

HERE'S *my* STORY

STRENGTH OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

PRIME MINISTER ARIEL SHARON

My relationship with the Rebbe began in 1967. That year my son Gur was killed in a tragic shooting accident. Shortly after that, I received a letter from the Rebbe, which I saved and still cherish.

Some time later, I met him in person for the first time, the first of many meetings I was privileged to have. I will never forget how he looked into my eyes with his piercing, but very warm, eyes.

Through our conversation we discussed many issues.

I knew that from the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the only people who managed to keep contact with the besieged Jewish community in the Soviet Union were Chabad, and I knew that the Rebbe had great influence. So I asked him to put pressure on the Soviets. This was a time when, for public relations reasons, the Soviet Union was starting to allow musicians and artists to leave. I thought that we should be putting more pressure on the Soviets, and then more Jews would be allowed to leave.

The Rebbe did not agree. He said that we should be very careful with the Soviets. It was the time of Brezhnev — it was a tough period in Russia. We should be careful, he said, because we can never know what their reaction will be.

"But, it will not take too many years," he continued, "before the doors will open." I remember the conversation.

"Everything in the world is becoming more open. There are



millions of students in the country, and it will be impossible for Russia to remain closed. There's no doubt a change will take place there." And, as a matter of fact, that's exactly what happened. The Rebbe had anticipated this as he anticipated many things.

As a general in the Israeli army, the commander of the southern front, I had a real struggle in the years after the Six Day War. We were sitting on the banks of the Suez Canal, where we were facing the Soviets and the Egyptians, and a debate raged amongst the generals about how best

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If they were sent on *Shlichus* by the Rebbe in 1958,
TODAY HE IS 79 & SHE IS 75.

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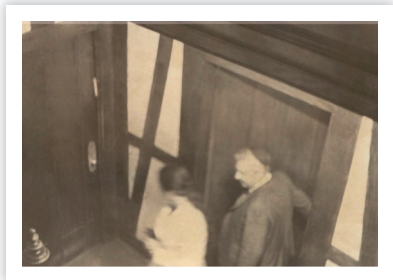
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to defend the Sinai?

We were heavily dependent on the Bar-Lev line, which was a series of fortifications along the eastern coast of the Suez Canal. There was a bitter conflict about this in the Israeli command — whether the Bar-Lev line was an effective barrier against an Egyptian attack.

The Rebbe knew about this conflict, and he sent me a letter describing the disaster that would happen to the Jewish people — the terrible damage and tragedy that this Bar-Lev line would bring. He anticipated the fall of the Bar-Lev line, and wrote that it would not hold up under attack.



He understood the military problem and analyzed it as a military expert. A few years later, in October of 1973, the Egyptians

attacked, starting the Yom Kippur War. Tragically, there was terrible damage, just as he had predicted.

The Rebbe was perhaps the greatest believer I've ever met in the G-d-given strength of the Jewish people. He most definitely believed in the strength of the Jewish nation, and he felt that Jews don't believe enough in their own strength.

The Rebbe once said to me, "The Jewish people must be mobilized." When I concurred that they must be organized, he corrected me, meanwhile demonstrating his exceptional wisdom and wit: "Not *organized*," he said, "What does it mean to *organize* the Jewish people? A few Jewish leaders get together for dinner, and the next day the newspapers report that they came to the conclusion that they must get together for another dinner..."

"When it comes to the Jewish people, a different approach must be taken. The Jewish people must be directed, instructed — they must be shown what needs to get done. It's not about *organizing* the Jewish people, it's about *mobilizing* them."

Although I am not a religious Jew, I am a Jew, and for me, to be a Jew is the most important thing. I worry about the future of the Jewish people, and I believe that Jewish education is very, very important. So I was very much impressed that this was his most important mission — to spread Jewish education around the world. Wherever I traveled around the world, I'd meet people who had been sent out by the Rebbe to provide Jewish children with a Jewish education.

Whenever I had an opportunity, I would speak to university students. I would say to them, "The Jewish people are a nation. Judaism is not only a religion — it is a combination of religion and nationalism. Take pride that you are part of the greatest nation in the world."

When I shared this with the Rebbe, he asked me, "But what did you tell them to *do*?"

"To identify as Jews," I replied.

The Rebbe responded: "For a young person who grew up in a traditional Jewish household, perhaps identifying as a Jew will hold him for one generation, but this alone will not guarantee the future of the Jewish people. Identification must be coupled with action — with practical observance of the commandments."

The Rebbe went on to explain that everything in Judaism is connected with action — settling the Land of Israel is an action, keeping Shabbat is an action...

One can always add, the Rebbe continued, no one is perfect. "I, too, am not complete in the *mitzvos*. The fact that I do not live in the Land of Israel makes me incomplete." — I saw greatness in hearing such words from his mouth.

The Rebbe believed that the Jews must stop trying to find favor in the eyes of foreign nations. Public relations is an important thing, but it is not the main thing. The main effort must be Jews focusing on Jews.

Ariel Sharon served as a general and commander in the IDF, as a minister in numerous Israeli governments including the Defense Ministry, and as the eleventh Prime Minister of Israel. He was interviewed in Israel in 2000.

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

This week in...

> **5712 — 1952**, Rabbi Eli Gross, accompanied by Rabbi Moshe Groner and Rabbi Hodokov brought a film of the Rebbe Rayatz's funeral to the Rebbe's study, projecting it for the Rebbe. The Rebbe wept bitterly as he watched the film. Afterwards, as a thank you, the Rebbe showed them a film of the Rebbe Rayatz's visit to the Unites States in 1929-1930.¹ 19 Shevat

1. *Diary of Reb Eli Gross.*

In honor of the 26th yahrzeit of
Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka
of righteous memory

By Menachem Mendel ben Rivkah

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