

CHEVRA REPORT



Chevra means friendship. Our goal is to help our people in their time of need.

SEPTEMBER 2011

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CHEVRA USA

Chevra is the American entity for our international effort. Chevra's work is a way people can make a real difference in the lives of many people in need.

FRUGALITY IS A VIRTUE ▶

Those of you who know me know that nine months ago I underwent gastric surgery. During that time, I have lost about 95 pounds. While that is a great thing, the drawback is that I have run out of all the "thin" clothes I had been saving for when I lost weight, and now I'm at the point where I have to buy new clothes. I hesitate to spend a lot of money on new clothing because in a few months, they will be too big for me and I'll have to give them away.

The daughter of a very close friend is getting married next week, and I needed to get a new suit. I went to a men's store I used to go to and found some beautiful suits, but they were priced four hundred dollars and up. I could justify the expense if I was going to wear the suit for the next five years, but to shrink out of it in a matter of months seems like such a colossal waste of money. My ever-practical wife suggested we look for a suit at a thrift shop. I told her I didn't like thrift shops, because they all smell stale or like moth balls, and that I could make one of the suits I have at home work. She said the suits at home were all too big and I really had to get another suit, so reluctantly, we went to the Kiwanis Club thrift store (I reasoned they were a step up from Salvation Army or Goodwill).

I started looking through the racks of clothing, which reminded me of the clothing we distribute to poor people in Eastern Europe,

when I came across a suit, that looked pretty good. I tried on the jacket, and it fit. I grabbed it and ran to the changing room, and the pants fit as well. They were even the correct length. Upon closer examination, I found the suit had the original store tags on it, and the pants had been tailored because the excess material from the hems were in the back pants pocket. The jacket pockets were still sewn, so I knew this suit, which fit me like it was made for me, was never worn. I checked the tags, and the suit was price marked twenty-five dollars. I thought it was quite a deal, until I got to the register and was informed that because it was half price Tuesday, the suit would be half price. So I got the suit for twelve dollars and change. My wife told me she was praying I'd find something suitable for the wedding.



It gave me pause to think. Even though I will be giving the suit to rummage in a few months, at least for now, it fits me, and I saved 388 dollars. Saving money isn't a matter of being cheap. It means I have more money to give to the poor, support humanitarian efforts, and in general, the means to bless other people.

There are some people who are cheap. They spend the least amount of money on anything, and sock away what they don't spend, amassing a fortune, but living like paupers. Yeshua said, "what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but lose his soul?" We need to be careful about how we spend our money, but not so we can make ourselves wealthy. We need to be careful with our spending, so we have the money to help others and practice a godly generosity toward those in need, and to help worthy ministries. We may be stressed financially, but from the perspective of most of the world, we are wealthy. How do I define wealth? We go to sleep at night knowing we are going to eat tomorrow. I know many who don't have that luxury. It's good to use coupons and take advantage of sales and offers. Being better stewards is not simply saving money. It is saving so we can be generous when we have opportunity.

Sincerely,

Michael Schiffman,
Chevra USA



TRAVELS IN POLAND, MAY 2011 ▶

We went to Warsaw where we met with Rudy, a holocaust survivor (**Photo 1**). He was telling us that he needed an operation and was given some money to cover it, but didn't have enough. We gave him the few hundred dollars he needed so he could have the surgery, and then asked me to make a prayer for him. I prayed in Hebrew and English and asked for God's blessing and healing on him.

After meeting Rudy, we went to meet Tomasz, a holocaust survivor and president of the organization of Jewish Combatants and Victims of World War II (**Photo 2**). This is a group of primarily Jewish partisans who fought the Nazis in the woods during the war, popularized by the film "Defiance." They are made up of former partisans and survivors of the holocaust. We send them funds to help them help needy survivors, and they presented me with an award for our humanitarian work. I was taken aback, because never in all the time we have been doing this work have we ever received an award.

After Warsaw, we went to Lublin, where we met with a young Jewish widow (**Photo 3**) and her two young children. She is very poor and lives on a small government stipend. The children face anti-Semitism every day in school just because they are Jews. I asked her why she doesn't try to move to Israel, but because she is a believer, that option does not exist for her. We provided extra funds to her, and took her and her children to the city square for some pizza.

After visiting the widow, we visited an elderly holocaust survivor in a nursing home in Lublin and spent time talking with her (**Photo 4**). When she asked what I do for a living, I told her I'm a rabbi, and she started to cry and said a rabbi had never visited her, and asked me to pray for her. I prayed for her blessing and good health. I was told the government pays for her staying at the nursing home, but not for her

medicines, so we left her money to cover her medicinal costs.

After meeting these people, we visited Majdanek concentration camp, in Lublin, where 79,000 people, mostly Jews, were murdered. We were there at the same time with a group of Israeli students, and we stood with them and said Kaddish in the gas chamber. It was a feeling of overwhelming sadness, and we soon left. It's important to bear witness to what happened.

After leaving Lublin, we went north to Ostruda, where we visited a camp we cooperate with other works to help holocaust survivors. While there, we had a group of survivors from Israel, primarily from an area frequently bombed by Arabs. We had them at the camp to refresh and bless them with good food and comfortable atmosphere, where they could spend time with their friends. One elderly woman recognized me as having visited her in Ukraine fifteen years ago, and we had a great reunion. Sometimes I wonder if anyone ever remembers what we do, and it's great when someone does.

From there I spoke in Northern Poland, where I addressed some Christian groups on their need to stand with Israel and the Jewish people. Those meetings went very well, and it is my hope that such meetings will roll back the feeling of anti-Semitism among so many Polish people. I told them that, in Yad Vashem, in Israel, they have a garden of the Righteous among the Nations, where gentiles who saved Jewish people are honored; and the largest single nationality of people who saved Jews during the war, were Polish people. The actions of a people can bring honor or dishonor on their nation, and they can bring honor on their nation by blessing the Jews. This is what the scripture means when it says, "by you shall all the nations bless themselves."

While at one place, a young man came up to me and told me he was Israeli, and living in Poland. It turns out his wife is Polish, and we talked about raising children in the diaspora and how it is different from Israel. I shared some thoughts with him and prayed for him as well. ■

