

All Who Are Hungry

A True Set Of Life Events By Rabbi Nachman Seltzer

Jewish people in general love nothing more than a good networking session around a kitchen table. Put two Yidden together on a plane or at a bus stop for more than five minutes and you will see them unable to control themselves from asking the expected network kick off questions..... (where are you from? Are you related to those Friedmans? Who are your children married to?) Some are worse than others when it comes to the whole Jewish geography phenomenon, but everyone enjoys a good round of JG from time to time. It's especially nice when people are able to use this enjoyment to help a friend find the perfect position in the work force or by pooling your vast network of acquaintances to help someone find the perfect shiduch. This was why the phone call from Duvy Zachter did not come as a huge surprise.

"It's Duvy," he identified himself to me when I answered the phone.

"How are you?"

"Boruch Hashem, do you have a second?"

"Sure what's on your mind?"

"It's like this. I'd like to take my family away for Pesach."

"Sounds like a dream most people have.."

"Yea well, the things is, I know that you know a lot of people and I was wondering if you know of any Pesach programs that are in need of the kind of services I can provide, which will in turn get me in for free, or if free is not an option, at least for a serious reduction in price."

It so happens to be that Reb Duvy Zachter is a truly talented person. He is a mesmerizing speaker with a captivating sense of humor, possesses outstanding organizational skills and can run a hotel program with its myriad details with ease. He is the consummate program professional and if it wouldn't have been so late in the season, I might have been more hopeful.

"I will definitely keep you in mind if anyone calls me about anything to do with the hotel/Pesach industry," I reassured him and then moved on with whatever it was that I was doing at the time. No doubt the whole thing would have slipped my mind were it not for the fact that someone else called me the next day. When my phone rang I glanced down at the screen and saw that it was Levi Green. I wondered what he wanted.

I knew Green from the time he was seventeen years old - and had seen him grow up and into himself. A self made businessman, Green's focus was on the hotel and vacation trade, and I'd watched him grow from hosting

weekends in two star hotels way off the beaten track, to five star vacations in stunning resorts. It was taking him time, but his company was developing a name for itself and Green was well on his way to the success he'd always dreamed of.

"How are you?"

"I'm fine," I replied, "to what do I owe the honor of this call?"

Obviously he needed something. Green didn't call for no reason. He was way too busy for chit chat.

"Well I wanted to say hello to you... I mean we haven't spoken in weeks...."

"That's so nice of you, so thoughtful."

"Well you know me, thoughtful is my middle name."

So we schmoozed for a few minutes and then Green finally got to the point.

"By the way," he said, as if this was completely beside the point and he'd only recalled that second to bring it up, "I need your help."

"How's that?"

"Well I hired a really amazing staff to be a part of my hotel program for the entire Pesach and singers to perform at some concerts during chol hamoed, but I just remembered that I need at least one superlative speaker to give drashos during Yom Tov itself. I need to provide my tzibur with an entertaining and polished speaker!"

"And you don't have one."

"No."

"And you don't know who to ask?"

"Everyone I considered is taken already."

This was very unlike Green. He never missed a detail.

"Okay let me think for a second." And then this sudden memory of a conversation rose unbidden to mind as I recalled that Duvy Zachter wanted to go away for Pesach.

"I've got the perfect candidate," I said.

"Really?"

"Perfect!"

"What's his name?"

"Rabbi Zachter."

"I never heard of him."

"You wouldn't have, he's been out of the New York area for the last ten years running a kiruv organization and you've been running around NY and Florida trying to get people to come to your hotel programs. Different crowds you know?"

“And he’s good?”

“He’s exactly what you’re looking for. When he stands up and addresses a crowd, people grow still and expectant. They want to hear what he has to say. He’s a born raconteur... he knows how to talk to a crowd.... Plus he’s a talmid chochum who will wow your tzibur with shiurim that make them think. The more I think about it, the more I realize that Duvy Zachter is your man.”

“What’s his number?”

I gave Green the number and waited for Zachter’s call. I knew that once Green followed up on my suggestion, Zachter’s call wouldn’t be far behind. To make a long story very short, Green called Zachter, Zachter was interested, Zachter called me to find out about Green, Green and Zachter met, Green offered Zachter the job, Zachter took the job and in the end, an enjoyable Pesach was celebrated by all. End of story.

Okay, that’s not really the end of the story.

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I met Duvy Zachter at a kidush on the first Shabbos after Pesach.

“How was it,” I asked him, feeling something akin to shadchan who just pulled off a successful engagement.

“Wonderful experience all around.”

“Was Green satisfied with you?”

“Satisfied enough that he asked me to work for him on a permanent basis.”

“And you’re happy that you went?”

“Yes, it was good for the family to get away. I worked hard but I enjoyed it. A perfect shiduch all around.”

He was quiet for a few seconds.

“Something occurred to me during Yom Tov. Something that I want to share with you.”

“What happened?”

He’d become reflective.

“Well you know how we say at every seder Kol Dichfin Yasay V’yaichal, all who are hungry come and eat?”

“Yes.”

“Well for a long time I was bothered by those words. They didn’t make sense to me. What are we really saying? If we honestly mean what we’re saying then why do we wait until we’re sitting down at the seder table to publicize our message and unanimous intent? We should recite that

invitation before we leave shul and go home! Saying it at the point in time that we do, seems like we're patting ourselves on the back without having to accept any obligations! By the time we make our grand statement, the vast majority of Klal Yisroel is already happily seated at their respective sedarim. So who exactly are we inviting?"

"Wow, major questions!"

"Yes, they bothered me for years and then this Pesach I reached an understanding that calmed me down."

"Are you going to share it with me?"

"Of course I will, you deserve to hear it – you were the shadchan who sent me to the hotel. It's all due to you that I got my answer."

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"As you know," Zachter began his tale/explanation, "hotels are filled with a wide range and assortment of people. Litvish, Chasidish, Heimish, Modernish, old, young, adults and children and really everything in between. Spending Pesach at a hotel gives you a picture of the veritable rainbow that is Klal Yisroel."

I nodded in agreement.

"As you are no doubt aware," he went on, "every community has it's prominent leaders, it's baalei batim who make up the community's backbone, and like in every society, there are those who live in the shadows and flirt at the edge of the acceptable. Some are not completely stable, others never found themselves, still others aren't well. A hotel," he said, warming to his theme, "is like any other community and possesses all these elements like in every city or town."

I waited to see where he was going with this.

"Along with all the "regular" families arriving on erev Pesach were a number of individuals who weren't quite mainstream. Let me tell you about one of these people. Simcha is a young man with a personality type that borders on autism. A sweet kid, his parents who live in another country pay for him to go away to a hotel every Pesach to ensure that he'll be surrounded by people and not be left uninvited and lonely for the sedarim. This year they were in touch with Green's Pesach program and booked Simcha a room for the entire yom tov. He was welcomed when he arrived at the hotel and he settled in without making any waves.

Now it so happens to be that at this particular hotel, the main dining room wasn't large enough to accommodate all the guests at the same time – and it's not as if we could have two shifts for the seder. So management

came up with a novel idea – they set up a gigantic tent just adjacent to the main dining room. The tent was large enough to seat the hundreds of guests comfortably and the moment davening ended, everyone made their way into the tent/dining area to begin their sederim.

Everyone except one.

Simcha, the young man who was there on his own somehow missed the mass exodus from the hotel into the tent. When he made his way to the lobby and looked around him, expecting to see guests on their way to the dining hall, he couldn't see anyone he knew – they were already comfortably sitting in the tent, and being naturally shy and inhibited, he couldn't bring himself to ask anyone – even passing staff where the entire hotel had disappeared to.... it was a pure disaster. A young man all alone, parents spent thousands so that he'd be well taken care of and not lonely for the seder - and in the end he sat quietly in the lobby for an hour and a half before giving up on his seder (because he didn't know where to go) and going upstairs to his room where he went to bed, hungry and no doubt extremely lonely, having missed out on the seder experience.”

There was a pained look in Zachter's eyes as he relived seder night before my eyes.

“And that wasn't all.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that he wasn't the only one I missed that night.”

“But it wasn't your job!”

“I know, but I should have cared enough to make it my job.”

I wasn't about to argue with him. If he felt that way, who was I to disagree?

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There was an older couple named Harris in the program. They come to spend Pesach with the Green's every year. Usually they bring all their children and grandchildren – the entire extended family, but this year I guess the kids were by their in-laws and they came by themselves. I got to know them over yom tov and they are truly special people. I also discovered that the husband suffers from migraine headaches. They hit him unexpectedly and when they blow in, it's with the full force of a tsunami.

That's what happened to him Seder night.

In the middle of Magid, he was struck by a pounding, raging migraine that bombarded him with a frenzied intensity! He tried to carry on with the seder, but he couldn't speak. Every word he said just added to the terrible

pain. He gave up on his seder ten minutes later and retired to their room for the night. But his wife wasn't ready to go to sleep. It was the middle of the seder and she wasn't tired. She was used to being surrounded by children and grandchildren Seder night and here she was, sitting all by herself, surrounded by a sea of people and yet, ironically, possibly lonelier than she'd ever been before!

And though she sat at a table for one... in the midst of a sprawling tent filled with large extended families all celebrating zman cheirusaynu with song and story, this lady sat at an island all her own, almost drowning in misery. How could I have missed these two people? And how could it be, that in an entire hotel filled with hundreds of people nobody cared enough to realize what was happening in their midst, right under their noses. How was it even possible that nobody thought to invite these two suffering souls to their sederim?!"

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"I only realized what happened the next day and for the rest of yom tov I made sure to be on the lookout for anyone who needed to join my meal. Simcha joined our table (and family) on a permanent basis and later on during yom tov, we hosted Mrs. Harris as well. Boruch Hashem I woke up when I did!"

There was true gratitude in Zachter's voice.

"It was then that I finally understood why we say "all who are hungry come and eat" when we're sitting comfortably ensconced at our Pesach sederim. It's not for the people you don't know, who live far away, or for the poor, poor man with ripped clothing who travels from village to village selling rags. No! The Hagada is referring to the many times in our lives when there are people sitting right in front of you who need an invitation, who desperately need someone to sit up and take notice of them, who are crying out for someone to care about them!! It's for those people that we say "Kol Dichfin, that we say all who are hungry." The Hagada is reminding us to look around, to remember that we are not alone in the world, to feel the responsibility that we bear as brothers to one another – and to ensure that nobody remains hungry in a physical or emotional sense, on the night of the seder.

Do you agree with my pshat?"

I sat there stunned by the power of his words.

"More than you can imagine," I said, "more than you can imagine."

As heard from Rabbi Duvy Zachter, incredible motivational speaker,
and talented, charismatic individual