

דער רבי וועט געפינען אַ וועג...

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The Inverted Bracha



AS TOLD BY
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(POTOMAC VILLAGE, MD)

Several years after starting our shlichus in Maryland, we moved to Potomac Village to establish a Chabad House. It is expensive to purchase or rent a house in this area, and we were grateful to quickly find a suitable house for our family and Chabad House at a reasonable price.

Soon after moving, we began a monthly Shabbos minyan, which then evolved into twice a month. At a certain point, one of our regulars said that she wanted to make our Chabad House her permanent shul, but couldn't since we didn't have Shabbos services every week. So with the encouragement of my brother who is a shliach in Franklin Lakes, NJ, we decided to take the plunge and commit to having a minyan every Shabbos. We thus began looking for a secondary location, separate from our home, to host our growing shul operation. Location was very important to us since we wanted to be in close proximity to the "Village", a central shopping district in our town.

After writing to the Rebbe about our new hachloto, we miraculously found a house to rent right across the street from where we were living. The house, situated on a 2-acre property had been built years earlier by a diplomat and had a large "ballroom" for entertaining. We rented the house for our Chabad activities with the hope of eventually buying it, but the owner's conditions for selling it to us were unreasonable.

During the month of Kislev 5780*, the house we were

renting for our Chabad activities went into foreclosure and the deed was purchased by a group of Israeli Jewish businessmen in California. After some research, I succeeded in making contact with them and they happily agreed to sell it to us, conditional on the original owner failing to purchase it back by a certain deadline.

The investors were confident the original owner didn't have the necessary funds to repurchase it and predicted the property would be ours in short order. We eagerly anticipated the deadline and were already strategizing exactly how to renovate the house to accommodate our family and the Chabad House.

To our great disappointment, right before the original owner's buyback option expired, he went to court over the property and all our well-laid plans came to an abrupt halt. Our lawyer advised us to give it up but knowing the limited properties that were available, we just couldn't walk away. We were convinced this property was our future.

Directly across the street from this property lived an elderly Jewish woman whom we had come to know. We would visit her regularly, especially during the Yomim Tovim to blow Shofar, bentch Lulav etc. Her home was an older home, set back on a 3-acre property but we never entertained the thought of purchasing it since a) we hoped she would live a long and healthy life, and b) we were completely fixated on the other property. Her daughter who

lived in the area was grateful for our visits to her mother and we kept in touch.

Around Tishrei 5780* our elderly neighbor was unable to continue living alone, and her daughter moved her to an assisted living home nearby. Unfortunately, six months later, the night before the COVID lockdown went into effect in our county, she passed away. Her daughter was beyond distraught. Not only was she unable to be at her mother's side when she passed away due to COVID restrictions, but there might also not be a funeral due to the impending lockdown. She called me frantic and after pulling some connections I was able to arrange a proper burial.

A few months later, after sorting out her mother's estate, the daughter was preparing to sign a contract with a local developer, which would have given him the exclusive rights to market and sell the property after building a brand new multi-million dollar house on it.

The daughter subsequently informed us that she requested an exception be inserted in the contract, that in the event we wished to purchase the property, we would have priority.

We thanked her for the thoughtful gesture but were still convinced that the future of Chabad Potomac Village was destined to be on the 2-acre property still tied up in litigation.

By the end of the summer, the builder was ready to move forward with his plans so the daughter called us and gave us one last opportunity to purchase the property. We were quite sure we didn't want it but faced with having to make a final decision I asked her for a couple of days and drove to the Ohel to ask the Rebbe for direction. In my letter to the Rebbe I described the two properties and explained that my wife and I were convinced that the property we were currently renting for the Chabad House was the best option. Since the only delay was some litigation, I concluded my letter by asking the Rebbe for a bracha that the litigation should clear up quickly and we should be able to move forward with our plans.

The next day we received a shocking phone call from the rental company that managed the home we had been living in for the past nine years.

They informed us that it had come to their attention that we were operating a commercial enterprise out of the residence in violation of our contract so we had 30 days to vacate the property. They claimed that since we had signed a two-year lease nine years earlier and never renewed it,

we were now on a month-to-month, and all they needed was to give us 30 days' notice.

We couldn't make any sense of this. I had just gone to the Ohel to ask for a bracha about purchasing a property and now we were being kicked out of our house in 30 days?!


For years we had operated our Chabad House out of our home with no complaints, and by this time almost three years had passed since we had rented the second location and were no longer doing any peulos in our home. All our entreaties for an extension and threats of legal action fell on deaf ears.

In desperation, I phoned the daughter and asked her to give me access to her mother's house so that I could take a walk-through. A friend of mine who deals in real estate joined me. After a quick walk-through, we stood on the front porch facing the other property still tied up in litigation.

As I shared with him my predicament, he turned to me and said, "Mendel, have you fallen on your head?! How could you even consider purchasing the other property over this one? They are not even comparable!" He then went on to enumerate the various advantages of this property over the other one. At that point I realized how blinded we had been all this time.

Baruch Hashem in Cheshvan 5781* we purchased the 3-acre property and after some renovations moved in and dedicated the permanent Chabad House before Pesach of that year. The 2-acre property we were originally working on remained tied up in litigation for another year, and the settlement would have made it impossible for us to ever purchase it.

In retrospect, we realized that the chain of events made perfect sense. The shocking eviction notice from the rental company was what finally pushed us to reconsider our options and ultimately purchase the 3 acre property. Had we waited for even a couple of days longer it would have been too late.

The Rebbe had indeed answered us. What appeared at first to be a dire situation merely 24 hours after writing to the Rebbe, was in fact the greatest bracha! 

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