

Streets of Life

Signs Along the Way

A SPECIAL TRIP BEGINS WITH A MIRACLE



There's a popular expression, "Be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it."

A week before my father's *yahrtzeit* on the second of Iyar, I received a phone call from a dear friend, someone who I believe is one of the hidden *tzaddikim* involved in the rebuilding of Eastern European Jewry. Rabbi Dovid Keleti is the founder of LATIV, which stands for "Emaan Tichyeh Yehadus B'Hungaria—For the Sake of the Revival of Hungarian Jewry."

Rabbi Keleti was calling to invite me to a Shabbaton that LATIV was hosting in the town of Kisvárda, about three hours away from Budapest. I had met the *rav* and his *rebbeztin* last year on a visit to Hungary with Rav Dovid Hofstедter to celebrate the Dirshu *siyum* of the third *cheilek* of Mishnah

Berurah, and I had been very impressed by what I saw.

Rabbi Keleti has *mesiras nefesh* for any and all Jews. It was fascinating to participate in a *siyum* with three dozen *baalei batim* and college-age students who—despite many years of communist rule and virtually no Jewish education—were beginning their trek to grow in *Yiddishkeit* by undertaking serious *limud haTorah*. That was aside from the over 200 men and women who regularly attend classes on a variety of levels, from learning how to read Hebrew to *shiurim* in Gemara and *mefarshim*.

The fact that the *rosh yeshivah* of Chevron, Rav Dovid Cohen, would be joining the Keletis for Shabbos made the offer even more tempting. Although I had never met the *rosh yeshivah* personally, I was often

inspired by his *sefarim* and had heard not only about his greatness in Torah but also about his warm embrace of all *Yidden*.

The *makeh b'patish*, however, was the fact that Kisvárda was only an hour and a half from Kerestir, and the LATIV Shabbaton would be taking place right after the *yahrtzeit* of the holy *tzaddik* Reb Shayale. I was thoroughly intrigued and mesmerized by the stories I'd heard about this *tzaddik* and all the miracles he performed.

Why, we even had his picture hanging in our kitchen at home, thanks to a series of incidents involving certain visitors whose presence was a bit too much for my better half, and it still remains in its prominent spot. The least I could do was to say thank you and *daven* at his *kever*. I even got a copy of my friend Sruli Besser's wonderful tome



on Reb Shayale so that I could further appreciate his greatness.

Although I left New York late on Wednesday night, which was technically after Reb Shayale's *yahrtzeit*, it says that a *niftar's neshamah* hovers over the gravesite for another three days and that *davening* there has the same impact as on the *yahrtzeit* itself.

I had an ulterior motive as well: I was hoping to return with a story I could write about on these two pages. Little did I know that my story would begin long before I reached Kerestir.

The plan was to switch planes in London for Budapest, where I would continue my trip with the group heading to Kisvárdá. I was sure that I would somehow find a way to Kerestir and back on Erev Shabbos. The connecting flight from Heathrow to Budapest was supposed to depart an hour and a half after the plane from New York touched down in London. As it turned out, however, the flight from New York was delayed, and I would have only a 50-minute window in which to make the connection. I was informed that my plane would be leaving from another terminal, and the only way to get there was a 10-minute shuttle bus ride.

Although my editors don't allow advertorials, I feel obligated to put in a plug here for British Airways. They were very accommodating in allowing me to move up towards the end of my flight so I could be closer to the exit door. They also said that they would call the gate in the other terminal to let them know I'd arrived.

When the plane landed, I dashed out with all my *bebeches*—a larger carry-on and a smaller bag containing my trusty laptop and some *sefarim* I'd perused on the six-hour flight to London. I bounded down the stairs to the back door, which would allow me to catch a bus for the ten minute ride to the terminal for the next leg without having to go through customs and rescreening.

Unfortunately, when a person is in a rush and slightly discombobulated, it sometimes

happens that the small details don't register. After a ten-minute wait, the bus finally arrived. We all packed in like sardines, after which the bus meandered leisurely from terminal to terminal until we finally reached the right one. It took longer than ten minutes. The clock was ticking. My carry-on seemed unusually heavy, and I was annoyed that the handle didn't pull out as easily as it had prior to the flight. But it didn't register in my consciousness that something was wrong until I finally reached the gate and was asked for my passport and boarding pass.

The passport was easy to produce as I had kept it in my pocket. But when I opened the zipper of the carry-on to reinsert it, my heart sank.

The items in the pocket were clearly not mine. I had somehow taken someone else's carry-on by mistake. My heart stopped. I could temporarily do without the *sefarim* and clothing, but not my *tallis* and *tefillin*!

I was in a state of despair. How in the world would I get my bag back? I walked to the nearest service desk and poured my heart out. Despite the calm reassurance of the agent behind the counter, who told me that I should just travel on and they would surely sort it out over the next few days, I refused to get on the flight to Budapest. So the kind fellow said he would put me on a later flight and suggested that I go back to the original terminal, where I could leave the carry-on that wasn't mine.

Meanwhile, I was certain that someone else was panicking as well. I opened the bag to see if there was any identification tag; there wasn't. I didn't remember any tag on mine either.

There was a small chance that the other person was at the lost-and-found, but so many questions loomed. Should I go home? Maybe it just wasn't meant to be. Then I started thinking about Reb Shayale, and I realized that compared to all the miracles I'd read about, getting my bag back seemed like a piece of cake. I looked heav-

enward, gave a *krechtz* and said, "Bizechus Reb Yeshayah ben Reb Moshe, please help me, *Ribbono Shel Olam*!"

It was no more than a minute later that my phone rang, displaying a number I didn't recognize. A man with an English accent asked, "Is this Mordecai Kame—" I finished the last syllable for him and fairly shouted, "Stop! I know why you're calling! You have my bag and I have yours!"

Indeed, I was right. But how did he know my name? You see, I had opted to take an older, soft-sided carry-on that had a small pocket in the back for an ID card. Some years ago I had put my business card, which had my cellphone number on it, in that pocket. Considering that the two bags looked identical (except for that back pocket), I'm sure it also took the other guy some time to realize they had been switched. We will never know who the original culprit was, but when we met a while later, we were both all smiles.

I took the next plane out—which was actually fortuitous because a driver was waiting there to take me not to Budapest but straight to the *kever* of Reb Shayale, where I would thank Hashem for the first *mofeis*, and hope and *daven* for many more important ones.

I wished for a story, and the one I got thankfully had a happy ending. But there would be many more over the few days I spent in Hungary.

Of course, I would have liked this story to be even more dramatic—like, the other fellow would have opened my bag, seen the *tefillin* and remembered that he was Jewish, and he now puts on *tefillin* every day. But perhaps it was a wink from Reb Shayale, and only the beginning of what would prove to be a most inspiring and magical journey to a very special world. ●

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the *rosh yeshivah* of Yeshiva Toras Chaim Bais Binyamin at South Shore and the author of the *Parsha Parables* series.