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WORLD

Rabbi's pal heard voice of evil on phone during Mumbai massacre

BY MATTHEW KALMAN IN JERUSALEM , SIMONE WEICHELBAUM AND CHRISTINA BOYLE IN NEW YORK / DAILY NEWS WRITERS

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2008, 2:00 AM

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When word reached [Rabbi Levi Shemtov](#) that his friends were being held hostage inside [Mumbai's](#) Jewish center, he frantically called their cell to offer help.

Evil picked up the phone.

PHOTOS: DEADLY ATTACKS IN MUMBAI, INDIA

"I tried and tried and tried, and in the end, someone answered and said, 'Hello,'" Shemtov told [Israel's Army](#) Radio as he recalled trying to negotiate with one of 10 Muslim militants.

The radicals were holding a group of Jews, including [Brooklyn-born](#) Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife, captive as Mumbai became paralyzed by coordinated raids across the city.

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The person who answered said his name was Imran, sounded "very calm" and reassured Shemtov everyone was safe.

Then came a piercing cry for help.

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"He said the rabbi was okay, everyone was okay, that if they did

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Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife, Rivkah, were killed by

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what he wanted he would free them," Shemtov said, explaining he asked a friend who spoke Urdu to translate.

gunmen at the Mumbai Jewish center where he worked.

"I asked if we could hear the voice of the rabbi, or someone who was alive there. We only heard the voice of one woman screaming in English, 'Please help immediately.'"

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"I asked him to pass the phone to the rabbi. He said, 'You've already asked for too much.'"

The line went dead.

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Shemtov dialed the same number repeatedly and spoke to the gunman at least five times, before he was told the phone battery was dying and the dialogue ended.

When Indian commandos finally raided the building Friday, everyone inside was dead, including Holtzberg, 29, and his wife, Rivkah, 28.

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Their orphaned son, Moshe, who celebrated his second birthday on Saturday, had also been in the Chabad-Lubavitch Jewish center when the raid occurred Wednesday night, but was smuggled to safety by his nanny.

Sunday loved ones from [Crown Heights](#), Brooklyn, were headed to [Israel](#), where the couple's funeral will take place.

Moshe, who is being cared for by his maternal grandparents, will accompany his parents' bodies. Special arrangements were also made for the nanny, who is Indian, to accompany the boy.

cboyle@nydailynews.com

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