

Chabad Mumbai Tragedy Hits Home

By Rabbi Yossi Groner

All of us are connected with one another. So when tragedy hits another Jewish community, even in a far corner of the world, it resonates with us here in Charlotte. The tragedy that struck the Chabad House in Mumbai during Thanksgiving weekend hit us particularly hard, as we felt connected to the Chabad directors, Rabbi Gavriel (Gabi) and Rivkie Holtzberg who were slain in this senseless violence. Like the Chabad rabbis here, the Holtzbergs were emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Mumbai doing their holy work in a tough environment.

In addition, there was a Charlotte connection to this event, as the night before the terrorist attack, Rabbi Holtzberg and his wife hosted Ari Lieberman from Charlotte and showed him a video clipping of a visit that we led from Charlotte to see the Rebbe in New York in 1990. Rabbi Holtzberg was always the one who made his guests feel at home, and that night he made members of the Charlotte Jewish community a part of his home.

The wound is deep and the questions linger: Why? Why did such good people who were dedicated to their fellow human beings and lived a total selfless life end it all in this terrible tragedy? The entire Chabad family has been affected deeply by this heartbreaking event and has been looking inward for strength and consolation.

One thing we do know is that Gabi and Rivkie would have asked us to pick up where they left off and to follow their example of love and caring for every human being. Gabi was a scholar whose erudition amazed his teachers and colleagues. Rivkie was a teacher but most of all a friend to all those

with whom she came in contact. She had an amazing way of making guests at her Chabad House feel at ease and wanting to come back frequently.

The Mumbai terror victims at the Chabad House were an example of the collection of people who gather at their dinner table. From the most Orthodox man from Jerusalem to the secular "Rambo lookalike" Israeli backpacker to the businessman from the Israeli Diamond Exchange, they all bonded as one family in the presence of the Holtzbergs.



Rabbi Gabriel and Rebbetzin Rivkie Holtzberg, of blessed memory.

Rabbi Holtzberg once recounted how he received a frantic phone call in the middle of the night from the El-Al station manager in the Mumbai airport. It was Thursday night past midnight, and the nonstop El-Al flight from Mumbai to Tel Aviv was stuck with technical problems on its computer. It would take two days to get the problem fixed. Now what was he to do with 150 passengers who required kosher food for Friday evening and Shabbat

day? Now, India does not have kosher grocery stores, nor can you find kosher items in the local food market. If you want kosher, you need to bake it or make it from scratch. Gabi woke his wife Rivkie at 2 AM, and together they began kneading bread and rolls and danishes for 150 people. Gabi, who was a certified *shochet*, went to the market and bought a large number of live chickens which he ritually prepared. By early afternoon they had enough food to fill King Solomon's tables. The El-Al passengers were delighted, and about twenty of them actually spent that Shabbat at the Chabad House.

The unfolding events from the first news of the attack to the discovery of the bodies captivated the full attention of people all over the world, especially in Israel. The dramatic rescue of little Moshe by his heroic nanny lifted the spirits of so many. The cries of Moshe for his mother were heartbreaking. My twin brother who lives in Israel called me on the night before the funeral saying, "All of Israel is weeping with little Moshe."

Although we watched events from afar, we lived with the tragedy as if it were happening in front of our very eyes. We felt the presence of these two angelic souls reaching out to us with a call to action. We watched with disbelief as they were brought off the Israeli military plane with an honor guard. Somehow it was not supposed to end this way.

It easy to fall into despair, yet

that is not what Judaism is about. True, life is not the same after Mumbai, yet we can make it better and gentler. We need to turn our anguish into positive action and to light up our world with kindness and good deeds.

Gabi and Rivkie truly exemplified the dictum of the Mishna: "Receive every human being with kindness and a smile." They were totally non-judgmental and always saw the positive in every human being; we can and should emulate their attitude and behavior.

On Sunday, December 7, during our New Torah dedication, we held a memorial service for the victims of the Mumbai terror tragedy. We lit candles in memory of the victims, and we recited the traditional memorial prayer. Yet

the one tangible transformer that had the most compelling effect was the mitzvah cards we handed out which encouraged people to accept one new mitzvah in memory of the victims. The choices ranged from lighting the Shabbat and holiday candles to learning a little Torah every day. As I am writing these words, there were over 8,000 new mitzvot added by people visiting the Chabad.org website. And like a ticker, the numbers keep jumping up. Each mitzvah will help dispel darkness and infuse the world with more light and kindness. Now it's up to you to add that one more mitzvah. To act, visit our website at ohrhatorahnc.org and help those numbers rise. ☆

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Chabad Brings a Taste of Home to Visitors in Foreign Countries

By Hagar Shahak, community schlichah

By the time these words are printed, it will have been one month since the terrorist attack on Mumbai's Chabad House. I want to share with you what Chabad means to me, as both an Israeli and a Jew.

For many Israelis, the Chabad houses are a home away from home. They serve as welcoming outposts in foreign lands and in the US, places to drop in to celebrate holidays or weekly Shabbat dinners.

In 2001, as I was traveling in South America, I needed a place to celebrate the High Holy days. I arrived at the Chabad House and there were 150 other young Israelis who had gravitated to the center. The Chabad family welcomed us all warmly as if we were part of their family. The family asked for nothing in return. The

atmosphere was electric, everyone felt connected even though we were complete strangers before.

I wasn't at all surprised. All Israelis know that Chabad is always there to help you, whether for health reasons, for Kosher food, or for emotional support.

The tragedy in Mumbai brought us together as a Jewish people. The Jewish Federation felt the pain and loss keenly. In Charlotte, we had many personal relationships with the Holtzbergs in Mumbai, making the pain even greater.

The comfort that I felt at Chabad during my travels is the way I feel about the Charlotte community during my schlichut now. It says we are of one global community and that we need to support one another in both good times and in times of sorrow. ☆



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