



# דער רבי וועט געפינען אַ וועג...

לזכות השלוחה מרת פערל גאלדא שתחיל לרגל יום הולדתה א' אייר, השליח גבריאל נח שיחיל, לרגל יום הולדתו ט' אייר, הבחור הת' השליח לוי שיחיל לרגל יום הולדתו י"ב אייר, הבחור הת' השליח מאיר שיחיל, לרגל יום הולדתו כ"ט אייר

נדפס ע"י הרה"ת ר' דוד ומשפחתו שיחיו טייכטל



## It's All Covered

AS TOLD BY RABBI SHMUEL KOT (TALLINN, ESTONIA)

In the summer of 5760\*, several months after our wedding, my wife's grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Lasker, inquired by Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky about shlichus opportunities for us. Rabbi Kotlarsky mentioned that the Jewish community of Estonia (a small Eastern European country that had declared independence from the Soviet Union only 10 years earlier) was seeking a rabbi.

The small group of dedicated Jews in the capital city Tallinn reached out to many Jewish organizations around the world but were rejected. They all refused to consider the possibility of a Jewish future in Estonia. Rabbi Glazman, the shliach in nearby Riga, Latvia was involved with the Yidden of Estonia for many years, by sending Merkos Shluchim, *shemurah matzah* and other *peulos*, but there was no proper Jewish infrastructure there. The shul was a dilapidated building that the community had secured during the years of Communism where only a few elderly people would gather to daven. Nevertheless, the community

was determined to grow and my wife and I came to visit for a few days to see if it was the right place for us.

The language and culture were so foreign to us and the Yiddishkeit situation was so primitive that we were skeptical about the chances of Estonia working out. Shortly after we returned to Israel from our brief trip, there was a Kinus Hashluchim for the shluchim of the Former Soviet Union and Rabbis Moshe Kotlarsky and Berel Lazar invited me to the hotel to meet Mr. George Rohr.

Mr. Rohr asked me what we needed to go on shlichus to Estonia and I mentioned that my greatest hesitation was the fact that the nearest *mikveh* was in Riga, three hours away. Hearing this he pledged \$50,000 to the construction of a *mikveh* in Estonia and that very day Chabad Lubavitch of Estonia was declared a reality.

It was not smooth sailing from the start. Some of the locals were unhappy with hiring a young Chabadnik as a rabbi, but by Chanukah 5761\* I

\* 5760-2000, 5761-2000

was installed as the first chief rabbi of Estonia since the Holocaust in a ceremony attended by the prime minister and other dignitaries.

We succeeded in our initial *peulos* of setting up a camp, Sunday school, other informal educational activities and providing for all the Jewish needs of the community, but we knew that the first big project would be building a *mikveh*. The locals laughed at us saying there were plenty of saunas in Tallinn. They couldn't grasp the logic of building a *mikveh* for a clientele they believed did not exist.

In the winter of 5763\* we started working on a building campaign for a *mikveh* as well as a kosher kitchen and classrooms. Rabbi Lazar insisted that any capital campaign must be an ambitious project to build a proper shul and Jewish community center with everything the community would need. It sounded like a good idea but I had no idea where to find the money for such a project locally. I wrote to Mr. George Rohr about the project but did not hear back from him.

During that time I traveled to New York and while at the Ohel I bumped into Rabbi Kotlarsky who happened to be there. He shared with me that the Rohr family just pledged \$350,000 to the Chabad Jewish Community Center in Estonia. I was elated to experience such a clear miracle at the Ohel and understood this as a sign from the Rebbe that we were doing the right thing by embarking on this project. I returned to Estonia and started preparing plans for a large beautiful center.

During the month of Cheshvan 5765\*, my father-in-law, Rabbi Avrohom Lasker, passed away after a prolonged illness and shortly after the *levaya* I returned to Estonia from Eretz Yisroel alone for a community meeting to unveil the plans for the forthcoming Jewish Center.

I will never forget how disastrous that meeting was. Aside from a handful of supporters, most of the people in attendance were downright hostile to the idea. Some declared the plans were terrible while others argued that building a shul on the property was a waste of good real estate. They figured a sports center would attract more people to the place. Above all people laughed at the notion that the funding for the project could be secured. The money we had from the Rohr family and other locals that had already contributed was only enough to cover the architectural plans, permits and preparing the site for construction. "What is this 27 year old rabbi thinking?!" they all said in one way or another.

As a result I came to the conclusion that



I was too young and inexperienced to take on such a project and I came to the Kinus Hashluchim in New York in emotional turmoil. I wrote to the Rebbe about the entire situation and wondered what would happen next.

On 3 Kislev I was at the Ohel when I received a phone call from Rabbi Berel Lazar.

"Shmuel, do you know a woman named Bella Barskaya in your community?"

"Of course. I knew her well. Her husband is a prominent academic and she passed away recently."

"Do you know her children?"

"No. They do not live in Estonia."

"Her son Alexander Bronshtein is sitting with me right now in my office in Moscow. He would like to do something special for the Estonia Jewish community in his mother's memory. I shared with him your plans for a community center and he is pledging to provide all the funding you still need to make it a reality!"

I cannot describe the intensity of the feelings I had at that moment. The clarity, the relief and excitement that the Rebbe was clearly guiding us to success in our shlichus was so overwhelming. With our budget covered we were able to convince more locals to get on board with the project. In Elul 5765\* we celebrated the groundbreaking of the new shul. Two-and-a-half years later, in Iyar 5767\*, we merited to open the doors of the beautiful Estonian Jewish Center serving all the Jews of the country today. **T**

## YOUR STORY

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