

HERE'S my STORY

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JUDAISM IN COLOR

MR. DAVID STAUBER



I was raised in a religious home and educated in a yeshiva, where everything was taught with a slap and a hit. After that experience, I had more than my fill of Judaism. I stopped practicing *Yiddishkeit* except for Yom Kippur. When I got married, my wife kept a kosher house, but that was her desire, not mine. Generally, I had a very skeptical and negative attitude toward Jewish observance.

In the early 1970s, I was in my second year of law school at the University of Southern California when, one Friday night, I went with my wife to Westwood to see a movie. But it was sold out. Inasmuch as we had already paid for parking, we wandered about and ended up at a Chabad House, where I met Rabbi Baruch Shlomo Cunin. And because of him, I became somewhat open to Judaism, and I even put on *tefillin* a couple of times. I didn't make any major changes in my life, but I was a bit more receptive to it.

After I graduated law school, we took a trip to Europe, and while we were touring Greece, we were in a terrible car accident. My wife's back was broken, and she became

semi-paralyzed as a consequence. When she was transferred to Cedars Hospital in LA, Rabbi Cunin was there waiting for us, and he urged my wife to write to the Rebbe. This she did. She got an immediate response and a blessing. The Rebbe said that lighting Shabbos candles was vital to her recovery, and she should be scrupulous in fulfilling this *mitzvah*. So my wife began lighting Shabbos candles.

Then there came a time when she was transferred to a rehabilitation facility and we forgot to bring the candles, so she didn't light them. Right after that, her right leg swelled terribly, and she suffered a setback. But she recovered, and she made sure never to miss lighting Shabbos candles again.

After six months, she finished her rehabilitation, and she was able to move about using long braces and crutches. She wanted very much to see the Rebbe in New York, and even though her doctors discouraged her from making the trip, we went. This was in 1973.

As we waited outside the Rebbe's office, someone told me that I should write a note to the Rebbe stating my request. "I have no requests," I replied. There's nothing I want from the Rebbe. I was just accompanying my wife, and other than that I would be a bystander, sitting in the back; there was no need for me to write anything. But this person was very insistent that I couldn't go in unless I wrote something.

So I wrote: "If G-d is so great, why does He insist on all these tiny details?" I asked this question just because I was told to write something but, the truth is, it always bothered me that G-d seemed stuck on all this minutia. It seemed to upset Him if you missed one little thing — like, if you used a meat spoon in cottage cheese. I never got why.

The Rebbe greeted us, asked us our names, and then he turned to me and said: "I don't understand your question.

continued on reverse

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 900 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. mystory@jemedi.org

continued from reverse

"I thought it was pretty straight forward, so I started to repeat it in Yiddish, thinking that maybe he had difficulty with English. But he stopped me midsentence. He put his hand up and said: "It's not for G-d; it's for us. G-d wants us to be close to Him, and this is the path He gives us."

As the Rebbe explained it, it suddenly became very clear to me that G-d wants the closeness of a relationship. For the first time, I understood. It's not that G-d wants to intimidate and frighten us. He gives us a path to Him, and He says: "If you follow this path, you'll find Me."

This was a very radical thought to me. I had never seen Judaism in that light. To me, the focus always seemed to be on what is forbidden. Judaism seemed to be saying that G-d wants subservience, not love — that I must conform my conduct in order to avoid G-d's wrath and punishment. I had never seen it in a positive way — that G-d loves us and wants us to come close to Him.

This way of looking at it really intrigued me. I felt as though I had been in a dark room and the Rebbe had turned on the light. I remember that I had the strongest impression that I had encountered one of the greatest men in the world. After we left, I began an extensive correspondence with him because I so much wanted to know more, and he always responded to my questions.

A little less than a year later, my wife became pregnant. She wrote to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe answered with a blessing for a "normal and easy pregnancy and the delivery of a healthy child at an auspicious time." Meanwhile, all the doctors she consulted were telling her to have an abortion because, with her injuries, she did not have the capacity to carry a baby to term. But she wouldn't hear of it — she totally trusted the Rebbe's blessing.

She went into labor and, at first, things moved very slowly. She had been in labor for thirteen or fourteen hours when the doctor said she'd have to have a Caesarean Section. But seeing her disappointment, he agreed to wait another fifteen minutes.

When the doctor returned and examined my wife again, he said, "I don't believe this. She's fully dilated!" And he yelled to me, "Go, go, go and get the nurse. Everybody go!" We rushed into the delivery room, and all the doctor had to do was put his hands out and my son came out.

The doctor later asked me for a copy of the Rebbe's blessing, and he said, "You have no idea what a miracle we've just witnessed. You have no idea whatsoever

because you're not a doctor and you can't appreciate all the difficulties. You don't know what happened in those fifteen minutes — it was an out-and-out miracle."

We ultimately had three sons and two daughters. With each pregnancy the Rebbe sent the same blessing, and each time everything went well, until my wife became pregnant with my daughter Sarah. This time the Rebbe said nothing about delivery of a healthy offspring. My wife was very upset, and she wrote the Rebbe again and again about it.

When Sarah was born, she was born with many difficulties, and she passed away six months after her birth. The death of this child was a very hard on us, and my wife and I got divorced as a consequence of it. But I was not bitter. I understood that G-d in His wisdom would only allow us to have this beautiful child for a limited time and, as much as I wanted her to stay on, I appreciated the fact that I had her for the time that I did.

I was able to see G-d as a loving G-d rather than a punishing G-d because of what the Rebbe had taught me.

Mr. David Stauber, an attorney practicing in Southern California, was involved in the founding of Chabad of North Hollywood. He was interviewed in September of 2011.

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

This week in...

- > **5714—1953**, the Rebbe initiated the "Lulav and Esrog Campaign", calling on Jews to assist their fellow Jews with the observance of this special Sukkos mitzvah. In the 1970s, the Rebbe added that special effort should be made to assist Jews in hospitals, senior homes, army bases, and prisons.¹ *15 Tishrei*
- > **5725 — 1964**, the Rebbe penned a letter thanking those who consoled him, offering their warm wishes, in person or in writing, after the passing of his mother Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson on 6 Tishrei.² *14 Tishrei*

1. *Sichos Kodesh 5738 Vol. 1, p. 138* 2. *Igros Kodesh Vol. 23, p. 273*

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