

HERE'S *my* STORY

THE STRING AND THE FLAME

AMBASSADOR YEHUDA AVNER

Before his historic first meeting with newly-elected U.S. President Jimmy Carter in Washington, Begin asked me to arrange a meeting with the Lubavitcher Rebbe in New York.

I myself had visited the Rebbe previously on behalf of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, and later as an advisor to Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's then-ambassador to the UN.

When we arrived, the Rebbe came out and escorted Prime Minister Begin to the entrance. Reporters were throwing out questions at the both of them, and I recall one question from a reporter for the Village Voice. He asked Begin, "Why do you seek out the Rebbe prior to your meeting with President Carter?" And Begin said, "It's my first meeting with the new US President and it's very important for me to get the blessings of the Rebbe for its success."

He went on to say that the Rebbe had many insights, and that he was a man of awesome knowledge. "I can learn many things from him", he said. He also described the Rebbe as an old friend.

Then he was asked, "Why doesn't the Rebbe come to you — as you are Prime Minister — why do you go to the Rebbe?" And he said, "He is a great sage of Israel ... he is a great leader himself."

Actually, Begin thought that the Lubavitcher Rebbe was the greatest Jewish leader of the 20th century. I had heard him say that.

And I recall the Rebbe saying with enormous modesty, in response to a question by the press: "I greet Prime Minister Begin as a friend, but I am receiving his visit on behalf of the Lubavitch Movement."

After Begin's meeting with Carter at the White House, I returned to see the Rebbe in order to give him a report. My appointment was set for 10 p.m. — and I must tell you that



the Rebbe always gave me an appointment at a "civilized" hour, not in the middle of the night.

I was ushered straight in, and I gave the Rebbe a report of the meeting. I'm not permitted to go into details, because there are still segments of that meeting that are classified. I must have spoken for half an hour, and then the Rebbe began to comment — and again, I don't think I can reveal those comments.

This exchange went on until after midnight. I was very tired, yet the Rebbe was as sprightly and as fresh as ever. But he saw that I was tired. He leaned over to me — I was sitting at the side of his desk — and he put his hand on mine. I will always remember these words. He said, "Reb Yehuda, you know us so well, why don't you identify more with us?"

Now, I shall never know whether it was only because I was tired that I had the temerity to say what I really felt or whether I would have said it anyway, but I heard myself saying to the Rebbe, "Because I have within my own family those who see in the Rebbe powers which the Rebbe does not recognize in himself."

continued on reverse

And he got a very serious look in his eyes, and he said to me these words: "There are evidently people who need crutches." And then he went on:

"I will tell you what I'm trying to do ... Reb Yehuda, imagine you are looking at a cupboard, and I tell to you open that



Avner and Begin

cupboard. You open the cupboard, and you see there a candle but I tell you that is not a candle — it is a lump of wax with a piece of string inside. When does the wax and the wick become a candle? When one brings a flame to the wick. That is when the wax

and the wick fulfill the purpose for which they were created.

"And that is what I try to do — to help every man and woman fulfill the purpose for which they were created."

I was sitting there listening to him, impressed by the authority in his voice. And then he said these words:

"Ha'esh, zeh esh haTorah ... The fire is the fire of the Torah. When one brings the flame to the wick, one ignites the soul — for the wick is the soul — and it gives life to the body, which is the wax. And then the body and the soul fulfill the purpose for which they were created. And that happens through the fire of Torah."

By the time my meeting with the Rebbe was over, it was past two in the morning. For the last hour, a buzzer had been buzzing intermittently, and only later did I realize that the door couldn't be opened unless the Rebbe released the latch from the inside. But he didn't. He merely said, "Al tityaches — Don't pay attention."

Finally, I rose and he escorted me to the door. He took hold of both my hands to say good-bye, and I said, "Has the Rebbe lit my candle?"

He answered, "No. I have given you the match. Only you can light your own candle."

Yehuda Avner served as an advisor and speechwriter to Israeli Prime Ministers Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Golda Meir and Levi Eshkol, and as Israel's Ambassador to Australia and the United Kingdom. He was interviewed in Riverdale, NY in December, 2006.

In honor of our dear Rabbi & Rebbetzin

Aryeh and Rosie Weinstein

by Jeremy, Shayna, Ethan, Hannah, Lisa
and Brandon Swartz

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

This week in....

- > **5694—1934**, in a letter to the Rebbe and Rebbetzin, the Rebbe Rayatz asked that the Rebbe accompany him on a trip to Israel for the month of Tishrei.¹ 19 Tammuz
- > **5720—1960**, in commemoration of the 200th year from the Baal Shem Tov's passing, the Rebbe made his third trip to Camp Gan Israel in the Catskill Mountains, holding a special *farbrengen* there.² 15 Tammuz
- > **5728—1968**, the Rebbe held a special *farbrengen* marking the 75th anniversary of the Rebbe Rayatz's Bar Mitzvah. The Rebbe Rashab, father of the Rebbe Rayatz, celebrated the Bar Mitzvah by delivering a *chasidic* discourse every day for seven days.³ 19 Tammuz
- > **5735—1975**, the Rebbe launched two new *mitzvah* campaigns: The Campaign for Kosher Food and the Campaign for Family Purity. The Rebbe announced a fund to pay for half of the expenses involved in kosherizing one's home and buying new separate sets of dishes for meat and dairy.⁴ 16 Tammuz
- > **5748—1988**, in a talk, the Rebbe proclaimed that the year should be a "Year of the Boy and the Girl" in which a special emphasis should be placed upon teaching Torah to Jewish children.⁵ 17 Tammuz

1. Igros Kodesh Rayatz Vol. 15, p. 194 2. Toras Menachem Vol. 28, p. 236
3. Sichos Kodesh 5728 Vol. 2, p. 338 4. Likkutei Sichos Vol. 13, p. 259 - 264
5. Sefer Hasichos 5748 Vol. 2, p. 537



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