



Returning The Favor

As related by Rabbi Shmuel Lew

Written By: Rabbi Tzemach Feller

Rabbi Nachman (Norman) Bernhard was a legendary activist, speaker and rabbi at Oxford Synagogue, South Africa's largest congregation. He graduated from Yeshiva University and served as rabbi in Wichita, Kansas for five years. After returning to New York, he was offered the position of rabbi in Oxford Synagogue but was unsure whether taking the job was the right thing to do.

It was suggested to Rabbi Bernhard that he visit the Rebbe, and so he did. He arrived in *yechidus* with a list of reasons why he shouldn't go to South Africa, and the Rebbe dismissed them, telling him that anyone capable of putting out the fire burning in Jewish life today must do so.

So Rabbi Bernhard agreed to move to South Africa. But he did not plan to stay there permanently. He instead intended to soon move to Eretz Yisroel. At his first *yechidus* after taking on the position in South Africa, he asked the Rebbe about his decision and requested a bracha to make *aliyah*.

Aware that her father would be seeing the Rebbe, Rabbi Bernhard's daughter had written a several-page-long letter to the Rebbe, pleading "Please don't take away my father's dream of making *aliyah*." The Rebbe responded to the girl, explaining why Rabbi Bernhard's moving to Eretz Yisroel wouldn't be a good idea, and explained why staying in his current position as a rabbi in South Africa would be the best thing not only for his community, but for himself as well. Despite the answer his daughter had received, Rabbi Bernhard still wanted to discuss it with the Rebbe.

In the course of a two-hour *yechidus* with the Rebbe late

one Thursday night, the Rebbe asked him, "Are you asking me for an *eitza* (advice) or a *bracha*?" An *eitza*," he replied. "I want the Rebbe's advice on what to do." In that case, the Rebbe told him, the best thing for him would be to stay in South Africa. "But I can be active in outreach in Eretz Yisroel," Rabbi Bernhard tried to reason. The Rebbe's response was, "It is not needed as much in Eretz Yisroel as it is in South Africa." The Rebbe went on, "You should do this not only out of *kabbalas ol*, but also out of an understanding as to why you should stay in South Africa."

That Shabbos at the *farbrengen*, the Rebbe called Rabbi Bernhard up and gave him a bottle of *mashke* for the "*Chevriah*," a group of people that would come together once a week to learn Torah with Rabbi Bernhard's involvement.

Before heading back to South Africa, Rabbi Bernhard requested another *yechidus*, which took place on Sunday night. When he walked in, he said to the Rebbe in Yiddish, "*Ich vil danken dem Rebbe'n far'n kiruv* [I want to thank the Rebbe for the particular close attention you have given me]" — presumably referring to the *mashke* he had merited to receive at the *farbrengen*. The Rebbe responded, in English, "*Kiruv* is a two-way street."

"How can I repay, so that it will be a two-way street?" Rabbi Bernhard asked. The Rebbe replied, "If you follow all my instructions and you do exactly what I tell you to do with *kabbalas ol*, that is not reciprocating the *kiruv*. Giving back *kiruv* is when you do what I ask with joy — because you know it's right." ❶