



דער רבי וועט געפינען א וועג...

What Comes First: The Money or the Pledge?

(AS TOLD BY RABBI YISROEL UZAN, ABUJA, NIGERIA)

We started our shlichus in Nigeria in the city of Lagos during Elul 5771*, upon the invitation of Rabbi Shlomo Bentolila, the head shliach to Central Africa. Although Lagos has a smaller Jewish population than the capital city Abuja, Mr. Nissim Gaon, an elderly philanthropist from Geneva, Switzerland had offered us use of his large villa in Lagos. The villa was spacious, fully furnished and secured, and was suitable for our living needs and for Chabad programming.

Unfortunately, four months later, our benefactor became very ill and remaining in the villa was no longer an option, so we returned to France to reconsider how to continue our shlichus in Nigeria.

We concluded that Abuja, with its larger and considerably younger Jewish population, was the logical place to reopen Chabad *peulos* in Nigeria. By Tishrei 5773*, an Israeli company in Abuja received us warmly and offered us to live in an apartment on their compound. We immediately started *shiurim*, *minyanim* and children's programs with the dozens of Jewish families living on that compound and many more Jews in town started to participate as well.

Very soon, our space became too small and we were forced to find a suitable location for a Beis Chabad in order to properly service the community. Finding a place to live in an African country that is on par with Western

standards, with dependable electricity, indoor plumbing and security is difficult, and finding a location large enough for a Beis Chabad is even harder.

However, the greatest challenge is that in order to rent such a location one needs to sign a two year contract and pay the entire rent up front. This is a huge sum of money, and we had no way of raising such an amount in our situation.

Life went on and we continued the daily and weekly *peulos*, but we had no way of moving forward in developing the shlichus. A Beis Chabad was quickly becoming a vanishing dream.

We started having nagging doubts about the entire shlichus. Perhaps our decision to come to Nigeria was a mistake and we were in way over our heads. All the developments in the shlichus certainly indicated so. Perhaps another couple would be more suited for this shlichus...

We were at a critical and painful juncture. After several weeks we decided it was time to travel to the Rebbe to ask for a *bracha* and a clear sign that the shlichus to Nigeria was for us.

We flew to New York for Chof-Beis Shevat 5773* and at the Ohel, we wrote all the details of how our shlichus had evolved. From starting off at the perfect premises for a Beis Chabad in Lagos we were now stuck in a tiny apartment in an Israeli compound in Abuja with no path forward. We begged the Rebbe for a clear sign as to whether we are to remain in Nigeria or search for a new shlichus elsewhere.

That week I heard about a wealthy businessman, Mr. David Khazanski from Toronto, who has several investments in Nigeria. I reached out to him, introduced myself and requested a meeting with him since I was in the area. He invited me for a meeting at his office at 6:00 p.m.

I searched online for flights, found a 3:00 p.m. departure from JFK arriving in Toronto at 4:00 p.m., leaving enough time to make it to his office, meet with him and catch the return flight to New York later that evening.

At 6:00 p.m. I arrived at the office to be told by the secretary that Mr. Khazanski is extremely busy and would like to reschedule for the next morning.

"There is no tomorrow morning for me in Toronto," I explained. "I just flew in from New York to meet Mr. Khazanski and I need to return tonight."

The secretary was a bit flustered and relayed the message. Mr. Khazanski came out of his office and apologized.

"I thought you said you were in the area?"

"Coming from Nigeria, New York City is in close proximity to Toronto."

He graciously invited me into his office and we had an animated conversation about Chabad activities in Nigeria in



MR. DAVID KHAZANSKI

general and in Abuja in particular. I explained to him that we were now at a critical moment and perhaps he would consider making the worthy investment in establishing our shlichus in Nigeria in the proper way.

Mr. Khazanski was very receptive and enthusiastic about everything I said but then explained that, at the moment, his assets were tied to many projects and investments and he was not in a position to give such a significant amount up front.

"When my pending deals in Nigeria pull through you will certainly hear from me."

He then requested that when I return to New York I should write to the Rebbe to request a *bracha* on his behalf for *hatzlacha* in his business dealing in Nigeria.

That evening, my wife and I went to the Ohel and wrote a long *tzetel* about the shlichus in Nigeria. This time we made somewhat of a detailed plan. We would return to Nigeria and remain until Lag Bomer. If by then we won't see any change in the situation, we would take it as a sign that the shlichus is not for us and return to France to look elsewhere.

Of course, we reported to the Rebbe the details of my meeting with Mr. Khazanski of Toronto and asked for a special *bracha* on his behalf for success in his business.

After davening at the Ohel, my wife walked into the Chabad House and saw on the video screen the following scene:

It was the farbrengen of Yud Shevat 5735* and in between one of the *sichos*, Rabbi Avraham Parshan presented Mr. Tanenbaum, a philanthropist from Toronto, to the Rebbe.

Rabbi Parshan: He pledged half a million dollars to build in Kfar Chabad...

Mr. Tanenbaum: I meant a quarter million...

The Rebbe: Why are you scared to commit to half a million if Hashem can make you wealthier? A Jew says you can give half a million...

Mr. Tanenbaum: I say "a quarter," he says "a half..."

The Rebbe: If you'll be able to give half a million, that's even better. Now you have a certain amount of capital which you calculate allows you to give a quarter million. Comes along Parshan here, and says you're giving twice as much. So you can indeed have twice as much capital!

Mr. Tanenbaum: May it only be...

The Rebbe: May Hashem help you - "געת ומצאת". Say *l'chaim*...

After Mr. Tanenbaum and his family say *l'chaim* to the Rebbe:

The Rebbe: If Parshan comes along in a few weeks, saying you can give a million, don't get scared... and then see to it that he also gives a million!

Needless to say, my wife was astounded to watch this clip, concerning a philanthropist from Toronto(!) at that exact moment and she repeated the exchange to me when I joined her a few moments later. I asked someone in the office where the video was from and they pointed out to me that this specific clip was produced by JEM as an Eye to Eye in the Living Torah series entitled "What Comes First: The Money or the Pledge?" and is available online. (www.chabad.org/779170)

Right away, I sent the link to Mr. Khazanski and informed him that this was the Rebbe's response to his request for *bracha*.

"My wife saw this message from the Rebbe on the video screen at the Chabad House right after davening on your behalf at the Ohel. Surely, committing to opening the Beis Chabad in Nigeria before the deals pull through will be the conduit for Hashem's blessing for your success."

He responded that we can go ahead with planning the new location for the Beis Chabad.

Before Lag B'omer, Mr. Khazanski came to Nigeria to settle the deal he had been working on for many months. Not only did he close his original deal with much success, he unexpectedly landed an amazing deal in an entirely different industry!

Needless to say, during this wondrous business trip, we signed the contract for the new location and opened a beautiful Beis Chabad.

Most importantly, on a personal level, we received the clearest and most tangible sign from the Rebbe that Nigeria is our *makom hashlichus*. We feel that we received a direct instruction from the Rebbe to remain in Nigeria as his shlichim to prepare the world for the *geula*. 📌

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"WHY ARE YOU SCARED TO COMMIT TO HALF A MILLION IF HASHEM CAN MAKE YOU WEALTHIER?"

THE REBBE SPEAKS TO MR. TANENBAUM AND RABBI AVRAHAM PARSHAN FROM TORONTO, DURING THE FARBRENGEN OF YUD SHEVAT 5735.



THE CHABAD HOUSE PURCHASED WITH MR. KHAZANSKI CONTRIBUTION.



THE CHANUKAS HABAYIS OF THE NEW CHABAD HOUSE.

