

CHABAD AND HEVRON RE-UNITE

By Aliza Karp

This year the Mitzva of blowing Shofar applied to the second day of Rosh HaShana. On this one day, Rabbi Danny Cohen, Chabad Shliach in Hevron, managed to hike to the army positions of 200 soldiers, in and around the Holy City of Hevron, bringing holiday refreshments and blowing Shofar for them.

Many of the soldiers admitted that had they been at home, they would not have gone to Shul to hear Shofar. But here, stationed at lonely outposts and rooftops, the Shofar came to them. They appreciated being remembered. They appreciated the extra mile Cohen had walked. Repeatedly during the day, Cohen kept hearing: “Kol HaKavod L’Chabad! Hurray for Chabad!”

During the 1800’s, Hevron was the Chabad capital of Eretz Yisroel. In the summer of 2002, Chabad and Hevron experienced a reunification, as Shliach Cohen moved into his home just above the Mittler Rebbe’s Shul, which, as its name describes, is a Shul that was purchased by the Mittler Rebbe, almost 200 years ago.

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Chabad Chassidim who settled in Eretz Yisroel in the days of the Alter Rebbe, the first Chabad Rebbe, settled mostly in Tzfat (Safed) and Tiveria (Tiberias.)

The Mittler Rebbe, the second Chabad Rebbe, requested that the Chassidim re-settle in Hevron. According to the Mittler Rebbe, all prayers are gathered in Marras HaMachpela in Hevron, the Cave of the Patriachs and Matriachs, so that together with the prayers of our ancestors, our prayers ascend on high.

During WWI, the Chabad community was evacuated by the Turks, who considered the Chassidim to be associated with Turkish enemies, the Russians. Indeed, funding for the community did come from the Chassidim in Russia.

In the era when the Chabad Chassidim lived in Hevron, both the economy and the security were dreadful, but the community life and the spiritual life were thriving. Leading the community was the Mittler Rebbe’s daughter, Rebbitzen Menucha Rochel Slonim. Her advice and blessings were sought by all: Jew and Arab, wise and unlearned. She was an extraordinary legendary figure in an era and in a capacity, usually dominated by men.

When Rabbi Cohen arrived in Hevron, he set for himself three paths for his Shlichus. One, to teach Judaism and Jewish pride to the many security personnel in the area. Two, to bring the deep and sweet teachings of Chassidus back to the city of Hevron. Three, to attend to the Ancient Askenazie Cemetary where Rebbitzen Menucha Rochel, and others in the Chabad community, were buried.

Serving the soldiers is a natural for Cohen. Before becoming a Shliach, he served in the Israeli Defense Forces, rising to the rank of Sergeant. He continues to serve in a combat unit in the reserves. He has also gone through very specialized training to participate in the first response team in Hevron, the civilians who are first to take control of an emergency situation, until the army arrives, at which point they work together with the army until the ‘all clear’ is sounded.

With Cohen’s security background he fits in well with the soldiers. He talks their language. They relate to his warm personality and open their minds and hearts to the

messages and the Mitzvos he brings them. When a new platoon was about to enter Hevron, the army asked Cohen to come to their base and address the new soldiers, familiarizing them with the special task of defending Hevron, dispelling their apprehensions and giving them encouragement.

In addition to bringing the soldiers Tefilin, Lulav and Esrog, Megillah, Menorah and Matza, Cohen and his family also bring the soldiers chicken soup. Every Friday night, whether it's a pleasant summer night, or a snowy, sleety winter night, the Cohen's interrupt their Friday night meal, arm their guests with pots, bowls and spoons and together they trek around the neighborhood serving a taste of Shabbos to the soldiers stationed nearby. (One soldier recounted that standing guard is not a favorite job amongst the soldiers, except for the Friday night shift near the Cohen's apartment.)

The Jewish community in Hevron is made up of fine, religious families, with incredible integrity and Jewish identity. Unlike Chabad Shluchim in a place like Denver, who teach the basics of Judaism, Cohen brings his fully observant neighbors the wellsprings of Chassidus and the excitement of the teachings of the Rebbe.

Amongst the enthusiastic responses Cohen received, when on the first night of Chanukah, a the giant menorah was lit at the crest of one of the hills surrounding the Jewish community in Hevron, are the comments of David Wilder, spokesman for the Jewish community of Hebron: "A terrorist sniper sited 10 month old Shalhevet Pass from the hills surrounding the Jewish community in Hevron. Those hills, also known as Abu Sneneh, are now called Givat Shalhevet. Shalhevet means flame. Chanukah, the festival of lights, of flames, brings hope that one day much greater light will radiate from those hills and all of Eretz Yisroel.

"Chabad has always been at the forefront of enlightening people. It is fitting that Chabad should be the ones to initiate the placing of a giant menorah on Givat Shalhevet."

At the conclusion of Chanukah, the Israeli Secret Service announced that the murderer of Shalhevet had been apprehended.

This year an even larger Menorah has been prepared to be erected on Givat Shalhevet, and permission has also been granted to place a giant Menorah near Maaras HaMach Cohen's third goal, attending to the cemetery, sounds a little unusual, and what is actually happening, is unusual... unusually exciting. Yes, at the cemetery... exciting. It is nothing new in Jewish tradition to Daven, pray, at the resting place of a righteous person. Tzchus Avos, in the merit of our forefathers, is a concept expressed at the very beginning of the central prayer, the Shmone Esrai, which begins with mentioning our ancestors.

The resting place of Rebbitzin Menucha Rochel is the place in Eretz Yisroel most closely connected to the Rebbe's of Chabad.

Although this plot of land is clearly owned by Jews, in previous years, the government would not allow Jews to use it. If a Jew would be seen as much as walking on this property, the Arab neighbors would call the police, and the Jew would be arrested!

The situation has changed, largely due to Cohen's concern. Adjacent to the cemetery, on the cemetery property, is a small building and a larger ruin that was a building. Cohen renovated the standing building, small as it is. He brought electricity to the area, and after almost a complete year of efforts, was able to install running water.

Now, not only are Jews not allowed to tread on this land, every weekday there is a group of men who come to study Torah in this building, and they are guarded by soldiers!

Chabad visitors now flock to this location from all parts of Eretz Yisroel and from all places Chabad is found (the four corners of the world and everywhere in between.) As the functions in the tiny building begin to outgrow its size, plans are being laid to reconstruct and furbish the larger ruin nearby.

This cemetery is located approximately a mile from the other Jewish enclaves in Hevron. With it becoming a functional Jewish center, the boundaries of the Jewish community, have been expanded. It is a clear message, to both the government and the Arabs, that Jews, steeped in their heritage and ready to fight for their future, are here to stay.

CHABAD HEVRON AND DENVER UNITE

Hevron Shliach Rabbi Danny Cohen visited Hevron on November 12th and 13th. He was a guest of Rabbi Serebriansky and the Denver branch of Americans Against Terror.

Dr. Neil Dobro had Cohen booked solid for two days straight including to being a guest on the radio.

“The people of Denver gave me such a warm welcome,” remarked Cohen.

“Everywhere I went, I met energetic, intelligent people who wanted to know about Hevron and wanted to know what they could do to be part of it. My Shlichus is not one that can do alone. Chabad of Hevron values the partners established in Denver. I look forward to greeting a Denver delegation in Hevron... very soon!”

Sara Halvri was one of the 100 people who attended Cohen’s presentation,

“Meeting Rabbi Cohen in person, was so enlightening. He is totally different from the ‘settler’ image portrayed in the news. If he is an ‘extremist’ it is his integrity and moral values that are extreme. I consider that to be a good thing.”