



דער רבי וועט געפינען א וועג...

לע"נ
הרה"ח ר' יצחק נח ע"ה בן האדמו"ר
משה מנחם מענדל מסלאנים ע"ה
סילווער

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יבלחט"א הרה"ת ר' אברהם יוסף
שיחי' סילווער

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תנ"צ'יה'

נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' אברהם יוסף וזוגתו
מרת צבי' הינדא שיחי' סילווער

I Was Meant To Come

AS TOLD BY MORDECHAI SOFER (SEINE-ET-MARNE, FRANCE)

I have been attending the Chabad House in Seine-et-Marne for several years when I finally decided to join the shliach Rabbi Yossi Amar on a trip to the Rebbe. Each year Rabbi Amar arranges a group trip to New York for the Shabbos of Hei Teves to give the Yidden in our town the opportunity to participate in a truly uplifting and inspiring Shabbos at the Ohel.

It was during Chanukah 5782* that I made up my mind to join the group this year and there were only seven days to make all the arrangements for my participation. This would be my first time coming to the Rebbe.

Since Covid wreaked havoc on travel around the world, one could imagine that arranging a trip to

the U.S. in under a week could potentially be fraught with challenges, and that's exactly what happened.

Although I have dual citizenship (Israeli and French), I only had a valid Israeli passport so Rabbi Amar advised me to submit a request to the American embassy for a visa to travel to the U.S. with my Israeli passport. It was impossible to reach the American embassy and the next viable option was to order an expedited French passport, since French citizens do not require a visa to travel to the U.S. I knew that in a small town like ours it was highly improbable to get a passport in under a week but I figured it was worth giving it a shot.

On Thursday 28 Kislev I entered the local city hall



to submit my request. I was told that I needed to show them airline tickets that proved I was actually planning on traveling immediately as well as a signed letter confirming that I had important business in New York on these specific dates. I immediately purchased tickets at an exorbitant price but did not have any letters regarding my business in New York.

I called Rabbi Amar with my quandary and he told me to say the truth. I needed to be in New York on Friday, 6 Teves for an important meeting with the Rebbe at the Ohel in order to secure a much needed blessing for myself, my family and my business. After all, that's the only reason I am traveling to New York at this time!

"Wait a few minutes and I'll send you the letter," Rabbi Amar said. Five minutes later I had in my email a PDF of his signed letter attesting to my appointment at the Ohel on Friday, 6 Teves at 10:00 a.m. and forwarded it to the clerk to add it to my request.

She wasn't impressed and said that it was highly doubtful the passport would come in time since the usual processing time was approximately eight business days. Leaving the building I was quite discouraged about the trip happening, but Rabbi Amar instructed me to write a letter to the Rebbe asking for a bracha that everything should work out properly and that I merit to come to the Ohel the next week together with the group. I wrote a heartfelt letter and sent it to the Ohel.

On Friday I called every few hours to inquire about my request and to my delight was notified minutes before Shabbos that my application had been approved! However the clerk had very little hope that the passport would arrive in time for my

flight the next Thursday. Rabbi Amar assured me that I had done everything in my power to make the trip happen, and now I needed to have *bitachon* that Hashem would take care of the rest to ensure that I made it to the Ohel together with the group.

Every day I called to find out if my passport had arrived and to my disappointment Wednesday evening came and my passport was not yet in Seine-et-Marne. Rabbi Amar suggested I write another letter to the Rebbe which I did, and then in accordance with the Rebbe's guidance of "*tracht gut vet zein gut*" (think good and it will be good), I packed my suitcases in preparation for my anticipated flight the next day.

On Thursday morning, Hei Teves, I made my way to the city hall at 11:00 a.m. with high hopes to find my passport there and was shocked to learn that it was closed due to a strike and would only open at 1:30 p.m. I was desperate to find out whether my passport had arrived in the mail and snuck into the building from a side door. A clerk found me and insisted I leave the premises immediately, but when I begged him to check the mail he grudgingly did so but found nothing.

My flight was at 3:40 p.m. and at 11:40 a.m. I did not yet have a passport, so I called Rabbi Amar to update him on the situation.

"Mordechai, don't give up hope," he said. "Hashem will help you get the passport later today. In the meantime try to find a later flight and write another letter to the Rebbe and ask for a bracha that you merit to come to the Ohel tomorrow morning."

Alternative flights were way too expensive for me and with a heavy heart I wrote to the Rebbe from my car while Rabbi Amar did the same from



RABBI YOSHI AMAR WITH THE GROUP OF MEKURAVIM THAT JOINED HIM FOR THE TRIP TO THE REBBE. MR. MORDECHAI SOFER IS IN THE TOP ROW, SECOND TO THE RIGHT.

his office in the Chabad House. Five minutes later I got a call from city hall that one passport arrived in today's mail... and it was mine!

I immediately called Rabbi Amar to update him on the good news and he sent me a photo of a letter he was currently writing to the Rebbe for the success of the entire trip and he was in the middle of writing the line "Mordechai should get his passport today..."

Now that I had my passport I still had some other things to take care of. While travelers from France to the U.S. do not need a visa, they are required to receive an approved travel authorization via ESTA to board a plane or vessel bound for the United States. The application usually takes an hour or two to be approved so I figured we had enough time to get it, but to my chagrin the ESTA website was down and I could not submit my application.

I wrote another letter to the Rebbe and meanwhile took a Covid antigen test required for all travelers to the U.S. At 12:30 p.m. I got the much needed "negative results" for Covid and right then the ESTA site loaded properly, but when I submitted my application I received an automated message that it could take up to 72 hours to process.

"Head to the airport!" Rabbi Amar suggested. "By then you will certainly get the ESTA approval. You've come this far, Hashem will definitely help you make the trip!"

Standing in the airport with the rest of the group I continuously refreshed my ESTA application to see if it was approved, but nothing changed. Rabbi Amar and the group were already on the way to the flight and he suggested I try to check in and hopefully they would

overlook the ESTA. I tried, but to no avail. Without the ESTA I could not even check in for the flight.

By now I was completely dejected. After all I went through to make it this far and get stuck at the last moment... I notified the group that sadly I would not be joining them this time. Rabbi Amar insisted that I try to find flights later that evening. "You overcame so many challenges, you will certainly succeed in joining us!" he said. I looked into it but the prices were well above my means and I gave up.

Although I received a full refund for my flight, I was quite depressed when I headed to the taxis to go home. Before entering the taxi I refreshed the ESTA page on my phone and was shocked to see that it was approved! It was 3:34 p.m., 6 minutes before the group was due to take off. Excitedly, I notified Rabbi Amar and he said that he found a flight through London that was leaving at 7:00 p.m. which cost 200 euro less than the flight I had originally purchased!

"You see, the Rebbe wants you to come! Nothing will stop you!" Rabbi Amar texted me right before takeoff.

I purchased the flight and returned to the airline desk. I checked in my bags and hours later was on my way to New York for my first visit to the Rebbe. *Bezras Hashem*, it will be the first of many.

YOUR STORY

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