

HERE'S *my* STORY

"GREET EVERY HUMAN BEING WITH A KIND FACE"

RABBI BORUCH ZAICHYK



My father, Rabbi Chaim Zaichyk, was one of the great *baalei mussar*, leaders of the Jewish ethical tradition; he authored some twenty-three books on the subject of *mussar*, which influenced Jews in America and in Israel. My father wanted me, as part of my religious education, to be exposed to all the *Gedolim*, the Torah giants of the generation. This is how I came to meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe, although we were not of a *chasidic* background.

As a young man, I chose to study at the Telzer Yeshiva, a *mussar* yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio, and on one vacation break when I was back home, my father decided to take me to see the Rebbe.

I remember it was Tuesday night, or more accurately, since it was 3 a.m., really Wednesday morning. The Chabad Headquarters was full of people waiting to see the Rebbe.

The Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Hodakov said to us, "You have fifteen minutes with the Rebbe." But my father answered him, "As long as the Rebbe wants us, that's how long we'll stay there." As it happened we went in at about 3:15 and left at 5 a.m.

My father and the Rebbe became involved in a deep discussion. I remember the Rebbe saying that the Chasidic Movement has taken over the task of the Mussar Movement in influencing Jews, and my father agreed.

Then the Rebbe said that Chabad in particular incorporated quite a lot of *mussar* in its teachings. And again my father agreed and added that this is why many *baalei mussar* like him were in close contact with Chabad, due to the common understanding.

When our visit was nearly over, the Rebbe turned to me and asked me what I was learning in *yeshiva*. I said, "Rebbe, are you going to test me?" And he said, "Heaven forbid, but every meeting should produce a Torah insight, so let's hear." And then he asked me a question about a rabbinic disagreement recorded in the Talmud. I answered him and, in turn, I posed a question of my own. He said, "You have already asked this question of someone else, didn't you?" I admitted I had but I was curious about the Rebbe's answer. And the Rebbe gave me exactly the same answer as the other rabbi, and he did so very quickly, in seconds. Then he said:

"I see you remember the Talmud well, but you should also remember this important thing — that whenever you meet anyone, be friendly. *'Hevay mekabel es ha'adam b'saver panim yafos* — Greet every human being with a kind face.'" Those were the words he used. He went on to say that a kind face, a smile, will influence another person much more than anything else.

I was seventeen or eighteen year old at the time and I didn't realize the value of this advice. But later, when I entered the Rabbinate, I remembered it and applied it very often.

My second audience with the Rebbe was in 1963. My father had decided to immigrate to Israel and he wanted to say good-bye to the Rebbe, and again, he took me along.

By this time I was already working as a rabbi in South Africa — I had been there for about a half year — and I

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took the opportunity to ask the Rebbe how best to bring estranged Jews close to *Yiddishkeit*. I told him that I was particularly trying to work with young people in this regard. He said, "That's good, and I understand your emphasis on this, but don't neglect anybody." Then he added, "Remember what I told you the last time you were here? Greet everyone with a smile?" I was surprised that he remembered our conversation considering how many people must have passed through his door in the meantime.

I told him that I did remember his advice, and I was trying to apply it. He added, "That is the best way."

And then the Rebbe totally amazed me by giving me very specific insights into South African Jewry. Although he had never been there, he seemed to know everything about this community, its roots and activities, and he advised me how I could best make an impact.



I was relatively new in South Africa, and I was attached to one large synagogue which counted 800 families as members. But there were many more synagogues and factions — in fact there were 29 synagogues in Johannesburg. As well, my approach was very American, but the South African Jews were very European in their mentality. The Rebbe understood all this and his words of advice helped me greatly in succeeding in this community. He told me that European Jews, especially Lithuanian Jews, were rather reserved people, and the glad-handing American approach could feel overwhelming to them. He advised me to take it more slowly and be less forward. And his advice worked very well.

Before we left, he asked, "How about you give me a blessing?" And my father demurred saying that his blessing was that of a simple person.

To this, the Rebbe's comment was, "You're not such a simple person, Reb Chaim, your blessing will go a long way." And to me he said, "And you're not a simple person either."

Anyway, it was a humorous interlude, and we wished the Rebbe success and blessing, and he wished us success and blessing. He blessed me to be successful in bringing people close to *Yiddishkeit* which, over the years, I managed to do.

As we were walking out, something humorous happened. We had been instructed each time by the Rebbe's secretary that the proper way to leave the Rebbe's office was to walk backwards, in other words, not to turn away from him.

So, as we went to leave, we started backing up, and the Rebbe smiled. He said to us, "Reb Chaim, Reb Boruch — you're not followers of mine, so turn around and walk out like a *mentsch*." So that's what we did and again we thanked the Rebbe for his blessings which he had given us during the course of the audience.

In my work, I always remembered his advice. And I never forgot him — his deeply penetrating eyes which seemed to look right through you. And how quickly his mind worked — you would mention something and the Rebbe was already way ahead of you on the whole thing.

As I said, my father made sure that, as part of my religious education, I was exposed to *Gedolim*, the Torah giants of the generation. But of the many *Gedolim* that I met, what I experienced with the Rebbe, I never experienced with anyone else.

Rabbi Boruch Zaichyk was a pulpit Rabbi in the US, Canada, South Africa and Australia for many years. He was interviewed in Aderet, Israel in May of 2013.

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

This week in....

- > **5616 — 1956**, in an exceptional occurrence, the Rebbe visited Camp Gan Israel in Swan Lake, NY, the first of three visits to the camp. These visits would be the only times the Rebbe traveled from Brooklyn, outside his visits to his father-in-law's resting place in Cambria Heights, NY. The Rebbe toured the camp grounds, offering guidance throughout. Following the visit in Swan Lake, the Rebbe visited Camp Emunah. *16 Tammuz*
- > **5723— 1963**, the Rebbe officiated at the wedding of Rabbi and Mrs. Shmuel Lew in the courtyard of 770. This would be the last instance that the Rebbe officiated at a wedding; a total of 61 times. *15 Tammuz*

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