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An Unexpected Gift

The *yeshiva katana* (*mesifta*) in Netanya originally was located in Hadera. The structure there was one of the worst you've ever seen or even heard of--the boys were actually making traps to catch mice and rats! Finally the municipality closed the Yeshiva due to faulty kitchen etc., condemned the entire building, and issued a demolition order.

Then the yeshiva moved to Netanya, into the building of another Hassidic group. There, too, the conditions were not good. Rabbi Moshe Orenstein, the Rosh Yeshiva, wanted to purchase a new building, but had no money. A fund-raising campaign was initiated.

A number of years went by, Rabbi Orenstein saved every penny he could, and eventually a new building was constructed on a tight budget. In the beginning of 2016 they entered the new building, even though it was not finished.

This year, Rabbi Orenstein approached three professional tradesmen and asked for quotes for the construction of an institutional kitchen. One proposal was significantly cheaper than the others and of course that was the one he chose.

The contractor's builder arrived. A young man covered with tattoos. For three days he worked non-stop. When he finished, he said to Rabbi Orenstein, "I see that there are many unfinished things in the structure."

Orenstein said to him, "True, but we don't have the money to deal with it yet. When we raise the funds we will finish everything that needs to be done."

"Let me do it now. You saw that I was significantly cheaper than the others. It'll be worth it," offered the builder.

Orenstein agreed.

The builder worked for a few more days. When he finished he presented to Rabbi Orenstein his bill: NIS 200,000.

Rabbi Orenstein paled. He asked about the terms of payment – "How long can I take to pay it out? How many payments?"

The man stared at the rabbi for half a minute or so in silence. Then he took out his pen and wrote on the invoice: "PAID IN FULL."

Rabbi Orenstein was amazed and happy, but also confused. "Why are you doing this?"

The man replied simply, "I am repaying an old debt." He explained:

"Many years ago I lived in India. I was using drugs and also dealing them. In fact, I was quite a successful trader. But one day they caught me. I was condemned to a prison sentence of many years.

"One night when I was sitting in despair in my cell, the warden suddenly appeared and unlocked the door. He whispered to me, 'You have two minutes to escape.'

"I stared at him in amazement. 'What? How?'

He pointed to a young bearded man at the end of the corridor and said, 'Stop talking and go!'

I ran to the man, who was clearly a rabbi. He gave me a plane ticket to Israel, and told me to run outside and get in the taxi waiting near the gate. 'Your flight will soon take off. Just stay out of trouble and make sure to never come back to India.'

"How can I ever repay you?' I stammered.

"You do not owe me anything. One day you will do something for Chabad."

The man concluded his story by saying, "So now I am repaying the debt through the Chabad Yeshiva here in Netanya!"

Then he added, "Subsequently I found out that my rescuer was Gabi Holtzberg."*

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*Editor's note:*

**Rabbi Gabriel Noah (Gabi") Holtzberg** was the Chabad representative in Mumbai who was cruelly murdered in his Chabad House during a terrorist attack along with his wife Rivka and 4 other people, Bentzion Kruman, Rabbi Leibish Teitelbaum, Mrs. Yoheved Orpaz and Norma Shvarzblat Rabinovich, on 28 Cheshvan 5769- Nov.26, 2008.

*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from two English versions of the story that I received in two different WhatsApp groups. The Hebrew original was submitted by Chani Dunin, sister of Rivki Holtzberg, to I don't know what publication.

*Connection:* The murders occurred during the week leading up to Parshat Todot, this week's parsha