

HERE'S *my* STORY

WHY HE COULD DEMAND SO MUCH

MRS. ESTHER MENTZ

When I became president of the Crown Heights chapter of *Nshei Chabad*, the Chabad women's organization - together with Malka Sara Kuperman - I decided I wanted to do something memorable other than hold meetings. And it occurred to me that Crown Heights really needed a *bikur cholim* society to visit the sick. The population had increased, with young people who had newly returned to their Jewish roots settling there. Many of these young *baalei teshuvah* did not have a family support system since their parents were not happy they had become religious. Life was difficult for them, money was short, and when they got sick, they didn't get many visitors at the hospital.

Lefferts General Hospital happened to be around the corner from where I lived, and that seemed as good a reason as any for me to do it. So this is what I did - I visited these young newly-religious people in the hospital. I found they needed to pour out their hearts to someone. They needed to tell someone how difficult things were at home... how upsetting this or that child was... that they didn't know how to take care of the baby... that they had no one to help them.

As I listened and learned about the problems of the young *baalei teshuvah*, I found that there was an urgent need for special baby formula. One of my children had needed it, and it cost something like fifty dollars a week which I didn't have, so I could empathize with these mothers in the same situation.



I ended up doing these two things - visiting people in the hospital, and raising money for babies who needed special formula. Plus, I did a third thing - something which I called a "Shabbos Party on Sunday." This was a gathering for children who were not well, who were handicapped in some way. These children were often hidden from the general population because their parents were fearful that the other children in the family might not find *shidduchim* - people might not want to marry into a family that has such a child.

The Beth Rivkah seminary allowed us to use their building and the seminary girls became involved, so that there was a one-on-one relationship - one child to one adult - because these children were all differently affected and needed special attention. Different women volunteered to pick up the children, local grocery stores supplied

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MY ENCOUNTER
with the REBBE

An oral history project dedicated to documenting the life of the Rebbe, Rabbi Mehnachem 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@jemia.org

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snacks, and a retired teacher came on board to organize the program. We did lots of nice things... like going to the zoo, for example. And I put it all together.

I was doing it singlehandedly. After some time, I became tired. It took a lot out of me. And it took me away from my children. They were home on Sunday, but I wasn't. So I decided I wanted to quit. I said, "I can't do this anymore."



And the next time I saw the Rebbe, I told him, "This is the last year, and then I'm letting it go."

The Rebbe said, "Why? Why are you letting this go? You're doing a great job."

"I'm tired," I said. "I'm doing it all alone. I don't want to do it anymore."

He looked at me. "You're tired and you don't want to do it anymore..." Then he asked me, "What should the Rebbe say - the Rebbe is tired and he doesn't want to do it anymore? But the Rebbe continues doing it."

"But I'm not the Rebbe."

"And you're not doing the job of a Rebbe. You're doing the job that you can do." He was so cajoling with that smile of his.

"Can you continue for another year?"

If the Rebbe asks you like that, you cannot say no.

So I said, "Okay," and I did it for another two years.

The Rebbe never asked you to do more than he himself did. That's why he could demand so much of others.

Mrs. Esther Mentz settled in Crown Heights in the 1950s.

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This week in....

- › **5688—1928**, from Berlin, the Rebbe wrote a letter to Rabbi Yosef Rosen, the Rogachover Gaon, on a number of topics in Torah scholarship, including requesting clarification on apparent inconsistencies in the Talmud's approach to the study of astronomy.¹ 22 Shevat
- › **5710—1950**, at the end of *shiva* after the Rebbe Rayatz's passing, the Rebbe led *chasidim* on a visit to his resting place. With no printed *Maane Loshon*, the Rebbe instructed *chasidim* to recite certain chapters of *Tehillim*, while the Rebbe himself recited sections of *Zohar* by heart.² 18 Shevat
- › **5730—1970**, at a special *tzeischem l'sholom* - for a group of visitors who had arrived from Israel for Yud Shevat, the Rebbe shared a unique time-management method which he had learned from the Rebbe Rayatz in Leningrad.³ 20 Shevat

1. *Reshimos* 33, pp. 4-7. 2. *Yemei Breishis* p. 94. 3. *Sichos Kodesh* 5730 Vol. 1, p. 469.

New Interviews

- › **Professor Chaim Doron**, former director of 'Kupat Cholim,' shared information from his one-and-a-half-hour audience with the Rebbe in 1977. The Rebbe foresaw that, with medical advances, the care provided by clinics and doctors was in danger of becoming depersonalized. He gave Dr. Doron specific advice on how to address the issue, as well as how to raise the status of medical professionals within Israeli society.
- › In his Minneapolis office, **US Senator Rudy Boschwitz** told us about his interaction with the Rebbe on the matter of family planning.

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