

## Going To The Country

A True Story By Rabbi Nachman Seltzer

The fact that \*Shmaryahu Zilberstein from Meah Shearim ended up in the Catskill Mountains was not something he had ever planned or thought possible. The very fact that he was even in the United States in the first place still surprised him, but there hadn't been any choice and he had done what he had to do. He was a chasson, his wedding was due to take place in a few months time and there was no money to pay for any of the things they would need to start a new life. Shmaryahu had given the matter a lot of thought and after much consideration and discussion with his parents and rebbeim, decided to do what many people had done before him and purchased a ticket for America.

It was true that he didn't know a soul in the States and he had no contacts and no friends. On the other hand, he also didn't have a choice. He'd heard a lot about the place called Boro Park and knew that there were many Yidden living there in the narrow streets where the houses almost touched one another. He landed in the summer and managed to get a ride to the middle of the great metropolis and when the driver left him on a street corner, he stared around himself in fascination and tried not to let the jetlag overwhelm him too much. Knowing that he had booked a return ticket and wasn't going to be in America for a long time, the chasson set to work, making his way from shul to shteibel and from yeshiva to beis medresh, but the results were disappointing and it seemed to him that there just weren't that many people around.

He couldn't figure it out.

The shuls were fairly empty and when he tried knocking on doors, he found to his great consternation, that most people weren't home.

"Where is everyone," he asked a fellow bochur from Yerushalayim.

"You're in the wrong place," the bochur replied. "It's summertime now and nobody stays in the city in the summer."

"Where do they go?"

"To the mountains."

"The mountains?"

"Yes, they go to the Catskills. Everyone. Whole Yeshivos leave the steamy city streets and head up to the cool mountains for camp."

"So how do I get to the mountains?"

“That shouldn’t be too difficult. Take a walk over to Shomer Shabbos on 13<sup>th</sup> avenue and ask around for a ride. There are people leaving from Shomer Shabbos to every location. You could probably hitch a ride to Alaska if you stood there long enough.”

“Where should I tell the driver that I want to go?”

“Tell him to take you to a bungalow colony.”

“What’s that?”

“Bungalow colonies are these little heimishe villages that people spend their summers in. A bunch of little houses or bigger houses, depending how much money the people have, a swimming pool, a shul and maybe even an auditorium.”

“Sounds nice. But it’s almost Shabbos and I’m going to need a place to stay.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem. There are always people coming and going from the city to the mountains and a lot of people have guest rooms or even guest houses and hopefully you’ll find the right place to stay.”

“So I should just get a ride to the mountains and knock on someone’s door and ask to stay with the for Shabbos?”

“Look, I don’t know how you’re going to pull this off. Start with step one. That’s a ride to the Catskills. Step two, find a place to stay. You hear what I’m saying?”

“I hear you. You’re saying I have to trust in Hashem and hope for the best.”

“Exactly. And Shomer Shabbos is a good place to start your journey.”

“Got it.”

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If 13<sup>th</sup> avenue is the heart of Boro Park, then one could be forgiven for claiming that Shomer Shabbos is the heart of the heart. It is not just a shul – it is an institution. Busy with non stop action from early in the morning until very, very late at night, Shomer Shabbos is the place for anyone trying to get a ride to anywhere in the Tri-State area and beyond. Shmaryahu made his way to the shul where he chapped a minyan and asked around if anyone was heading up country. It wasn’t long before a shiduch was made and Shmaryahu was handed over to a driver who led him in the direction of his vehicle.

“Where do you need to go,” the guy wanted to know.

Shmaryahu didn't really know and was kind of vague on his ultimate destination, only knowing that the mountains were the place to be, but not too much more than that.

"Look," said the guy, "I'm heading up to Hollow Log Estates to visit my parents for Shabbos and I'd be happy to drop you off there if you don't have anywhere else to go."

Shmaryahu had no better idea and thanking his host, settled down to get comfortable for the long ride. In short order they had left the teeming city streets behind and were on the long highway roads, greenery on either side of them, and a blue sky with wispy clouds filled with promise. They made good time, having left early enough to beat the erev Shabbos rush and it wasn't long before they were already cruising past Woodbury Commons and entering the country proper.

"We'll be there in about half an hour."

Shmaryahu nodded. It was the nod of a person who was agreeable to going with the flow and following the signposts that showed up despite the lack of prior planning. True he had arrived in the States without any plans of visiting the Catskills, but he was open and ready for anything and it seemed clear to him that this was what Hashem wanted him to be doing, so who was he to get in the way? The roads flew by like a ribbon, he could smell the fresh green grass through the partially open window and the music on the sound system kept him upbeat and happy. Soon enough they exited the highway and joined a two lane country road, the occasional farm house or ranch style home hiding behind the thick bushes or tall trees that skirted the horizon. Ten minutes later, they were pulling into a narrow road leading to Hollow Log Estates and soon enough the first bungalows came into sight.

"Where are you planning on staying for Shabbos?"

Shmaryahu shrugged. "No idea."

"Okay, I'll let you off near the shul. I guess you can ask around there."

He dropped Shmaryahu off outside the colony's shul and pulled off down the potholed road. Shmaryahu entered the shul and looked around. There were a bunch of people sitting and learning. It was erev Shabbos and there was no time to waste, so he headed over to one of the men and stood a little off to the side hoping that the other would look at him. Sensing his presence, the man stopped what he was doing and took a good look at the Yerushalmi bochur standing awkwardly before him.

"What can I do for you?"

Shmaryahu explained his predicament. How he had ended up at Hollow Log Estates because he was trying to collect money for his

upcoming wedding and how he needed a place to stay for Shabbos. The man heard him out.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you,” he said at last, “but you came to the wrong place. This is not the kind of colony that you’re looking for.”

“So what *am* I looking for?”

“You are looking for a place with big houses that have four or five bedrooms each and clean pools and maybe a clubhouse and a brand new shul and a gate surrounding the entire colony. You need a place where the people have money to give you and maybe a guest room which they will let you use for Shabbos.”

“So where should I go?”

The man thought for a second.

“Go to The Brook.”

“The Brook?”

“Yes, not far away, nice big houses, generous people. You’ll find a place for Shabbos there.”

“How do I get there?”

“Leave Hollow Log Estates and walk back to the main road. Stand on the side of the road. People drive by all the time in the direction of The Brook. Someone will stop for you in five minutes. But leave now, Shabbos is in a few hours and you don’t have that much time.”

“Thank you very much.”

“No problem, remember stand right where the road from Hollow Log joins the bigger road. Shouldn’t take you longer then five minutes.”

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It actually took three.

Shmaryahu was picked up by a young man of about twenty three years old in a tan polo shirt, white shorts and a Yankees cap. He was driving a Suburban and there was a coffee mug in the cup holder beside him. Shmaryahu was greeted by a blast of cold air as he clambered aboard and responded in Yiddish to the guy’s greeting.

“Where to?”

“Der Brook,” Shmaryahu told him.

“You’re coming for Shabbos?”

Shmaryahu nodded, figuring out the gist of the question.

The guy smiled at him, and was about to subject him to the normal questions, when his phone rang and he switched on his ear piece before engaging in conversation. Shmaryahu was forgotten.

They arrived at The Brook shortly afterwards. The man back at Hollow Log hadn't been exaggerating. This place was something else. Houses stood tall and proud, the cars were all late model and major horsepower air conditioner units whirred endlessly beside every home. The man dropped him off and he stood at the side of the road, trying to decide on his next move. As he stood there, two men approached him, looking like father and son. They studied him for a minute taking in the Yerushalmi hat and garb.

"Can we help you?"

Shmaryahu nodded.

"I hope so. I need a place for Shabbos."

"Where are you from?"

"I'm a chosson from Yerushalayim."

The man took in his youthful appearance, the curling peyos, the fresh face, the innocent eyes.

"Welcome to America."

Shmaryahu inclined his head in bashful thanks.

"Look, we're guests here at The Brook this Shabbos. We're staying at the home of a friend of ours who also happens to own a second home which he uses for a guest house. There's plenty of room and they always have lots of guests."

"So you think I'll be able to stay with you?"

"We have to ask the family, but I imagine it will be okay."

"I appreciate your help very much."

"It's our pleasure. You don't get to help a chosson every day of the week."

Shmaryahu followed them down the tree lined path, past a few homes where children played outside and kids rode bikes. He tried to compare this lifestyle and what he was used to from back home and came up short. Like the wires had fried and shorted. No comparison. That's just the way it was. Back home, the average family lived in two bedrooms. Here the people had five, six bedroom homes for two months a year. It boggled the mind.

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Friday night. The table was set with crystal and china, the food was delectable and well presented and the singing drifted out into the crisp mountain air. Shmaryahu looked around the table, taking in the scene. His host seemed like a genial sort of man. He was very kind and obviously a big

baal chesed who enjoyed helping people. Turning to the person sitting next to him, Shmaryahu asked, "can you tell me the name of our host?"

He felt kind of silly sitting at a person's table and partaking of his food, when he didn't even know the man's name.

"What, you haven't been introduced," asked his neighbor.

"Not yet."

"Well that's easily remedied. Our host's name is Rabbi Chaim Dovid Landau."

"Reb Chaim Dovid Landau?"

The other nodded. "That's his name."

Shmaryahu's eyes had widened for a second and he seemed to be deeply lost in thought.

"Is everything okay?"

"More than okay."

"Turning to his host, Shmaryahu said, "Rabbi Landau, can I ask you a few questions?"

From his place at the head of the table, Chaim Dovid Landau smiled at the young Yerushalmi bochur.

"Certainly," he replied.

Shmaryahu took a deep breath and began to speak.

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"Did you visit Eretz Yisroel about years ago," he asked Rabbi Landau.

Chaim Dovid thought for a few seconds.

"Sounds about right," he said at last.

"While you were there, you also visited the Kosel, correct?"

"Of course," his host replied, "which Yid visits Eretz Yisroel and doesn't go spend some time at the Kosel?"

"While you were visiting the Kosel, do you recall seeing a particular Yerushalmi Yid that made a deep impression on you?"

"Chaim Dovid Landau sat up in his seat, unsure where this line of questioning was going.

"I do recall a Yid who made a deep impression on me."

"At the time, you sent someone over to him asking if he would agree to talk with you and the Yerushalmi man agreed."

Everyone sitting around the table stared at Shmaryahu wondering how he had come to know a story about their host in such minute detail.

"Go on," said Rabbi Landau.

“Once you were both sitting together, you told the Yid that you had been watching him sitting at the Kosel davening for a long time and you were very impressed because you had never seen anyone daven with as much intensity as he exhibited in your entire life.

Then you said to the Yid, “tell me, what is wrong in your life that you are davening like this?”

“Nothing is wrong,” the Yid replied. “I have a beautiful gebenshte life.”

“But then, why were you davening as if the doctor just informed you five minutes before that you have twenty minutes to live?”

“There is nothing wrong, believe me, everything is fine. That’s just the way I daven.”

“But it wasn’t normal! I’ve never seen anyone daven that way even on Yom Kippur!!”

“I’m telling you there is nothing wrong. I was just sitting here davening to Hashem and that’s it.”

You were extremely impressed with the Yerushalmi Yid and told him so. And then you said one other thing.

“If you ever need anything,” you told the Yid, “my name is Chaim Dovid Landau and I live in America. Look me up and get in touch and if I can, I will try my best to help you.”

The entire table was utterly silent now, waiting to hear the end of the story.

“The Yerushalmi man that you met at the Kosel was my father,” Shmaryahu revealed with a shy smile. “When I decided to travel to the States to collect money for my upcoming wedding, I asked my father if he had any contacts here or knew anyone at all. First he told me no. Then he thought for a second, as if a memory had just come flashing through his mind.

“Wait a second, I do know someone. Reb Chaim Dovid Landau. I met him at the Kosel.”

Then he told me the whole story.

“Do you have his phone number?”

“No.”

“Address?”

“No.”

“Way to get in touch with him?”

“No.”

I ended up leaving to America with no contacts in my pocket and just your name in my head. Through a completely amazing chain of events I

ended up in your home, here in the mountains. I am reminding you of what you said to my father at the Kosel two years ago when you promised to help him if you could. Is the offer still available?"

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The Brook threw a gala melave malka the following evening in honor of Shmaryahu where they raised the entire amount necessary to pay for his wedding. So enamored were they by the incredible siyata dishmaya that had come into their lives, that they couldn't stop talking about Shmaryahu or his story. Not only that, but Rabbi Chaim Dovid Landau even flew in to Eretz Yisroel for the chasuna of the son of the man he had met at the Kosel who davened like nobody he'd ever seen.

As for Shmaryahu, he danced like he'd never danced in his life and reflected on the set of circumstances that had brought him to that day. And he recalled a conversation with his father about possible names of people in New York and a flight to JFK and the fact that Boro Park had been devoid of people (more or less) and a ride from Shomer Shabbos to Hollow Log Estates and another ride to The Brook and a meeting with people who cared enough about a fellow Jew to set him up for Shabbos and a home where there was always guests and a Shabbos table where everyone felt comfortable and a bungalow colony that paid for a wedding and a host that flew in to dance.

Then he caught Rabbi Landau's eye and he smiled.

As heard from Reb Yanky Miller  
Names have been changed