



Caring For A Stranger

Mid 5710s*

This story was related by Daniel to Rabbi Mendel Scharf who shared it with us for this publication*

The tragic loss of his father and the family's breadwinner left a massive weight of responsibility on the shoulders of the oldest child, a boy of only 15 years old. Coping with the pain on a personal level was challenging enough but mustering the strength to be there for his family seemed almost impossible at times.

Daniel* recalls those difficult days and weeks:

"I was walking to shul on Shabbos the same way I had been doing for years alongside my father... but now I was doing it alone. I was feeling pretty down at the time and was looking to keep to myself. As I passed fellow Yidden also going to shul I wished them 'Gut Shabbos' out of habit and continued on my way.

"I noticed a Chassidic looking man coming my way and called out 'Gut Shabbos'. His next words changed my life forever.

"Gut Shabbos,' he responded warmly, 'and how are you doing? How was your week?' I couldn't put my finger on it but I felt completely comfortable opening up to this stranger and sharing with him what was going on in my life. It was a show of deep concern and empathy that I didn't even realize I desperately needed.

"As I made my way to shul the next week, I silently hoped I would meet him again. Sure enough, we crossed paths and had another conversation. This repeated itself week after week and became somewhat unofficially official.

לע"נ
הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' שמעון
בהר"ר שמואל זאנוויל ע"ה הי"ד
גאלדמאן
נלב"ע כ"ט תשרי ה'תשע"ז
ולע"נ זוגתו
מרת אסתר בת הרה"ח ר' יוחנן ע"ה
גאלדמאן
נלב"ע ט"ב תשרי ה'תשע"ד
ולע"נ
ר' יצחק יעקב ב"ר משה ע"ה
סיימאן
נלב"ע ד' אדר א' ה'תשע"ט
תנ"צ' ב'ה'

"I stood there stunned. It never occurred to me that I had been talking to the Rebbe. I was overcome with regret that I had 'wasted' so much of his time."

I savored these moments. His words and more importantly his care were the strength that carried me through each week."

A number of months later, Daniel and his friend were discussing Purim plans. His friend, somewhat connected to Chabad, convinced him to join the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Purim farbrengen which in those years took place in local halls to accommodate the large crowd.

Daniel agreed and they entered the shul surrounded by thousands of Chassidim and Yidden coming to celebrate this special day with the Rebbe.

As Daniel shifted and squirmed around to get a better spot and view of the head table, his eyes locked onto the Rebbe who he had never seen before. Or so he thought.

Instantly he recognized the Rebbe as the same Chassidic man who he had been meeting up with every Shabbos morning.

Daniel describes the magnitude of this revelation:

"I stood there stunned. It never occurred to me that I had been talking to the Rebbe. I was overcome with regret that I had 'wasted' so much of his time. At that moment I pledged to myself that I would not show up for our weekly Shabbos meeting. I was so embarrassed that when I got engaged and my *kallah*, who had some connection with Chabad, was going to get a bracha from the Rebbe, I opted not to go.

"One thing is for certain; those meetings saved me in many ways and set me on a path of healing. It never ceases to amaze me how the Rebbe took the time to care for me, a complete stranger." ❶

* Name added for the sake of clarity.