

The Gift Of Uman

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Shimon Gross (a pseudonym) is a Chassidic businessman residing in London, England. He traveled to Uman for the first time in the winter of 2000.

I was invited to join a group of chassidim touring the gravesites of the tzaddikim in the Ukraine. We arrived in Uman late Thursday night. On Friday morning, we got up before dawn to pray with the sunrise.

I remember walking down the streets of Uman at that time of the morning. Everything was still dark, it was freezing cold and there was snow everywhere. Before praying, we immersed in the *mikveh* opposite the *tziyun*. I was the last one to leave the building.

Upon leaving the *mikveh*, I heard music in the stillness. The

music grew louder as I approached the *tziyun*. I realized that it was coming from the room of the *kohanim*(1), a detached room near the *tziyun* where the *kohanim* could pray. I looked in through the window and saw a guy who looked like a hippie sitting in front of an open book of Psalms, strumming his guitar and singing the words of King David at the top of his voice. He seemed to be so immersed in his prayer that he was oblivious to the world.

At that moment, I understood the gift of Uman. Uman gives each person the opportunity to connect to God, no matter his or her level of observance. That morning, I prayed differently than I had ever prayed before.

I'm not a Breslover chassid, but since then, I've traveled to Uman several times, including Rosh HaShanah. It's not easy to leave my family behind, but Rosh HaShanah in Uman is an experience that will remain with me forever.

1. A kohen is forbidden to enter a cemetery unless certain criteria are met. The committee that oversees the Rebbe's gravesite built a special room that meets those halakhic requirements, enabling kohanim to pray at the tziyun.

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