



## SALFORD RAISED

*HARAV Y. REUVEN RUBIN SHLITA*

Let me first set the stage for the reader. I am a New Yorker born and raised. Just talk to me for a moment and my broad accent will tell you this, and I carry this identity with comfort, after all it's been who I am for over three score and ten years. This instant identification of my birthplace has its pro's and con's, but that's just where Hashem has placed me so I guess I have to work with it. Living in England for almost half my life hasn't changed anything, I open my mouth and out comes a New York twang that easily gives me away.

That was until last week, and then everything was turned upside down. I had to go into one of the larger supermarkets to pick up four items that my hiemisha grocery doesn't carry. I entered with trepidation, mask tightly fastened, hands suitably sanitised. I found my few products and made my way to the checkout counters. My memory vaguely told me that there is a line for those who are purchasing less than ten items. This line used to be peopled by older denizens who bought sparsely and didn't like using the new-fangled checkout machines. I looked to and fro with no such line in sight, just then a burly fellow strode over to me and explained that such small order lines are now extinct and I should use one of the new automated checkout points. I explained that I don't like those creatures, they always bark at me about something I've done wrong, like 'a suspected item in my bag', or some such. My new found guide to the perplexed worked in the store and seemed to be in charge of shepherding old dozy customers through the initiation process of joining the twenty first century. He promised he would get me through the experience without any trauma and guided me to one of the cold hulking machines. He talked me through the first steps,



## Adass Aish Kodesh

Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita

36 Bury Old Road

Prestwich – Manchester

M25 0FT



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then he took the initiative and scanned my few articles. Well, that is he almost did, without batting an eye, the machine loudly announced that I had ‘a suspicious’.... You guessed it.... ‘Article in the bagging area!’ Well, well, I just smiled, although he couldn’t see being that we both wore masks, but the ordeal ended. I was about to bid farewell to my chaperone when he came out with this startling observation. “Tell me Rabbi, you sure have a broad Salford accent, you born around here?” I was stunned, after close to forty years of being asked where in America I come from, I was finally taken as a native. Salford *nuch*, it must have been the mask. I laughed and answered that I come from the Brooklyn side of Salford, at which point the well-meaning fellow did what I usually experience, he went into a monologue about how he loves New York City after spending a day there some ten years ago. We chatted some more about his New York experiences, and parted with smiles and fond blessings.

Why do I burden you with this tale of mistaken identity? Because of one word the fellow said. He called me Rabbi, and although that may be the truth in this case, it could have been anyone from the hiemisha community, because to the world, everyone with a beard and hat is a Rabbi, and as such, a walking advertisement for our whole community. I spoke to that grocery worker even though I had places to go people to see, yet, well he was there and I am a Rabbi in his eyes, just as all of us are.

Let me share just one more incident on the day I thought I was finally granted leave to be a native of Salford.

Some hours later I was standing in front of a large house in leafy Cheshire holding a platter of hiemisha food. I was there to visit a close friend who had just gotten up from Shiva for his wife. The estate has two huge houses and one must use an intercom to be buzzed in. When I arrived, there were two British Gas engineers waiting to do some work at one of the houses whilst I was coming to visit the other. Whilst waiting to be buzzed in, we started to talk. Immediately I lost my new found Salford accent and they immediately started telling me how much they loved New Yorkers and our sense of humour. My new found friends turned to one another and noting the tray of food one said, ‘sure that’s what the Jewish people do, they help others in tough times’. Job done! They saw a chessed and attached it to our people. As The grip of Covid recedes somewhat, and people once more take the plunge to reenter the general population, we all should be exceedingly diligent. This is a moment when creating kiddush Hashem is extremely important. The hiemisha community hasn’t always covered itself with glory during this difficult time and sadly the media likes nothing more than having pictures of colourful looking people not abiding by the rules. I don’t intend to enter into any debate over the rights and wrongs of the situation, I only want to point out that now is a perfect time to create a positive understanding of who we are as a community.

Everyone is suffering from ‘battle fatigue’ but this is no time to let ourselves go and act as if nothing ever happened.

We are all meant to be mekadeish Hashem wherever we find ourselves. In this zechus may we share in rufous and yeshuous. Amen!

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