - you must be the exception to the rule. You're so friendly and understanding. I'd like you to be the rabbi at my son's wedding."

I was floored. "I'm honored!" I replied. "Of course! I'd love to be there! When is the wedding?"

"January 13th," she said.

"January 13th... January 13th..." I murmured, as I flipped through my calendar. "But that's... Friday night!"

"Right!" Ayala confirmed, cheerfully.

"But I can't... We don't do weddings on Shabbat!" I explained.

"Not on Shabbat! But why not?" she asked. "Shabbat is holy and weddings are holy. It's a perfect match!"

I did my best to explain why it didn't quite work that way, and Ayala finally got it.

"I don't know what to do now," she fretted. "Our kibbutz *only* has weddings on Friday nights. We work hard all week and Shabbat is the only day we get to relax. There's no time throughout the rest of the week for a wedding! On Friday night, everyone can drink, party, and dance, knowing they can sleep in the next morning."

"What if I come Thursday night instead?" I asked. "We can hold a small chuppah. All we need is a minyan."

Ayala agreed, and I came one night earlier to perform the wedding ceremony. It was a historic chuppah - the first wedding ever on the kibbutz to be performed K'das Moshe v'Yisroel.

I visit the hospital every week to see the wounded soldiers who are undergoing care and rehabilitation.



One day, I was walking past the ICU, when a woman stopped me.

"Excuse me, are you Chabad?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Can you please come with me to my son's room? He was very badly wounded in Gaza. His tank blew up, and he's been unconscious ever since. The doctors don't know if or when he'll wake up, and even if he does, they don't know if he'll be paralyzed or incapable of speech. We're very worried about him. It would make me feel better if you came and said a prayer for him."

"I'd be happy to," I answered. "But since only family members are allowed in the ICU, please ask the nurses' permission first."

Special permission granted, I followed her to her son's room. The soldier's brother was in the room as well, and he stood up respectfully when I walked in. I recited a "Mi Shebeirach" for the soldier, and a few kapitelach of Tehillim.

"The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that in times like these, checking one's tefillin can be a special zechus for the person," I explained. "If you give me your son's tefillin, I'll be happy to bring them to a sofer to check."

His mother shook her head sadly.

"I wish I could. His tefillin were so precious to him! He put them on every day, without fail, and took them everywhere. Unfortunately, that means he also took them on the tank with him. They were burned, and were completely unsalvageable."

"I can't believe the hashgacha pratis!" I said. "Just this morning, someone donated a pair of tefillin. They told me that if I met a wounded soldier who needed a pair, I should give them to him. They're clearly meant for your son!"

"That's really unbelievable!" the soldier's brother said. "Honestly, I was worried what would happen when he wakes up to find out his tefillin are gone. I knew how upset he'd be. He'll be so happy to have a brand new set, waiting for him!"

I pulled the tefillin out of my case and started to hand them to the brother.

"Hold on to these for your brother for now. I'm Yirtzeh Hashem, he'll be using them very soon!"

As I was speaking, the young soldier opened his eyes and smiled as widely as he could. He even lifted his arm, as if to take the precious tefillin himself.

Doctors and nurses immediately swarmed the room. They couldn't believe he'd woken up - let alone smiled and lifted his arm!

But I knew his neshama had been listening to our entire conversation. When he heard he'd have new tefillin, the simcha gave him so much strength and energy he was able to wake from his weeks-long coma!

Baruch Hashem, he made an amazing recovery. He can walk, talk, and smile, and best of all - he can put on tefillin!

One of the victims from Kibbutz Be'eri was survived by his parents. I spoke with them and commiserated with them.

"I know saying kaddish can be a tough commitment at times," I told them. "So please let me know if there's anything I can do to help."

"Oh, the kibbutz does a communal kaddish for everyone," his parents explained. "It's just about remembering our loved ones."

"That's beautiful in its own way," I responded, "but your son's neshama needs this!"

Kibbutznikim to the core, his parents weren't interested in listening to my explanations.

"What if I arrange for someone to say kaddish on your son's behalf?" I offered.

"Sure," they agreed. "I guess it can't hurt."

I found a volunteer to say kaddish for the neshama of this kadosh for the full 11 months. May his neshama have an aliyah in Shamayim.



In a few short moments, Orlee's life was changed forever. Orlee lived with her husband, infant, and mother-in-law in Kibbutz Be'eri. The terrorists stormed her home and killed her husband and mother-in-law. Orlee ran to grab her baby, but as she ran, the terrorists fired after her. Orlee's little five-month-old angel was murdered in her arms, and Orlee herself was wounded.

Orlee moved to her mother's apartment with her two surviving children, and tried to pick up the pieces of her lacerated life. We helped her as much as we could. When she was ready to move into an apartment of her own, we helped her get all the furniture she'd need.

"I have a mezuzah for you as well," I reminded her.

"Oh, that's okay," she responded. "We never had one on the kibbutz, so I don't see why I'd need one now."

I didn't want to pressure her in any way, but I told her she could always call me if she changed her mind.

A few weeks later, Orlee called.

"I moved into my new apartment today," she told me. "I had a friend help me. When we finally finished arranging all the furniture, she looked around and said, *you're missing something*. I couldn't figure out what she was talking about! A *mezuzah*, she said. *I actually have one with me!*

"I know it's Friday, and it's a busy day, but do you think you could come help me hang it up and say the blessing?"

"Sure!" I answered. "I'll be right there!"

When I got to her new apartment, she showed me the mezuzah her friend had given her.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she enthused.

"It certainly is a beautiful *cover*," I said. I turned it over and saw that it was empty inside. "The most important part is the scroll that goes inside." I explained the significance of the mezuzah to Orlee and her friend,

who'd never heard of it before. "I have a scroll right here. I'll help you affix it on the doorpost."

Orlee called me a few days later, her voice filled with wonder.

"Rabbi, I don't know what you did. I haven't been able to sleep since October 7th. I have so many nightmares, and I wake up screaming and crying. The night you put the mezuzah on the door is the first night I was able to sleep since then. For the first time, I feel like I have the strength to carry on."

"It's nothing I did!" I explained. "Hashem is with you, guarding you and protecting you. He's going to help you get through this and live a good life. No matter what happens, you know Hashem is by your side!"

**Names changed to protect privacy*

DollarDaily.org

a Project of

**YadLShliach.org
and COLive.com**

COLIVE



**SIMCHAS TORAH KIBBUDIM
NOW ON KIBID, POWERED BY DOLLARDAILY.ORG!**

As we approach *Simchas Torah*, you can now bid on special *kibbudim* like *Chosson Torah* and *Chosson Bereishis* through **Kibid.org**, a revolutionary auction platform for *kibbudim*.

Last year, a woman purchased *Chosson Torah* from Chabad in Orlando through **Kibid**, and within two weeks of paying it off, she met her husband—they're now happily married! 💍 Another buyer from **Chabad of Nebraska** had a similar experience and has already committed to buying *Chosson Torah* again this year (now married). These *kibbudim* are powerful *segulos* for *parnassah*, marriage, and success, and now they're accessible to everyone, no matter where you are. Plus, they support *shluchim* when they need it most.



 **DollarDaily.org**

By participating in **Kibid, you're not just securing *brachos*—you're also supporting Chabad centers worldwide with critical holiday funding.**

Don't miss this unique opportunity! Visit **Kibid.org to place your bid today!**