

# HERE'S *my* STORY

## EVERY LITTLE DETAIL

**RABBI LEIBISH FRIEDMAN**



I was born in Budapest, Hungary, around the outbreak of World War II.

My family miraculously managed to survive the war, and afterwards, we immigrated to Australia. When we got there, Australia was a parched desert when it came to Torah institutions. But thanks to Chabad, in the late 1940s, a *yeshiva* was established in Melbourne, and this is where I was educated.

The rabbi in charge of the *yeshiva* there was Rabbi Yitzchok Groner — he was very clever, and very experienced. And he built up the *yeshiva* there from scratch. In the mid-1950s, Chabad opened a girl's school. Both were highly successful.

All the Rebbe's emissaries who came to Australia made a very good impression. They were warm, friendly, and helpful. They went out of their way to help people. And people admired them because they were willing to sacrifice for the sake of *Yiddishkeit*. Whatever the Rebbe told them to do, they did it one hundred percent, and perhaps even more.

Today, Melbourne is booming Jewishly. There is a kindergarten, a school for boys, a school for girls, a

beginner's *yeshiva*, an advanced *yeshiva*, and a seminary, all thanks to Chabad.

As I mentioned, I attended the Chabad *yeshiva* when I was a youngster — I came there when I was thirteen and stayed until sixteen, at which age I went into business. And from that time — this would be from 1952 — I started to correspond with the Rebbe. I wrote to him every year on the occasion of my birthday, asking for blessings. The Rebbe answered every letter that I wrote to him — usually, his reply would come within ten days.

I remember that once I asked his advice about my Torah studies. The Rebbe advised that besides my standard learning I should also learn *Tanya*. Regular study of the *Tanya* was very important to him and, many years later, he gave me a pocket *Tanya*, which I still have with me. When he gave it to me, he said that if it gets torn, I would be given a new one. In other words: "Keep on learning daily, diligently, and don't worry if the book tears."

In 1961, when I reached marriageable age, I came to the United States to look for a wife. And that's when I went to see the Rebbe for the first time.

Waiting outside his office, I was one of many, and everybody was very, very anxious. So I asked them, "What's going on? Why are you so nervous?" So they said, "It is known that this is a very special occasion. Before you go in to see the Rebbe, you immerse in the *mikvah*, you put on a *gartel*, and you recite Psalms." I was new to this, and I hadn't realized what I should do to prepare myself. Fortunately, I had gone to the *mikvah*, the ritual bath, that morning. But I didn't own a *gartel*, the cloth belt that *chasidim* wear, as I wasn't married yet. Still, I was apprehensive.

But when I went inside, the Rebbe made me comfortable on the spot. He smiled, greeted me warmly, and invited me to sit down. And straight away I was relaxed. It was a beautiful experience — beautiful, beautiful.

I was advised in advance not to give my hand to the

*continued on reverse*

MY ENCOUNTER  
with the REBBE

An oral history project dedicated to documenting the life of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. The story is one of thousands recorded in the 800 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. [mystory@jemediia.org](mailto:mystory@jemediia.org)



continued from reverse

Rebbe. To my surprise, the Rebbe offered me his hand in greeting, but instead I just handed him a bunch of letters addressed to him which I had brought from Melbourne.

He then asked me about how the *chasidim* were doing back home — he wanted to know the little details, what was going on in town.

I told him that before leaving Melbourne I had visited Reb Mordechai Perlow, who had been in a car accident which, miraculously, he had survived, thank G-d. He had an operation, and he was fine. I had just seen him the day before I left.

The Rebbe knew about this. But when I said that Reb Perlow also had an operation on his finger, he exclaimed, "What? They didn't inform me that he had an operation on his finger!" He was taken aback that he hadn't been informed that Reb Perlow had a little operation on his finger.

This little operation was done after the main operation, which the Rebbe had been informed of, but of the little one he was not informed. So when I told him this, he was surprised.

That's when I understood how the Rebbe was interested in every piece of data, no matter how small, in every little detail.

I stayed in New York for a while. I learned a bit in the *yeshiva* there. And during this time, I had three more meetings with the Rebbe. On the last occasion, I told him that I was planning to go to Israel via several cities in Europe. He asked me to add Copenhagen to my itinerary and to bring wine from him to the Chabad emissaries wherever I went. This I agreed to do and this I did. And they were all very happy to make *I'chaim* with this wine.

Once I arrived in Israel, I wrote to the Rebbe about my trip. I was tired, so it was not a long letter — I just described in general what went on in the last three weeks. And, immediately, the Rebbe wrote me back: "I was already anxious to hear from you. I wondered why I didn't hear from you so far. And I want to hear more. I'm surprised that I didn't get more details from you."



Rabbi Yitzchok Groner

I should have remembered — the Rebbe always wanted to know all the details.

*Rabbi Leibish Friedman lives with in family in London, England. He was interviewed in New York in February, 2012.*

לע"נ ר' ישראל יעקב וזוגתו מרת קריינא ע"ה לאקשין  
ע"י בניהם ר' נחמן ור' אברהם ומשפחתם שיחיו

## This week in....

> **5697 — 1937**, in a letter written from Paris to the Rebbe Rayatz, the Rebbe suggested that *Kuntres Etz Chaim* and *Kutres Ho'avoda* be printed, to mark the 40th anniversary of *Tomchei Tmimim* and the 10th anniversary of the Rebbe Rayatz's release from Soviet imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> 13 Adar

> **5712 — 1952**, the Rebbe instructed Rabbi Moshe Gourarie of Tel Aviv, Israel to conduct a *Farbrengen* with the *yeshiva* students learning in 770, in honor of the birthday and passing of Moses on the seventh of Adar, explaining that while some fast on this day, we should say *I'chaim*. 7 Adar

> **5735 — 1975**, taking a lesson from the bells attached to the garments of the high priest, which would ring as he would enter and exit the Holy Temple, the Rebbe urged that the 'Mitzvah Tanks,' which would bring Mitzvos to the Jews on the streets, should be loud and attractive.<sup>2</sup> 11 Adar

1. Igros Kodesh Rayatz 15, p. 307 2. Sichos Kodesh 5735 Vol. 1, p. 433.



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