



הצליחו עד עתה ולמעלה מן המשוער



Rabbi Mordechai Avtzon

Hong Kong

”נשיא דורנו האמ
אויפגעטאן און
אנגעזאגט צו כל
אנשי ונשי הדור
אז מצוות הדור
איז אין דעם ענין
השליחות...”

“The Rebbe *nesi doreinu* established and mandated each and every man and woman in this generation that the ‘mitzvah of our generation’ is *shlichus*...”
(ש”פ וישלח תשמ”ז)

With a history of over 100 years, the Hong Kong Jewish community was desperately searching for a rabbi. They sent letters to Jewish organizations worldwide, asking for help. The Rebbe’s response was immediate. Within days, Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky traveled here to assess the situation. This was the winter of 5745*.

As the community was reluctant to hire a full-time rabbi, it was agreed that two *bochurim* would come for a short while. Armed with the Rebbe’s *bracha*, Rabbi Michel Gurkov (today, shliach in Wayne, NJ) and I came to service the community for one month through Purim. At that point, Michel needed to return to New York, and the community asked me to stay. As it is uncommon for a

bochur to be on *Merkos Shlichus* alone, it was not clear to me how to react.

I contacted Rabbi Hodakov who advised me that the Rebbe’s instruction was for me to remain for the time being. I stayed through Pesach and then returned twice for short visits. When the summer came around, the community invited me to serve as their rabbi for the following year.

To sign such a contract as a *bochur*, especially at *shidduchim* age, was a big deal! I asked the Rebbe for his guidance but the summer passed and there was still no answer. Toward the end of the summer, Rabbi Kotlarsky wrote to the Rebbe and mentioned that since the community is without a *rav* for Tishrei, he is asking again if I should take the job.

The Rebbe responded:

כעצת ועד רבני אנ”ש כאן אזכיר עה”צ ויבש”ט

“Follow the advice of the *Vaad Rabbanim* here. I will mention this at the *Tziyun*, and may you share good news.”

At the advice of the *rabbonim* which consisted of Rabbi Sholom Morosow, Rabbi Marlow and יבלח”ט Rabbi Osdoba, I traveled back to Hong Kong just before Rosh Hashanah and signed a contract for a year, with the agreement that when a *shidduch* comes up, it would be okay to travel.

A few months passed and a *shidduch* was proposed. I wrote to the Rebbe, asking for a *bracha* to come to New York. On the very morning that my ticket was booked, *mazkirus* called and informed me that the Rebbe just instructed:

לא כדאי להפסיק השליחות כעת.

“It is not worthwhile to interrupt the *shlichus* at this point.”

This was a turning point as it had not been clear to me whether my employment was deemed as a full-fledged *shlichus*. Here, the Rebbe clearly referred to this position as a *shlichus*!

About a month later, the *shidduch* came up again and the Rebbe responded in the affirmative. Several weeks later, on Yud Shevat, I became engaged to Goldie Shemtov –

מוקדש לחיזוק ההתקשרות
 לכ"ק אדמו"ר
 בקשר עם יום הבהיר י"א ניסן
 נדפס ע"י
 הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל
 וזוגתו מרת חנה שיינא
 ומשפחתם ח' מושקא, לוי יצחק,
 רבקה מאריאשא, ברכה,
 יקותיאל זוסמאן וגיטה שיחיו
 גנזבורג
 שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר לטאראנטא, קאנאדא



daughter of Rabbi Avrohom and Bat Sheva Shemtov from Philadelphia. On Rosh Chodesh Nissan, just three weeks after our wedding, we traveled back to Hong Kong as a couple.

The community included many factions. While there was a traditional group that supported my employment, there were also those who were opposed to having a Chabad rabbi. In spite of a new contract offered for the coming year, the community reneged during that summer. We were in New York at the time due to my mother's passing and to us it seemed that it was all over.

The Rebbe, however, wanted the shlichus to continue. Rabbi Kotlarsky was instructed to travel to Hong Kong and work things out with the community but they did not budge. On a phone call with Rabbi Hodakov the Rebbe came on the line and said:

מ'וועט נישט דערלאזן אוועקשיקן די
 וועלכע מ'שיקט פון דאנעט

"We will not allow those who are sent from here to be sent away."

The Rebbe's position was clear; Chabad would open independently. At that point, I asked Rabbi Hodakov if this meant that we should be the shluchim or perhaps in light of the embroiled community environment, a fresh couple should be selected for this position. Again, the Rebbe made it clear by saying that it is "נוגע בנפש" (absolutely essential) that we be the shluchim!

On Rosh Chodesh Elul that year (5746*), we started "Chabad of Hong

Kong" in a 100 square foot room at the Hilton Hotel. Some members of the community pledged their support but most of the community was opposed to our presence.

Soon thereafter, we established "L.I.F.E. – Lubavitch In the Far East," and with the Rebbe's *brachos* our community grew and Chabad's presence throughout the South East Asia took root.¹

During those first few years, we worked on many fronts as the Rebbe's only shluchim in Asia. I made many trips to Thailand, Japan, Singapore, Korea, Vietnam, and of course China, to work with individuals and communities in these places. *Baruch Hashem*, all these places now have permanent shluchim.

Chinuch became an issue that weighed heavily on our minds. The possibility of a Jewish school seemed daunting. This predated the Shluchim Online School by many years. The notion of bringing up our children in such an isolated location seemed impossible. The closest Jewish community was an eight-hour flight!

Concerned and worried, my wife wrote to the Rebbe, asking permission to relocate. The Rebbe's reply was incredibly encouraging:

הצליחו ע"ע ולמעלה מן המשוער. ואזכיר
 על הציון שלעיתיד לבא יצליחו עוד יותר ומתוך
 שמחה וטוב לבב ויבשרו טוב.

"You have succeeded until now, and beyond expectations. I will mention at the *Tziyun* that going forward you should succeed even more than you

did until now, and with joy and good hearts; may you share good news."


It is important to mention that we received this answer during the "Nine Days." Rabbi Binyomin Klein told us that it was extremely unusual for the Rebbe to give out answers during that period.

Shortly after receiving this answer, we managed to open a nursery school with eight children. After a year or so, people asked that we turn it into a community school and after much consideration we decided to go ahead with this. To accomplish this and get a maximum number of community members on board there were some policy issues that needed to be negotiated – some of which made it no longer feasible to be an official Chabad school. These issues were discussed under pressure of time and at one point I felt that we may have shown weakness. I shared my concerns with the Rebbe, adding my hope that the overall result brought him *ruach*.

The Rebbe drew a line under the words *נחת רוח*, extended the line above my letter, and wrote in big letters:

ורב הוא!!

"[The *nachas ruach*] is great"

Today the school has grown and is home to close to 400 Jewish children! 

1. A number of clips where the Rebbe speaks to people about the work of Chabad in Hong Kong can be found on Living Torah. Chabad.org/1558542. Chabad.org/443384. Chabad.org/1804988. Chabad.org/1441939.