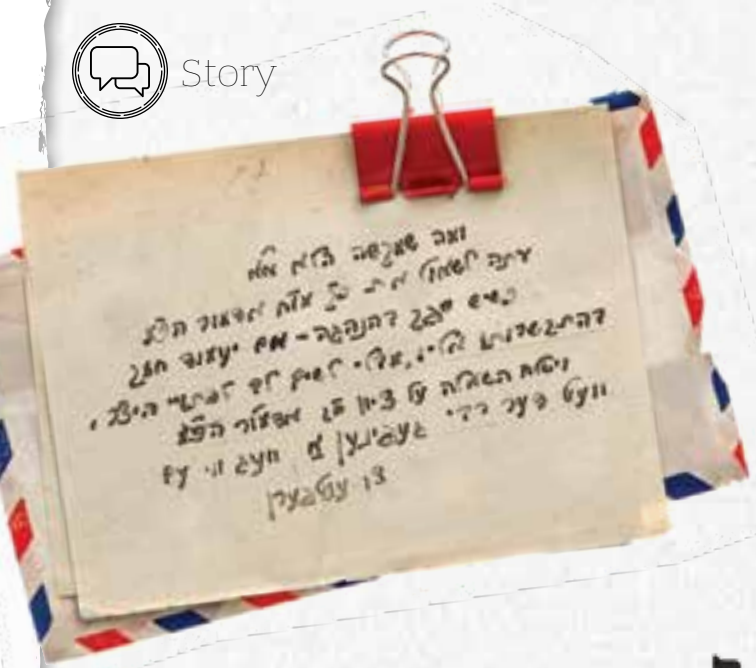




SHMULI PHOTO



דער רבי וועט געפינען א וועג...

לזכות
חנה בת מושקא
לרפואה שלימה

נדפס ע"י הרה"ת ר' אוריאל
הזוגתו מרת שבי שיחיו
ויגלר

The Only Flight Home

AS TOLD BY RABBI LEVI YITZCHOK GARELIK (BROOKLYN, NY)

On the morning of Tuesday September 11, 2001 (23 Elul 5761) I was travelling from Brussels, Belgium to New York City on a Sabena flight. At approximately 9:00 a.m., about an hour and a half before we were scheduled to land in JFK, the pilot announced that due to terrorist attacks in the United States we cannot fly into the USA and we had two choices: either to go back to Brussels or land on a Canadian Island, and since we don't have enough fuel to go back we were being diverted to Newfoundland, Canada.

Due to my work on behalf of the OK Laboratories at the time, I had an international cell phone, so upon landing

in Newfoundland I called my wife in Crown Heights. She shared with me the shocking news of the hijackings and the collapse of the first of the Twin Towers and it became clear that we were not dealing with a simple delay.

After waiting on the tarmac for many hours (until about 6:00 p.m.), we were told to disembark without taking any luggage. I agreed to leave the plane only after the pilot assured me that I would have my tallis and tefillin in time to daven the next morning. There were many other planes that had been diverted to this tiny airport and after several hours, the thousands of stranded travelers were transported

to a local stadium and from there we were sent to several public schools that served as “dormitories” (the hotels were all full to capacity and there were thousands of people).

The locals were extremely hospitable and they provided food, blankets, toiletries and cots for us all. There were several other frum Yidden from the various planes and we arranged for some fruits and vegetables and other necessary accommodations.

The pilot was true to his word and after midnight, at around 2:00 a.m., I was escorted back to the plane to retrieve my tallis and tefillin. The next day I made the rounds to all the locations and shared my tefillin with all who wished to use them (the local newspapers even took pictures). I encountered lots of Yidden and many were happy to wrap tefillin; I also blew the shofar.

My midnight tefillin story made the headlines of the local newspaper and later that day I received a call from the president of the local Jewish community inviting me to address the small but active Jewish community on the island. I was happy to oblige and had the pleasure of meeting the local Yidden and sharing with them relevant lessons for the upcoming *yomim noraim*. I compiled a list of their contact information and, *boruch Hashem*, I was able to maintain a connection with the community ever since.

Meanwhile, the flight ban in the United States continued, so on Thursday my original flight returned to Brussels, but there was no clarity as to when it would be possible to travel to the US from Europe (some news outlets said it may take several weeks). Rosh Hashanah was on Monday night and I figured I had a better chance of reaching New York before Yom Tov from Newfoundland than from Brussels, so I stayed put. There were no flights and an attempt to reach Canada by boat failed, so the travel options were quite limited. As an exception, the US authorities allowed some of the stranded planes that came from Europe to continue on to the US and they managed to go on Friday, but I couldn't go with them as I was from the Sabena flight that went back. So I was stuck. The next Air Canada flight from the island to anywhere was not for another week!

I always travel with matzah and we found a jar of gefilte fish (from Pesach...) at the Jewish community center, I squeezed grapes for *kiddush*, and we settled down for Shabbos on the island. Although I had a shofar with me I knew that I needed to return to NY for Yom Tov, as my brother-in-law, Rabbi Levi Krinsky, Shliach in Manchester, New Hampshire, depended on my services as *baal tefilla* for the *yomim noraim*. I hoped for the best. There are many more details to this story but I will get to the following point.



On Motzei Shabbos, at 1:00 a.m. I was at my wits' end. I was sitting in an office next to a fax machine (as I had requested my wife to fax me the next *shiuirim* in Rambam as the sefer I had was done...). In desperation, I was thinking to myself “*vos geit do zain...*” and I decided that since I'm next to a fax machine, I'll send a *tzetzl* to the Rebbe by fax! I called up Reb Abba at the Ohel and I told him that “*ich bet rachmanus*” as I'm “stuck on an island” so I'm sending a *tzetzl* asking the Rebbe to come to the rescue, and if Reb Abba can please bring it into the Ohel right away, which he gladly agreed. I wrote the *tzetzl* and faxed it to the Ohel requesting a *bracha* that I should return home before Rosh Hashanah. I felt that I had accomplished what I could in Newfoundland for the local Yidden during my brief stay and it was time for me to return home, but there are no flights available at least for another week!

Within the hour, I was searching the internet for flight options and out of the blues I found an Air Canada flight to Toronto scheduled to depart at 5:00 a.m. I didn't believe it because they said clearly that there won't be any flights for a minimum of another few days. But I had just written to the Rebbe... So, together with another Lubavitcher *yungerman*, we hailed a taxi and raced over to the airport. We arrived to an obviously deserted terminal and were the first in line at the Air Canada desk. The few airport personnel looked at us as if we are crazy, why we are waiting for a flight in middle of the night when there are no flights coming or going for days?

Literally minutes later, the terminal filled up with hundreds of other people, right behind us, hoping to make that flight. An agent arrived and announced that there would be only one flight to Toronto, and reservations will be sold on a first come first serve basis. I never checked when the next flight that left Newfoundland was, but *boruch Hashem* our flight departed as scheduled and I returned home safely in time for Yom Tov.

Thank you Rebbe, as always. **T**

1. I have the great zechus to have been the one who found and publicized the ksav yad kodosh (handwritten note) from the Rebbe in my Zeidy's archives, which adorns the pages of these personal stories. It is my privilege to share this story with my friends.

YOUR STORY

Share your story with A Chassidisher Derher by emailing stories@derher.org.