

Fighting For Life

The Saga of How *Klal Yisrael* United to Cheat the Angel of Death

The *Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 30:3)* tells us that each year after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the Jewish people become a nation reborn. "And a nation now created will praise Hashem" (*Tehillim 102:19*): we are obligated to take the *lulav* and *esrog* and praise Hashem on *Sukkos* for saving us from death each year.

In our second issue (Nissan 5770), *Zman* reported on how *Klal Yisrael* united to try to save Martin Grossman. Even though our best efforts could not prevent the tragedy, it was a deeply moving event that brought numerous segments of *Klal Yisrael* together and underscored the inestimable value of each Jewish soul.

Now we share with our readers another incident in which diverse members and communities of *Klal Yisrael* united to save a Jewish soul, even after all hope was gone. This incredible saga involves a desperate trans-Atlantic air transport that made medical history. The story of Rebbetzin Faiga Gottesman of Manchester became a case study for doctors around the world. For us, it is a case study in how much *Klal Yisrael* can accomplish by working together and NEVER GIVING UP!

Read the remarkable story of how Rebbetzin Gottesman was snatched from the arms of death and given a new lease on life.

This is it," she thought to herself. "My time in this world is over."

It was *Shabbos parshas Noach*, 2011, and the Gottesman family had just finished their *seudah*. Rebbetzin Faiga Gottesman sensed that her *neshamah* was leaving and returning to the upper worlds.

Just one day earlier, on Friday, the doctor who cared for the Rebbetzin had visited the Gottesmans at their home in Manchester, England. He checked the Rebbetzin carefully and concluded that her time was just about up. The doctor called her husband, Rabbi Yehuda Eliezer Gottesman, and children into another room to break the news that the end was imminent.

"I want you to be prepared," he said in a sympathetic tone. "She is not going to survive the weekend. I know that Jews avoid putting off funerals at all costs and I have to be away this weekend. I'm going to prepare a death certificate for you. An assistant of mine will fill in the missing details after the fact."

The *Chevra Kadisha* was informed and the necessary preparations were completed.

Sure enough, at noontime on *Shabbos*, the Rebbetzin signaled to her husband and told him in a weak voice, "I feel that this is it. My minutes are numbered." She asked him to call in their children.

When her children entered the room, Rebbetzin Gottesman strained herself to gaze at each of them. She could barely speak but she told them that it was their duty to accept *Hashem's* will calmly. The Rebbetzin had barely lived to see her youngest daughter married. Now that daughter began weeping, "*Mammeh*, you can't go! I still need you!" The other children also lost their composure.

The Rebbetzin's voice was so weak now that her children could barely make out her final words. She told them that she would know no peace in the next world if there was fighting among them. With that she blessed them one last time and closed her eyes.

Returned from the Other Side

There are documented cases of "near death experiences"

in which people who were clinically dead nevertheless experienced things like their soul flying out of their bodies, seeing a great light and experiencing a life review. Rebbetzin Gottesman offers no such accounts; she recalls little from the time she hovered between life and death.

Zman had the honor of meeting with Rebbetzin Gottesman, a daughter of Rabbi Yehoshua Lerner, *zt"l*, Rav of Wallatz and author of *Teshuvos Knesses Yehoshua*. Rabbi Lerner was a renowned Rav who held the rabbinical post in various communities. He passed away in 1964 and was buried in Vienna.

We met Rebbetzin Gottesman in her temporary home in New York. Her husband has found work as a *shochet* at the slaughterhouse in Kiryas Yoel in Monroe, New York, for the duration of their stay in the area. The Rebbetzin sat and spoke to us normally, although she still suffers aches and pains from the difficult procedure she underwent. She must take a large assortment of pills to help her recover and to suppress her immune system's natural rejection of her new lungs.

Those who saw the Rebbetzin lying on her deathbed testify that it is impossible to believe that this woman who is so full of vitality is the same woman who spent nine months in Cleveland staring death in the face.

We learned that the same week we conducted our interview, a woman who visited Rebbetzin Gottesman in the clinic in Cleveland bumped into her in a grocery in Monsey. The woman turned white and began trembling. She could not believe that she was meeting the Rebbetzin, up and well.

We also visited the clinic in Cleveland. A veritable small city in its own right, the clinic is one of the largest medical centers in the world. We spoke to the Rebbetzin's doctors and others who witnessed her miraculous recovery. Everyone who was involved acknowledged that they had witnessed a miracle.

Sudden Weakness

In 2000, Rebbetzin Gottesman suddenly began to feel unwell. She was climbing a small hill one night on the way to her home

in Manchester when she began gasping for breath. Her initial reaction was to wave off the problem. "I thought to myself, 'I must have eaten too much.'"

Over the next few days, however, the situation deteriorated. Suddenly, she found it difficult to ascend a flight of stairs, and the simple act of breathing became increasingly arduous. Just a few steps left her feeling like she was running in a marathon. In fact, the Rebbetzin became so weak that she could barely talk. "I decided it was time to see a doctor."

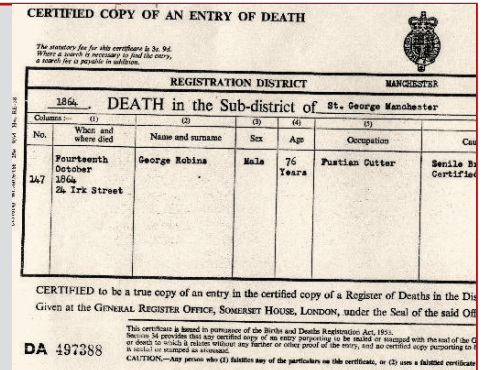
The doctors performed a battery of tests on her lungs but found nothing amiss. The top specialists in Manchester concluded that she had developed asthma, an allergic reaction most common in children but also occurring in adults. Asthma causes the windpipe to become constricted and the

condition known as sarcoidosis, a disease that involves the growth of lumps in the lungs. It is these growths that impair a person's breathing.

"Trying to explain to me what sarcoidosis is," the Rebbetzin told us, "the doctor told me that it is like an eczema on the lungs, and just like with people who have eczema, the longer it goes untreated the more the skin becomes hardened and split. So too with the lungs. The doctor said that this was sarcoidosis stage 2. Sarcoidosis stage 1 usually heals itself, but the stage 2 usually ruins one of the limbs—sometimes it is the eyes, sometimes something else."

The doctors put the Rebbetzin on a large dose of cortisone, a steroid that reduces swelling. The Rebbetzin began to feel better. In fact, the steroid boosted her energy level and she became more active. She cooked and

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opening to the lungs to become inflamed. Doctors generally prescribe drugs that open up the airways. However, in the Rebbetzin's case, these medications failed to relieve her symptoms. A very typical story under the British health care system.

Next, Rebbetzin Gottesman went to a specialist who ran a seemingly endless series of tests. For two years she was subjected to all sorts of intrusive examinations, but the doctor could not identify the problem. In the end, he decided to perform a bronchoscopy, a difficult and painful procedure where the doctor looks inside the patient's airways by inserting into the lungs a thin tube with a light and camera attached.

At last, the problem became clear. Rebbetzin Gottesman was suffering from a

cleaned with abandon. But she found that she could hardly sleep at night. The heightened activity was sapping her strength.

Either way, the cortisone could not cure the condition. It could only provide temporary relief from the symptoms. The doctor warned the Rebbetzin that it was unsafe to remain on such a high dose for an extended period of time, so he slowly weaned her off the drug. Now she was back to square one.

The Rebbetzin went to London to seek further treatment for her condition. She shuttled from one doctor's office to the next, meeting with one professor after another. Meanwhile, the debts began to pile up.

"I will never forget how we traveled to Dr. Mitchel, an elderly doctor who was my own doctor's former professor of medicine.