

The Deal Of a Lifetime

AS TOLD TO RABBI NACHMAN SELTZER

From: mimi6153@ymail.co
To: Surigr8@herizon.net
Subject: Great deal!!

Dear Suri,*
Check out the latest deal on Dan's Deals.
It's for a trip to Israel, and it's a once in a
lifetime opportunity. Grab it!
Mimi

I checked out the deal the minute I saw Mimi's email. I called and, indeed, Dan had certainly outdone himself this time. It was a flight to Israel via Amsterdam with a thirteen-hour stopover, but the price couldn't be beat: \$550. I couldn't remember the last time a flight to Israel

was less than nine hundred. Mimi was right. This was a deal worth jumping on.

The trip wasn't even for me, though there was nothing I'd have loved more than a visit to Eretz Yisrael. But I knew that I wouldn't be able to get away right then. I had work and other obligations, and the timing wasn't right. But it was the perfect deal for my father. Sure, he wouldn't be thrilled about the prospect of having to spend thirteen hours sitting in a Dutch airport, but this was a golden opportunity for him. He needed this trip. Knowing that the chances of him having heard about the deal were about five hundred to one, I called him myself.

"Hi, Tatty."



"Hi, Suri. How's everything?"

"Everything is great, Tatty. I have some interesting news."

"What kind of news?"

"Mimi just sent me an email with a deal for a flight to Eretz Yisrael for only five hundred and fifty dollars!"

"That's very cheap."

"There is a thirteen-hour stopover, but you can't beat the price, and most importantly, you'll be able to be there for Zeide's *yahrtzeit*."

"The price is perfect and I would love to be in Eretz Yisrael for Zeide's *yahrtzeit*, but thirteen hours in the airport is a bit much, don't you think?"

"I knew that you were going to say that, Tatty, and the truth is, it *will* probably be difficult for you on those hard plastic airport chairs for so long... but I still think you should do it."

"And why is that?"

"Because Tante Rechy is ... very sick. If you don't grab this chance to visit her now, while you're in Eretz Yisrael for the *yahrtzeit*, who knows if and when you'll have another opportunity?"

Tatty was quiet now. That was a positive sign. When Tatty was quiet, it meant that Tatty was weighing the pros and cons, and I knew that the chances of success were high.

"By the way, if you do decide to go for it, you should probably book now. Everyone is talking about this deal, and I can't imagine that it will last too much longer."

"Okay, book the tickets, Suri," Tatty said decisively. "I want to be there for Zeide's *yahrtzeit*, and I need to visit my sister before ... it's too late. This is an important trip. Thirteen hours in the airport is a small price to pay."

"I'll do it right away." And so I booked one ticket for mid-February. My mother was not interested in going along. Thirteen hours in Amsterdam was too much for her, and it was too close to Purim. There were things to do at home, and she had no time to be a world-traveler.



Pandemonium broke out, with the screams and wails of passengers intermingled with the high-pitched shrieks of frightened children. And then the plane began to fall through the sky.

Two events occurred prior to February that could have conceivably caused Tatty to switch the dates of his ticket. One: We were notified that Delta was willing to switch all tickets purchase through this deal to direct flights, at no extra charge. Two – Tatty received word from his nephew in Israel that Tante Rechy was on her deathbed.

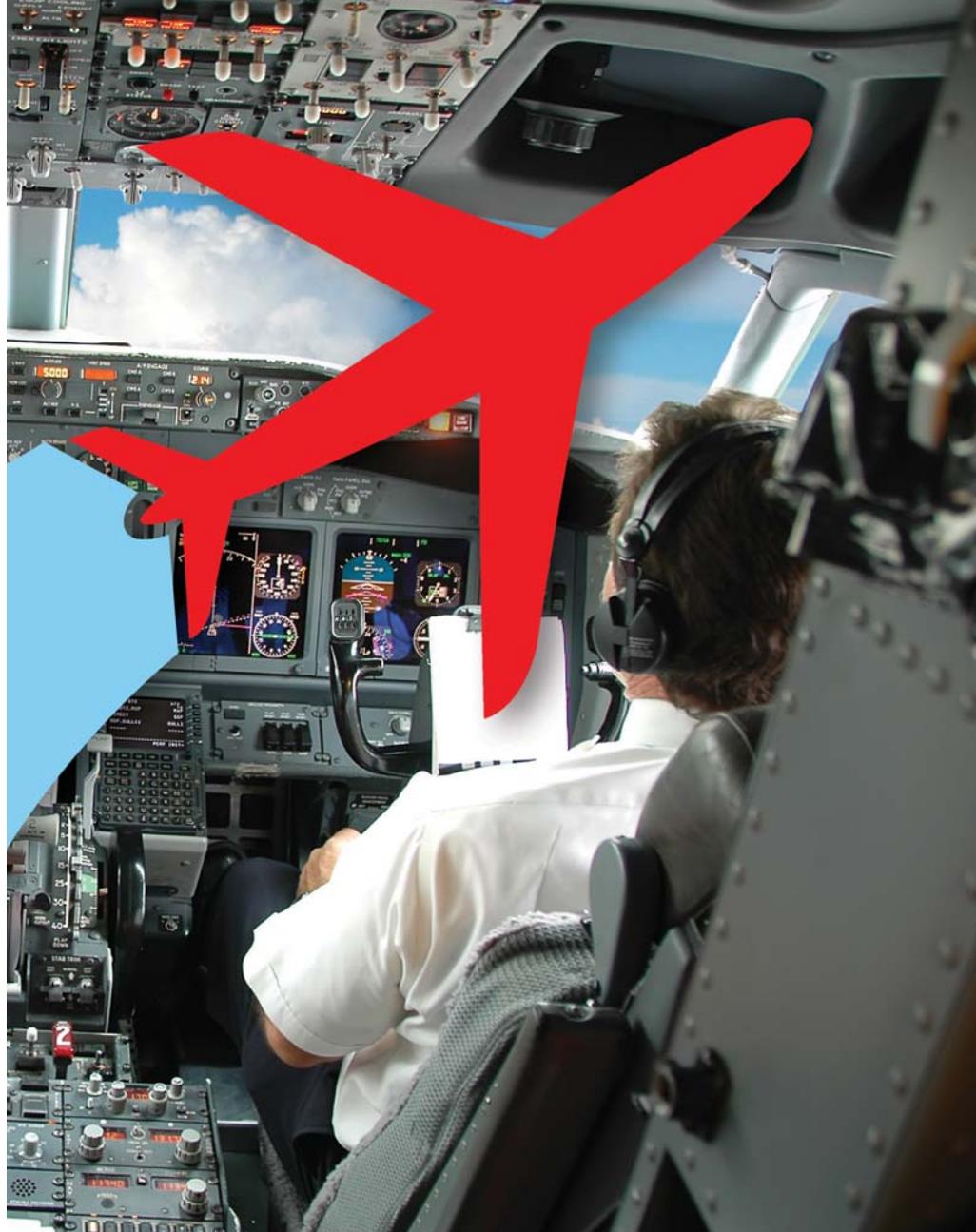
The moment I heard about Delta's offer, I informed Tatty of the good news and called the company to change Tatty's ticket, but I was too late – the deal was off. The next question was whether he should change his ticket, even for a fee, so as to reach his

sister's bedside before she passed away.

We called Delta and checked out the prices for three days from then – the earliest he was able to get away – and were told that the change would cost more than the price of the original ticket. It was a lot of money, and Tatty really didn't know what to do.

In the end, my father resolved to call his Rebbe the next day and ask his advice. Morning, however, brought with it a phone call from my cousins in Yerushalayim.

"Feter Tully," my cousin said, "Mommy is leaving us now. We know how close the two of you are, and we wanted you to be there with us as we



plane winged its way across the Atlantic, all the while dreading the thirteen hours he was facing, alone, in a foreign airport. He did have some *sefarim* packed in his carry-on, so hopefully it wouldn't be too bad. And so things might have gone, if flight #34 from Newark to Amsterdam had followed its chartered course and landed according to schedule. As it turned out, however, no one on the plane would be seeing any windmills.



There is something surreal about nighttime on a plane. Try as you might, you cannot see — and truthfully, there really isn't anything to see other than a black void. Looking out the window reveals nothing. You are miraculously suspended over the earth, trying not to think about the fact that a few pieces of metal welded together are carrying you across the globe.

Most people sleep the hours away. Some read. Some listen to music. A very few use the time productively. The air is stale, hot and claustrophobic, and smells faintly of brewing coffee from the steward's galley. But all feelings of discomfort pale to insignificance the moment you feel that you are descending into the face of mortal danger.

One second, Tatty was trying to learn by the faint overhead light and the next he was being jolted by screams coming from passengers sitting alongside the engines, which were apparently shooting sparks. A moment later the plane shuddered deeply, and the motor went completely silent. Then all the lights went off, plunging the passengers into darkness, which was compounded by the darkness outside their windows.

Pandemonium broke out, with the screams and wails of passengers intermingled with the high-pitched shrieks of frightened children. And then the plane began to fall through the sky. It was only a couple of seconds, but they were seconds of pure terror.

The plane ceased falling, and a few

say '*Shema*' with her."

So Tatty listened as his nieces and nephews recited "*Shema*" with their mother and heard the doctor inform the family that Tante Rechy had just passed away. "*Baruch ... Dayan Ha'emes,*" he intoned.

After a few heartfelt words to his sister's children, Tatty hung up the phone, heartbroken that in the end, after all his efforts to reach his sister's bedside, he'd been too late. It hurt — more than he'd imagined. It was hard to believe that he would never see his sister again.



Tatty's flight left the United States a few days after the *shivah* was over. Forget about seeing windmills, though. Since he was still in *sheloshim*, any plans he may have had about touring Amsterdam during his thirteen-hour stopover were shelved. Such is life, and Tatty was resigned to the situation.

Mommy drove him to the airport, and he boarded his flight thinking of his father's upcoming *yahrtzeit* and how he had to remember to bring a rag to the cemetery to clean the *kever* from the layer of grime that had no doubt accumulated on it since his previous visit.

He did his best to fall asleep as the

minutes later the lights came back on. The relief was palpable.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. As you are aware, we are experiencing mechanical difficulties. While trying to resolve them, we turned off our engines, but when we turned them back on, some were non-responsive. We are trying to correct the problem and will keep you posted. Do not panic. Things are under control.”

Shortly afterwards, however, it became quite clear that things were not under control.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Our crew members have determined that it is unsafe to continue flying this aircraft. We have therefore changed course, and are now heading to the nearest airport, which is one hour away in Shannon, Ireland. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.”

Throughout the excitement, Abba had a *sefer* written by a Rebbe opened on his lap and was trying valiantly to learn from it while keeping focus. Though we are constantly in Hashem’s hands, there is no clearer time to see that than while flying in a compromised aircraft. Tatty *davened* that Hashem should continue supporting each of the passengers, as He had done until that point. Tatty’s distinguished demeanor and choice of reading material served as a source of comfort to his fellow passengers, and they humbly requested that “the rabbi” should please *daven* for them as well.

Tatty reassured them that he had the entire plane in mind. “One for all and all for one,” as they say.

Time passed in a haze of worries and reminiscing and hopes for a safe landing. Half an hour later, the captain informed the passengers that since the imminent danger had been averted, they would be bypassing Shannon and heading for the Dublin International Airport instead, as it was far better equipped to deal with their possible emergency.

“Due to the fact that our aircraft is



not currently operating at one hundred percent, we do not know how our landing gear will react when put into operation. Therefore, fire trucks and various emergency responders will be awaiting us on the tarmac, as a precaution. Do not let this worry you at all. It is standard procedure in this type of situations.”

This pilot was one cool customer — or maybe just a talented actor. To everyone’s relief, the landing proceeded smoothly, and although it seemed as if all of Dublin’s fire trucks and ambulances had been summoned to the runway, *baruch Hashem* none of them were put into use on that exciting day.



We don’t always appreciate the value of being on solid ground, but when you’ve just been flying unsupported by

full engine power thousands of feet above ground, you come to appreciate the solidity of Planet Earth. The passengers were all assembled in a big room when an airline representative explained that a plane that was currently on its way from Chicago to Amsterdam was being rerouted to pick them up, and would reach them in five hours’ time.

“Until the plane arrives,” said the friendly and apologetic airline rep, “why don’t you utilize the opportunity to relax.”

Some went off to grab a bite to eat. Others felt fortunate to have been granted an unexpected opportunity to see Dublin and disappeared into the early morning light. In the blink of an eye, the group of passengers had disbanded and were no longer a unit.

Tatty looked around him, processing the situation. Touring was all well and



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good for people who didn’t have to daven *Shacharis*. Although he didn’t normally consciously appreciate the fact that the sun rose over the horizon and lit up the world with its benevolent gaze, today was not a typical day. Today was a day to give thanks and praise to the *Ribbono shel Olam*. Though there had been approximately thirty *frum* people on the flight, at least twenty of them had already left the airport. Tatty counted the remaining men: there were nine of them. He tried a recount — still nine. With no recourse, Tatty began combing the terminal for another religious Jew, who perhaps was waiting for a different flight. But try as he might, and comb as he may, there were no black, white, or multi-colored *yarmulkes* in sight.

Tatty was desperate, and desperate

times called for desperate measures.

“Are you Jewish?” he asked a man with a mustache and sunglasses.

“Sorry, man.”

“Are you Jewish?” he asked a man who was hunched over his laptop. The man couldn’t be bothered to reply. He just frowned. Tatty got the point, but was still not ready to concede defeat.

He struck gold on the sixth try.

“Yes, I am,” replied an old man.

“Are you familiar with the concept of a *minyan*?”

The man nodded.

“Well then, we have nine men and need one more. Would you be our tenth man?”

The old man nodded.

As they walked over to where the other eight men were waiting to begin *Shacharis*, the old man decided to share some information with his new acquaintance.

“It’s funny that you should meet me here in the Dublin airport, of all places, and ask me to join you as the tenth man for your *minyan*.”

“Why is that?”

“Because today is my father’s *yahrtzeit*, and I know it meant a lot to him that I say *Kaddish* for his *neshamah*.”

Tatty was properly inspired by this statement.

“Well then, would you perhaps be willing to put on *Tefillin* as well?” he asked, pushing his luck. The man was unwilling, despite Tatty’s spirited explanations as to how meaningful it would be to that same *neshamah*. But he did join them for the *minyan* and recited *Kaddish* before heading off to catch his plane to Johannesburg.

Tatty was left wondering who this man’s father was, and how he had merited to have a *minyan* of Yidden fall out of the sky so his son could recite *Kaddish* for him. He remembered how he had wanted to change his ticket to a direct flight and hadn’t been successful, and how he hadn’t even managed to make it to Israel in time for his own sister’s *levayah*. He thought of how frightening it had been up there on that plane as all the passengers hovered in a place between heaven and earth — not knowing if they were going to make it out alive.

He reflected on all of this and he just *knew* that every detail had transpired so as to provide a *minyan* to Dublin for the *yahrtzeit* of this man’s father, a man who had evidently been worthy of causing Hashem to arrange an emergency landing.

Not always do we see why things happen, Tatty thought, as he began the final leg of his journey, *but sometimes we are given the smallest glimpse, that helps remind us of the important things we should never forget...*

All in all, it had been the deal of a lifetime after all. ■

**As heard from Suri.*

Names have been changed.