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## ***Two Real Estate Bargains***

Rabbi Chaim Zaid, a head of the *mesivta* [yeshiva for the younger teenage boys] in Yeshivas Nachalat Shlomo, located in the Kiryat Herzog neighbourhood of Bnei Brak, is known to be a caring mentor. Nevertheless, his role ordinarily does not extend far beyond the yeshiva walls. But then, ten years ago, R' Chaim learned that one of his former students had been stricken with cancer. Now, beyond the spiritual support he was accustomed to extending to the boys, R Chaim offered his whole-hearted assistance in every aspect, assuming all responsibility for the necessary medical treatments and procedures, accompanying his student every step along the way.

### **THE MISSING MONEY**

In the winter of 2009," the student, whom we will call Uriel for the sake of his privacy, aged twenty-two, was discovered to have a cancerous brain tumor, and the disease had already spread to other parts of his body. He was sent to France for expert treatment, but the doctors there were unable to control the disease. Rabbi Zaid remembers clearly the last phone call he received from France, when Uriel wept in sheer despair.

The doctors had told the family that there was nothing more they could for him and that they could begin counting the days. But the group of dedicated *askanim* [community supporters] following Uriel's progress refused to despair. "We have doctors in order to heal, not to pronounce a death sentence" they declared. Accordingly, they set out determinedly to find help from another source.

They consulted many experts in the medical profession, and other knowledgeable contacts as well. While they were still weighing all their options, one of the group suddenly recalled that his sister ran a *Bikur Cholim* [Visiting the Sick] society in a major city in the United States.

He got in touch with her, and she immediately mentioned a name, one Professor Rich, a non-Jew and as yet unknown in Israel, but in the U.S. he was swiftly gaining acclaim for the unique method he had developed himself, one that offered the hope of a cure for cancer patients who had already received a 'death sentence' from others in the medical profession. His treatment involved operating on the patient, but obviously in return for a substantial fee. In fact, his going rate was a staggering \$130,000.

With their hopes raised again, Uriel's family was caught in a dilemma. There was no doubt in their minds that they had to find a way to procure the services of the only person who held out some hope for Uriel - but the amount the doctor was asking was simply beyond their means. They saw absolutely no way forward.

Further, the \$130,000 was not even a complete estimate for all the costs involved. Professor Rich would also have to be brought to Israel, housed in suitable accommodations, provided with a rented operating theater in a private hospital -- all this added on approximately \$30,000 to the bill.

They did consider sending Uriel to the United States, but in the end, realized it would only cost more money, and in addition, it would have added to the strain on Uriel.

And so, the various people involved began to look for ways to raise the sum. They turned to several charity funds, but none of them could commit to such a large expense.

They turned to several leading rabbinical figures, asking for advice, and they all told them that the public could not be expected to produce such a huge sum of money. At this point, they felt stymied; there was no sign of help from any angle.

It was an agonizing situation, as they helplessly watched Uriel suffer, his condition gradually deteriorating, waiting for what now seemed the inevitable.

But after just one day passed in this way, R' Chaim Zaid received a surprising phone call. The lady on the other end introduced herself as Mrs. Abutbul, Uriel's sister. Then, to his complete shock, she informed him joyfully that they could proceed with all their plans and book Professor Rich.

R' Chaim was overjoyed but confused; what had happened? Mrs. Abutbul didn't keep him in suspense. "I decided to sell my apartment," she told him simply. R' Chaim was taken aback.

"I urged her to think it over carefully and to consult with knowledgeable rabbis, asking if she was permitted to do such a thing. After all, she had a husband and six children to consider. But she was adamant. She had already called Uriel to inform him of her decision, even before speaking to me. She also told him that she was certain the surgery would be successful and that he would recover in order to dedicate his life to Torah. For the sake of Torah, she was fully prepared to make this sacrifice. G-d would help. Afraid of what rabbis might answer, she did not even want to ask, so determined was she and so certain that the Al-mighty would not let them down."

### ***THE CAB DRIVER***

After discussing her plan with R' Zaid, Uriel's sister immediately put her Ramat Beit Shemesh apartment up for sale, asking for \$130,000, with the full sum to be paid in cash. Her home was actually worth more, but since time was of the essence, her priority was to make a quick sale. A potential buyer quickly materialized, eager to snap up a bargain, and the contract was signed.

Meanwhile, R' Chaim had swung into action in order to raise the remaining sum, another \$30,000. He turned to his former students in the yeshivah, now adults, and begged them to help. "We asked each one to pledge to raise 1000 shekels," he recalled.

The young men set out with great enthusiasm, hiring taxis with their own money to take them on their collection rounds.

"Professor Rich was scheduled to arrive on a Wednesday, but on that day, I had a prior commitment in the north of the country, to give a talk in a girls' school. I was on my way there when I received a call from one of my students, Yehuda, who was then out collecting. He had a question for me: The cab driver who was ferrying them from one place to the next had asked him and his friend to deliver a suitcase to a certain address. Should they do him the favor?"

"I told him in no uncertain terms to refuse. I would not let my students get involved in any shady business!"

A few minutes later, Yehuda called back. The driver was begging and pleading, he said. But I was adamant. Under no circumstances should he agree, I insisted, adding that if the driver wanted, he could speak with me directly, after I had given my talk.

"By then we had arrived, and I delivered my address. As I walked out of the building to return home, there was Yehuda, together with the cab driver, waiting for me! I couldn't understand what could be so important, that the driver had made such a huge detour to find me. Why couldn't he deliver the case himself? Still, I was unmoved. I went over to him and told him again that there was no way I could let my students transfer suspicious packages; surely he could understand?"

"The driver didn't reply straight away, but instead took out the case in question and opened it in front of me. It was a small, expensive-looking valise - but most interesting was the contents - small instruments, knives, strange little flashlights. Then the driver tried to explain:

"Today, before I picked up your students, I was at the airport, where I picked up a passenger who had just arrived from abroad. A very distinguished sort of man, wealthy-looking too. I drove him to where he told me to go, but after I had let him out, I realized that he'd left this suitcase behind.

"Actually, by the time I noticed the case, a few hours had already passed, and I didn't know what to do. First I thought I'd open it, to see what was inside. I was kind of hoping it would be full of dollars - but instead, all I found were these strange instruments. Now what? So much time had passed that I was embarrassed to go back and look for the man, so I asked your students if they would do me the favour. The name of the person is inside, and I can tell you where he's staying."

R' Chaim was intrigued. He took the valise and looked for the name tag - and his face turned white. The case belonged to none other than Professor Rich, who was supposed to be arriving that day to operate on Uriel.

"Straight away I asked the cab driver to give me the address of the hotel, and we got there as quickly as we could. From the reception desk we called his room, introducing ourselves and asking if he could come down to meet us, which he did. His mouth dropped when he saw the case - he must have despaired of ever seeing it again.

" 'This case contains all my surgical equipment, for an operation I came here to perform,' he told us emotionally. 'The contents are worth maybe as much as \$40,000 - but it's not just the money--these items are irreplaceable! I designed many of the instruments myself, after months and months of research and effort.'"

For a few moments, all were silent, digesting the incredible turn of events. Then R' Chaim pulled himself together -- for the benefit of his beloved student:

"I wanted him to realize that something amazing had happened, and to fill him in on the whole picture. 'Just imagine,' I told him. 'You arrived here to operate on my dear student - and then, where did you forget your valise? In the very cab that was busy transporting people making the rounds to collect money for that student! Surely you can see the Hand of Divine Providence here?'"

"And another thing - you probably don't know, but the operation was only made possible because of Uriel's sister - she sold her apartment to pay for it, and now she and her husband and six children have no roof over their heads!"

The professor was stunned. He'd clearly never come into contact with such *mesirut nefesh* [self-sacrifice] and was very touched at Mrs. Abutbul's selfless action. He was also totally unaccustomed to viewing 'mundane' events through the prism of Divine intervention, and wasn't sure how to respond.

After having sunk deep into thought for a while, the Professor suddenly announced that he was going to forego the entire payment of \$130,000!

It was like a dream," R' Chaim said. That very week, Uriel's operation took place in a private medical centre in Herzliya, with dozens of his friends and family praying that the operation be successful.

And, thank G-d, it was. Uriel began recuperating. Not so long after that he was able to host a public Thanksgiving Meal in gratitude.

### **A FIVE ROOM APARTMENT IN JERUSALEM**

Uriel's sister was immensely relieved and grateful, of course, but now she was faced with a dilemma. Although she had her money back, it was too late to re-claim her apartment; she had signed a contract, and soon she would have to move out.

She and her husband sat down to figure things out. "If we're going to move, we might as well consider Jerusalem," she began hopefully.

Her husband immediately pointed out how unrealistic such an idea was. "The money we have available is enough for a converted store-room in Jerusalem, not an apartment for a family!" he told her, trying to stop her from getting her hopes up. But Mrs. Abutbul wasn't to be put off so easily, and decided to visit a friend in Jerusalem to ask for her advice.

Why not at least see what's available, now that you're here?" the friend suggested, and so they walked to a nearby real estate agent,

When the agent heard the sum Mrs. Abutbul had at her disposal, he just laughed. Disappointed, they left the office and started to wander around the nearby streets aimlessly, when all of a sudden, they noticed a 'For Sale' sign on a building. The two friends exchanged glances.

"Nu, why not?" the friend said, and so they knocked on the door. A woman opened for them and ushered them inside. It was a five-room apartment, in excellent condition. But the price?

"I'll have to ask my husband," she told them. "I'll call him now, and he'll be here soon. Please sit down while you wait."

Sure enough, within a few minutes the owner arrived, and immediately began to list the advantages of his apartment, the dimensions, the directions it faced. Mrs. Abutbul needed no convincing -- she already loved the apartment -- but the real question was, what was the asking price?

"Three hundred and ten thousand dollars," was the reply.

Mrs. Abutbul just sighed. Of course she had known that it was impossible - but even so.... Regretfully she admitted that she had less than half the amount the apartment was worth.

The owner was clearly displeased. Turning to his wife, he asked her in annoyance why she had bothered to call him home for a couple of jokes. Upset that the wife was now being blamed for her own actions, Mrs. Abutbul tried to explain, and in her doing so the whole story came out: how she had come to sell her home in Beit Shemesh for less than the market price, how she didn't need the money in the end...

The owner didn't let her finish, but interrupted in mid-stream: "You sold your apartment to pay for your brother's operation? Are you Mrs. Abutbul, by any chance?" he demanded to know.

"Yes," she said quietly, amazed that he knew her name.

"And do you know who I am? I am the cab driver who found Professor Rich's precious suitcase! I just can't believe this turn of events -- that you should have come to my house, wanting to buy it!"

They all stood in shock, silent, staring at each other.

The owner continued: "And why am I selling such a good apartment? My mother passed away recently, and she left me a private villa in a quiet settlement. So we are moving there. I just have to call Rabbi Chaim Zaid right now, to tell him all of this!"

He dialled the number, and as soon as R Chaim answered, the words burst out of his mouth: "You won't believe this, *Kavod Harav* [honorable Rabbi]. Uriel's sister is right now in my apartment, wanting to buy it! Of course, she doesn't have the

necessary amount, but maybe I should sell it to her for what she has anyway, for less than half of the market price? What does the Rav say?"

"I told him not to be in such a rush to decide," R Chaim continued his narrative. "I suggested that we go together to a major rabbinical figure, to ask for advice and a blessing. I suggested the well-known rabbinical leader, Rabbi David Abuchatzeira, the grandson of Baba Sali and the chief Rabbi of Nahariya, as I often did.

The very next day we travelled together to Nahariya. We recounted the whole story, from beginning to end. The rabbi advised the driver to sell for the low price, promising that in reward he and his wife would live long, healthy lives.

"And that is the end of the story, I guess," R Chaim concluded. "The Rav himself was very moved by it. He said that it was one of the most incredible examples of Divine Providence that he had encountered in years."

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by Chananya Bleich in ***Sha'ah Tovah*** # 42, 21 Iyar 5770 – 5 May 2010 and subsequently posted on ShemaYisrael.com, based on his exclusive in-depth interview with Rabbi Chaim Zaid.

*Biographical note:* **Rabbi David-Chai Abuhatzeira**, who after several decades is still serving as the Chief Rabbi of Nahariya, Israel, is one of the five sons of Baba Meir Abuhatzeira, the son of the legendary *Baba Sali*. Rabbi David is currently considered the scion of the esteemed Abuhatzeira clan.

*Connection:* Seasonal - This is the first full week of Adar B, the Jewish "Month of Mazal," and there certainly is plenty of good mazal in this story.

*Editor's note:* For an interesting story about How Rabbi Chaim Zaid once received unexpected re-payment for one of his good deeds, see [this story](#) from the Jewish Press.