

# HERE'S *my* STORY

## A JEW IN BANGLADESH

**MR. MAX COHEN**  
**RABBI YOSSI GRONER**

### MR. MAX COHEN

In April 1991, a powerful cyclone struck Bangladesh, killing close to 140,000 people and leaving 10 million homeless. I was due to travel to Bangladesh on business shortly thereafter, and I didn't know what to do. The Sunday morning that I was to depart, I heard the news that there was another cyclone aiming for the area that very day. I immediately called one of my textile suppliers over there, but he assured me that this cyclone was due to hit a hundred miles down the coast, and there was nothing to worry about.

But I have to say I was worried just the same. I had called the Rebbe's office several times about it, but didn't receive a response. I was sitting on the flight from Manchester to London — where I'd be catching the flight to Bangladesh — and I was weighing the situation. I didn't have a blessing from the Rebbe, and I knew that everybody back home would be worried sick. So by the time I arrived in London, I had come to the decision that I was not going to travel any further.

I found a phone box and I called my in-laws to reassure them, and that's when my father-in-law told me that he had just gotten a phone call from Dovid, my brother-in-law — who at the time was a rabbinical student at the Chabad Headquarters in New York — that the Rebbe had given a blessing for my trip.

So, I immediately took my luggage and checked in for the flight to Bangladesh, and then I called Dovid who was waiting in New York to tell me the details.

What Dovid told me absolutely blew my mind. He said that the Rebbe was handing out dollars for charity, as was his custom every Sunday morning, and that he decided to enter the queue and ask for a blessing for my trip. Their conversation went like this:

The Rebbe: "Bangladesh, you say? It is very tumultuous there now."

Dovid: "His business contacts over there



say it's not so bad."

The Rebbe: "May it be a successful trip."

Dovid: "Amen."

The Rebbe: "Is he travelling there legally?"

Dovid: "Yes."

The Rebbe: "It should be for the good. Ask him to give this dollar to the person over there who is involved in Chabad activities."

When I heard this, in an instant, all my anxiety and worry vanished. Because I now had a blessing to go to Bangladesh, so I knew there was nothing at all to worry about. The Rebbe had blessed me for a successful trip and sent me on a mission to give his dollar to somebody else.

But then I started to think, "How am I going to find this person? I had been to Bangladesh a number of times before, and I'd never met another Jewish person there."

When I arrived, I immediately began asking every person I met if they knew a Jewish person anywhere in the country. But nobody did.

It was my very last night that I was in Bangladesh, in Chittagong. I had just returned to my hotel — it was the Agrabad Hotel — and I came out of the elevator on the third

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floor. There, in the corridor, were three people engaged in a conversation, and one of them was an elderly man who was unmistakably Jewish.

I went straight over to this man, and I said, "I'm very sorry for interrupting, but I have to ask you a question — do you know the Lubavitcher Rebbe?"

His answer totally astounded me. He said, "Do I know the Lubavitcher Rebbe? Yossi Groner and I are very close!"

He was referring to Rabbi Yossi Groner, the Chabad emissary in North Carolina.

He told me that his name was Walter Yarris, and he had been travelling to Bangladesh and doing business there for the last ten years, but that he was from Charlotte, and when Yossi Groner first came to Charlotte they became friendly — he had introduced Yossi to other people in town and helped him in a variety of ways.



Walter in Bangladesh

It was obvious to me that Walter was the person whom the Rebbe had in mind when he was talking about someone in Bangladesh who had been involved in Chabad work. So I gave him a dollar — a dollar bill from my own pocket — and I

said, "Give this dollar to charity, and as soon as I get the original dollar from the Rebbe's hand, I'll make sure that I get it to you."

And Walter became extremely emotional, because it was obvious to both of us that our accidental meeting was very, very special. And how the Rebbe could have known that we were going to meet like that was just unbelievable.

*Rabbi Yossi Groner fills in the rest of the story:*

## RABBI YOSSI GRONER

I got a call from Max Cohen in Bangladesh asking me if I knew someone by the name of Walter Yarris?" And I said, "Of course I know Walter Yarris! We're very friendly, but what's it to you?"

Max wanted to know if Walter was a *shliach*. And I said, "He's not an official emissary, but he definitely does the Rebbe's work in Bangladesh. He is keeping Judaism alive for a few Jewish families that live over there."

And then Max told me about the dollar that the Rebbe gave for a person in Bangladesh who is involved in Chabad work. He wanted to know: "Did you ever tell the Rebbe about Walter?"

And I said, "I actually wrote about him — a paragraph only, in a report three years ago!"

It was amazing that the Rebbe read every report and every paragraph, and that whatever he read remained etched in his memory!

The next morning, Mrs. Blanche Yarris came running into my office. She was generally a very calm woman, but she was beside herself with excitement. "Walter called me! He said that the Rebbe recognized his efforts, what he's doing in Bangladesh!"

And then, when Walter came to Charlotte for Rosh Hashana, he shared the story with me as well. He told me that he almost didn't go to Chittagong because he didn't want to take time away from work. But then he felt compelled to go. And he believed that the whole thing was arranged by Divine Providence. But what meant the most to him was that he had gotten the Rebbe's seal of approval for his efforts on behalf of Jews in Bangladesh. And that gave him a sense of fulfillment — to do something for G-d and have it acknowledged by the Rebbe.

*Max Cohen of Manchester is a businessman engaged in the textile business in Manchester, England. Rabbi Yossi Groner is the Chabad emissary in Charlotte, North Carolina. They were both interviewed in New York in May, 2013.*

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

## This week in...

- > **5725 — 1964**, at 8:45 pm, US Senators from New York, Kenneth Keating and Jacob Javits visited the Rebbe with their entourage for a private audience that lasted about half an hour. The Rebbe spoke with them about the need to strengthen education for children in the US and gave them specific advice on how to care for troubled children who use drugs.<sup>1</sup> 23 *Cheshvan*
- > **5743 — 1982**, the first Conference of Shluchim was held in Brooklyn, New York. Throughout the years, in honor of the conference, the Rebbe would participate by speaking about the concept of *shlichus* in his Shabbos address. 27 *Cheshvan*

1. Wolff family memento, p. 108

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