

HERE'S my STORY

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SUKKOS WITH THE REBBE-TO-BE

RABBI YITZCHOK GRONER

I'll never forget the day I first met the Rebbe — or, I should say, the man who would later become the Rebbe. That day was the day I became a student at Tomchei Temimim, the Chabad Yeshiva, so I remember it very well.

In 1941, I went to the pier together with a delegation which had been sent by the Previous Rebbe, the "Rebbe Rayatz," to greet him. I remember that he came off the boat wearing a light-colored suit, with a gray hat to match. He was accompanied by Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka who was wearing a brown dress. He greeted all the dignitaries who had come out to meet him on the pier, and then he came over to us boys and greeted each one of us, one by one, with "*Shalom Aleichem* — Peace be with you."

He always paid special attention to us boys, the young students. I remember him talking to us on the first night of Sukkos as he was going home. At that time he and the Rebbetzin lived in a third floor apartment on the corner of President Street and New York Avenue. About a dozen of us students were standing around, and he came up to us and pointing with his finger said, "My father-in-law, the Rebbe, wants that you, and you, and you, and you, should be outstanding Talmudic scholars."

During Chol Hamoed Sukkos, most nights he'd come into the *sukkah* with a tray of food, and he'd even offer us wine. I remember that he said to me, "Yitzchok, drink some wine." And I said, "I don't want." He said, "My father-in-law, the Rebbe, says that every day of Chol Hamoed you have to drink a little wine."

He'd then sit and talk with us in the *sukkah*, discussing the Talmudic texts we were learning in *yeshiva* at the time.

We used to get a Talmud to look up various passages. And we realized that he had a photographic mind — he had a picture of the Talmud in his head. He didn't have



to search for Rashi's commentary; he just opened it right on the spot. We noticed that he did that with the writings of Maimonides, as well.

I once spoke to him about a certain topic, and when he opened the book, there it was — right where he opened it.

On Simchas Torah, because the Rebbe Rayatz was not well, the circuits with the Torah, the *Hakafos*, took place upstairs in his study. As the room was small, only certain people were admitted, and then the door was locked.

When the future Rebbe would go upstairs, a few of us used to follow him. He'd look at us, and after he'd open the door with his key, he'd walk in and leave the door unlocked; sometimes he would even leave it a little bit open. We used to sneak in and hide ourselves in the room adjoining the Rebbe Rayatz's study, which had at one time been his mother's room. From there we couldn't be seen, but we could observe what was happening.

I remember that the first year, in 1940, the Rebbe Rayatz

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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 over 1,000 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. mystory@jemedi.org

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was still able to walk around the table with a Torah scroll. But the next year he wasn't able to walk any more. He sat during *Hakafos*, holding the Torah scroll.

The future Rebbe always seemed to notice us, and to help us "skirt the rules" in order to have the chance to see the Previous Rebbe. One year during *Hakafos* there were two of us there peeking in from the Rebbe's mother's room — I remember it was me and Moshe Kazarnovsky — and the future Rebbe said to us, "Don't come in."

We got frightened. We said, "If you want, we'll go downstairs!"

"No," he replied.

Then at the seventh and final *Hakafah*, I felt someone's hand on my back. It was the Rebbe. He pushed us into the room so we could also participate.



In 1947, I finished *yeshiva* and the Rebbe Rayatz sent me on a mission to Australia for about four-and-a-half months, and to New Zealand for about a month-and-a-half. After I was done, I went home.

Several years after the Rebbe Rayatz passed away and the Rebbe assumed leadership, the families in Australia petitioned him to bring me back. This was in 1954. And finally I agreed — it took me a while, but in the end I agreed, and I went to Australia in 1959.

On Simchas Torah of that year, before I was to depart, the Rebbe called me in together with Gershon Mendel Garelik, who was going to Milan. And, at the *Farbrengen*, he gave us each a whole glass of wine, and he said to me, "*Kovesh zayn Australia — Take over Australia.*"

When it came time for me and Garelik to go to the airport, he sent the whole *yeshiva* to see us off and he, himself, came out standing by the door and waving till our car pulled away.

Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid Groner was the Head Shliach of Australia and the director of the Yeshivah Centre until his passing in 2008. He was interviewed in January of 2006.

Dedicated in merit of
Mirjam bas Levana
Sonja Buntrock
Chaya Liba bas Rivka
for a full and speedy recovery

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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...

- > **5702 — 1941**, the Rebbe Rayatz announced the commencement of writing the "Torah Scroll of Moshiach". The completion of the Torah was delayed many years, and was completed per the Rebbe's instructions on 10 Shevat, 5730 — 1970, the Rebbe Rayatz's twentieth *yahrtzeit*. 23 Tishrei
- > **5739 — 1978**, the Rebbe instructed each guest who came to visit for the month of Tishrei to collect a book personally signed by the Rebbe from his secretariat. Each man received a Tanya, and each woman received a Siddur. 24 Tishrei
- > **5741 — 1980**, following the Rebbe's call for ever-increasing joy during the holiday of Sukkos, *Simchas Beis Hashoevah* celebrations began in the streets of Crown Heights with dancing throughout the night. 15 Tishrei



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