



דער רבי וועט געפינען א וועג...

A Change of Heart

AS TOLD BY NAFTOLI HERTZ PEWZNER

There is a certain remote city which, due to its small Jewish population, does not have an established Jewish community. With no Jewish infrastructure such as a *shul* or community center, many Jews there felt that in terms of Yiddishkeit they were all alone in an alien environment.

This all changed when in 5771, Merkos Shluchim began visiting regularly to service the community's needs. *Be'ezras Hashem* the shlichus saw great *hatzlacha* and contributed a real sense of Jewish identity, thereby causing great strides by many in *kiyume hamitzvos*. The vast majority of the local Jews participated in the Pesach *sedarim* and *tefilos* on the Yomim Noraim arranged by the Merkos Shluchim, and before long, a large circle of local Jews took form.

In 5774 I had the *zechus*, along with a friend of mine, Berel Paltiel, to have been assigned to organize the *sedarim* that year in this city. About a month before Pesach we reached out to some of the people to notify them that

once again Chabad would be joining their community to celebrate Pesach together. A short while later we received a response from an individual, who has quite a large amount of influence in the community, informing us that it does not seem that there will be an interest in our programs, and they don't think it would be "worthwhile" for us to come.

We were also informed that they would be arranging their own community *seider* to be held in the very same hall that we had used in previous years. Fortunately though, for matters of convenience, it was scheduled for the third night of Pesach, the first night of Chol Hamoed.

This was rather surprising to me, as I had already gotten to know these Yidden from a previous visit, and in the past they had been very glad to participate in our activities and even assisted in many ways. I wondered how this new attitude would affect the rest of the community; would this undo years of hard work?

However despite the apparent obstacles in our path, we were certain that the shlichus would work out. So, while knowing that we have a delicate task ahead of us, we continued to plan our trip. We explained to them that we still felt it would be worthwhile to come even if it was only for the tourists and a handful of locals that were still interested. In addition, we would also be bringing matzah and other kosher-for-Passover foods, which would only add to the community's holiday experience.

Our flight was scheduled for the Tuesday night before Pesach and of course that day I went to the Ohel. In my *tzetel* to the Rebbe, I described the sensitive situation and asked for a *brachah* that the shlichus should be successful in a manner, completely beyond our expectations. My intention was that although we had complete faith that something would change, I understood that the Rebbe's standard and estimation of *hatzlacha* must definitely stand above and beyond all of my most optimistic dreams.

Moments after I left the Ohel, at 12:52 p.m., I was notified that as I stood in front of the Rebbe, at

12:46 p.m., we had received an email from this very individual, but this time in an entirely different tone. Suddenly, they were looking forward to meeting us and offering to assist us in any way. Moreover, they had just called our hotel and arranged for us a discount on the hall that we were planning to use for the *seder*! Truly "*od heim midabrim va'ani eshma.*"

Of course seeing how the Rebbe is leading us by the hand in such a clear way, gave us a huge boost and we joyfully finished packing our bags. I even ran out to the store to buy one more bottle of grape juice in preparation for a "packed house."

When we arrived, we came to realize just how deep this change of heart was. For not only did they help with cooking, etc. even more than in the past, they were surprised that I was not expecting it in the first place.

Needless to say, the *sedarim* were very well attended, and the visit as a whole was a great success. Boruch Hashem, in a more recent visit for Pesach 5775 we saw even greater *hatzlacha*. **T**

