

# HERE'S my STORY

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## CHALLENGE

**MR. CONRAD MORRIS**



I was born and raised in London, England. I led a dynamic secular life before coming in contact with Chabad in Stamford Hill in the early 1970s. I was already married at the time with children.

My wife knew Rabbi Faivish Vogel of Lubavitch from earlier, and she introduced me to him. From that point on we developed a close friendship.

For many years I served as Chairman of Friends of Lubavitch UK which provided the major bulk of the funds needed to support Lubavitch's activities. We organized annual dinners with world class personalities — authors, leading rabbis, and government ministers.

When Rabbi Vogel suggested to me that I should go to meet the Rebbe in New York, I jumped at the opportunity. Before meeting the Rebbe, I had quite an experience spending Shabbat at 770, the Chabad Headquarters. As the Rebbe came into the room, waves of people moved aside just like the parting of the sea to let the Israelites through. At the *Farbrengen* that Shabbat, I had a front row seat, watching the Rebbe up on the dais, with Rabbi Vogel translating into English. This went on for many hours, and

it was something that one has to experience in person. I can't even begin to describe it.

Then came my appointment with the Rebbe. I entered his office with a lot of trepidation, but the Rebbe put me immediately at ease. He was a very approachable person, and he spoke to me in perfect English. We discussed many subjects ranging from the state of Jewry in England to the State of Israel, to the needs of the Jewish people.

The meeting began at 1:30 a.m. From time to time a bell would ring which was supposed to be a signal from the Rebbe's secretary for me to leave. But each time the Rebbe motioned for me to stay and we continued talking until 4 a.m.!

I think that the Rebbe's purpose in seeing somebody like me was to find out how much he could challenge me. How much he could bring out from me any hidden talent and potential that needed actualizing. It was as if he looked into my very soul. It was an incredible experience.

Among the questions I asked him was, "How do I educate my children when I myself was not educated in Yiddishkeit?" I told him that I thought myself to be a good Jew because at least a third of my working day was spent on Jewish communal affairs, and because I always contributed my fair share to charity, but I was completely secular in other respects.

I explained to the Rebbe how it came to be that I never got any Jewish education. My mother died when I was seven and I was brought up at a boarding school for orphans. Then the war came with its deprivations, and when it ended, I was fourteen and started work.

The Rebbe responded with great sensitivity. I asked him how I should go about educating my children when I know so little. He replied, "Don't worry, your children will educate you." And indeed, that is exactly what happened. The Rebbe emphasized the importance of my children going to Jewish schools and I followed his advice. My daughters went to the Jewish Free School and my son to Hasmonean, which is *yeshiva*-type school. And they met

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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](mailto:mystory@jemedi.org)

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my every expectation — all are good Jews, leading full Jewish lives and their children are doing likewise.

The Rebbe gave me advice in my business matters, as well. He told me, "Borrow as much as you can and as much as you need, so you can expand your business quickly. And also expand your charitable activities."

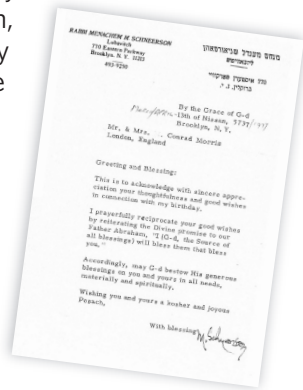
Recently, I sold a business which went public for many hundreds of millions of dollars, and while my share of that business was relatively low, because it had been diluted over the years as the company brought in more partners and expanded, nonetheless it was sufficient for me to make a 10 percent charity donation in six figures. My son, who has taken over most of my business activities, takes the same view about charity as I have always taken — that you give more than you should, more than you can, because it will come back next year somehow or another.

But the advice of the Rebbe which perhaps had the greatest impact on me had to do with my community role. I had asked the Rebbe about making *aliyah* to Israel, but he didn't encourage it. As far as he was concerned, my first responsibility was to my community in the UK.

I pointed out that it was a diminishing community — thirty years ago it numbered something like 400,000 Jews, but at the time when I met with him it was down to 350,000. Now it's not much more than 250,000. The Rebbe's response to this argument was, "It's like the story of G-d destroying the city and being challenged. If there are only ten righteous people, would You not save the city?" And G-d answered that He would save the city."

The Rebbe wanted to ensure that wherever Jews choose to live and make their mark on the world, they should be able to do so. And if you are amongst them — and if you are a community leader, you can't abandon ship. You are responsible for seeing they're provided with religious facilities, education, security, and whatever else they need.

So that was a challenge that the Rebbe threw out at me. And while my wife and I had planned that sometime after our marriage we would move to Israel, we ended up staying in the UK and becoming involved in all aspects of the Jewish community, particularly in education.



I recall that whilst organizing a United Jewish Israel Appeal mission to Israel in 1990, the Gulf War broke out. Afraid of a major dropout of participants, I turned to the Rebbe for advice, by asking him whether his stand on "Israel being the safest place" had changed.

The Rebbe response was "emphatically not" and the mission went successfully ahead.

I became involved with the Jewish Educational Trust which was set up by the late Chief Rabbi Lord Jacobovits, to establish a network of Jewish day schools in England. We succeeded in this effort, and as a result there are now primary and secondary Jewish schools which service the majority of Jewish children. Over the time that I had been involved with this project, enrolment jumped from 12 percent to 60 percent and is still expanding. I think in this respect we've done probably the best job in the Jewish world in looking after Jewish education, with the exception of Australia.

And all this came about because of the Rebbe's advice to me. When I first met him, I was already in a leadership position in the UK, but he looked to challenge every aspect of my being — he brought out even more in me.

*The late Mr. Conrad Morris was a British Jewish philanthropist and businessman. He sat on the boards of numerous charitable organizations and donated funds to Jewish schools both in Britain and Israel. He was interviewed in his home in Jerusalem in May of 2012.*

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

## This week in....

- > **5737 — 1976**, the Rebbe held a surprise *Farbrengen* in honor of the group of Shluchim he sent to conduct *Hakofot* the Western Wall, the Cave of the Patriarchs and the Tzemach Tzedek synagogue in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> 4 *Cheshvan*
- > **5741 — 1980**, seeing off a group of rabbinical students going to the Yeshiva in Miami, the Rebbe handed each of them a recent talk he had given and a dollar for charity, and told them, "It will be a year of Simchas Torah! A year of Torah and a year of joy". 5 *Cheshvan*

1. *Likutei Sichos* Vol. 35, p. 242

In memory of the noted educator  
**Rabbi Isaac Mintz**  
On the occasion of his 21st *yahrzeit*  
2 *Cheshvan*

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