

SLICE OF LIFE

Wake Up and Smell the Davening



by Steve Hyatt

The morning sun was just moments away from making its spectacular debut as my wife Linda and I made our way through the cavernous walkway of the B terminal at the Reno-Tahoe International airport. On this particular morning we were beginning the daylong journey to Linda's hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Our ambitious travel schedule called for a 6:00 a.m. flight.

The day before the trip I had opened my newspaper and turned to the weather page to check out the next day's forecast for Reno and Pittsburgh. As I scanned the page I was chagrined to discover that sunrise would be at 5:45 a.m. I immediately picked up the phone and called my local Chabad Rabbi Mendel Cunin. I asked him how early one can begin saying the morning prayers. He informed me that Jewish law dictates one cannot start *davening* (praying) until 52 minutes before sunrise. As I hung up panic enveloped me. I did a quick calculation and realized our early morning departure would preclude me from davening within the comfortable confines of my home before leaving for the airport.

The realization that I might have to put on my *talit* and *tefilin* in front of hundreds if not thousands of strangers was almost more than I could endure. Concerned, I called Rabbi Cunin again, pleading for some sort of special dispensation. He told me that to do it right, I couldn't begin davening until after I arrived at the airport. He said if I was uncomfortable doing so, I could always wait and daven on the plane. "Thanks Rabbi, that suggestion is a whole lot better," I thought to myself.

As I sat in my home the night before the journey, wondering what I was going to do, the words of my good friend and mentor Rabbi Chuni Vogel of Chabad of Delaware sprang into my mind. On many, many occasions he has reminded me, "Shlomo Yakov, no one ever said a *mitzva* (commandment) HAD to be easy!" My mind screamed out, "Yea but no one ever said you had to do it in front of a thousand stressed-out business travelers, tired vacationers, screaming kids and no-nonsense flight crews either."

We arrived in good time at the airport the next morning. By the time we finally made our way through security I had convinced myself that I'd just have to wait to daven until I arrived that afternoon at my father-in-law's home in Pittsburgh. As I sat down in the crowded terminal, Linda looked at me and said, "We've got about 90 minutes before we board the plane, aren't you going to find a place to daven?"

Frankly, I didn't know what to say. There she was looking at me with inquiring eyes, and all I wanted to do was run screaming from the airport because I was afraid of looking foolish in front of strangers. Once again Rabbi Vogel's sagacious advice popped into my mind, "Shlomo Yakov, no one ever said a *mitzva* had to be easy." I looked at my wife, I contemplated the Rabbi's words once again, and I reluctantly went to find a "quiet" spot in the airport. As I walked around the terminal I calculated that I was surrounded by more than 100,000 square feet of space. Yet as I gazed off into the distance I didn't see a single area that wasn't filled to the brim with people.

Walking on, I noticed that the coffee shop hadn't yet opened. There was a large area adjacent to the shop that was totally unoccupied. I put on my *talit*, placed my *tefilin* on my arm and head, and with a smile on my face and a prayer of thanks to G-d for providing this vacant spot I started davening.

As I swayed back and forth, I literally forgot where I was. I was no longer cognizant of what was going on around me and my self-consciousness had quickly dissipated. I kept turning the pages, reciting the familiar words and reveled in the opportunity to properly fulfill the *mitzva*. "What was I so afraid of?" I asked myself. This, as we like to say in the Hyatt

household, was a piece of kugel!

When I concluded my prayers and lowered my *talit* from my head I was surprised by what I saw. The coffee shop had opened for business and I was now completely surrounded by at least 100 early-morning pastry-munching, coffee-drinking, newspaper-reading patrons. Not only had I failed to find a quiet spot in the airport, I had somehow managed to find the busiest place, other than the security gate, in which to conduct my business.

I stood there feeling like a statue in a museum; I couldn't help but notice that not one of the patrons was paying the slightest bit of attention to me. While they probably had taken a quick glance when they first strolled in, it was immediately apparent that they were more interested in the morning's headlines and the taste of their French-roast coffee than they were in me. Realizing that it was almost time to board the plane to Pittsburgh, I made my way back to the gate.

As I walked through the crowded terminal, I marvelled at the fact that I had found the vacant area when I did. I was convinced that if I had arrived even ten minutes later, I would have seen the huge coffee crowd and moved on. I probably would have given into my fears, never davened that morning and felt guilty for the rest of the day. Instead, G-d presented me with an opportunity to face my fears, overcome them, learn an important lesson and complete the *mitzva*. I discovered that the only thing standing between me and my desire to live a more observant Jewish life was me.

Since discovering Chabad I've had countless "spiritual" experiences. Some were easy and others were more challenging. Yet in each case, the joy and satisfaction I felt after accomplishing something that I had never dreamed I could do, was extraordinary. My recent experience taught me that the joy of fulfilling the *mitzva* far outweighed the momentary discomfort of the challenge.

With a smile on my face and a song in my heart I strolled up to the gate. Linda looked up from her newspaper and asked, "So did you have any trouble finding a quiet place to daven?" With grin I said, "No problem at all, it was a piece of kugel."

etc.

Conference on Torah and Science

The Fifth Miami International Conference on Torah and Science, entitled, "Absolute Standards in an Age of Relativity" will take place on Dec. 16-18 at the Kovens Conference Center of the Florida International University, in Miami, Florida. The conference will be followed by a Shabbaton at the Shul of Bal Harbour. The conference is sponsored by the Shul of Bal Harbour, the Department of Religious Studies: Florida International University, the Aleph Institute of Miami as well as B'Or Ha'Torah Journal of Science, Art and Modern Life. To submit a paper contact info@borhatorah.org. For all other information about the conference contact Miriam Gitman at (305) 868-1411 or miriam@theshul.org

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