

HERE'S my STORY

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THE JEWISH WOMAN'S COURAGE

RABBI & MRS. CHAIM YAAKOV AND DANIELLE SHLOMEI



Rabbi Shlomei: I was born in 1929, in Saverne, a town in the Alsace region of France. There was no Jewish school in Saverne when I was growing up, so after normal school let out, my grandfather, who was the chief rabbi of the town, taught me himself.

During the war, we fled to Switzerland, where I learned in the *yeshiva* of Rav Botschko, and after the war I went to England, where I learned at the Gateshead Yeshiva for four years. I was ordained a rabbi and went to work in Mulhouse, which is another town in the Alsace region of France.

Rebbetzin Shlomei: I was born in 1933 in Paris, and I was also educated at Gateshead. I married my husband in 1953 and went with him to Alsace where we stayed for several years.

Then my husband met Rabbi Binyomin Gorodetsky who, at the time, was the Rebbe's emissary in Europe. Rabbi Gorodetsky said he was looking for somebody who would build a seminary for girls near Paris, and he asked my husband if he would be interested.

My husband said yes, and after receiving the Rebbe's approval, we established, Bais Rivkah in Yerres, France — a Seminary under Chabad-Lubavitch auspices, though we were not Lubavitch ourselves. And we stayed there for 22 years — from 1958 to 1980.

Rabbi Shlomei: During the time that we were operating the school, I received many letters of guidance from the Rebbe, but there are two that I found especially interesting.

One, from 1963, is addressed to the students of the school. This letter the Rebbe wrote on the birthday of Moses, Moshe Rabbeinu, and in this letter he tells the girls that they should think about the fact that the mother and the sister of Moshe were his educators, and that they played an important role in freeing the Jews from bondage in Egypt. They had the courage to disobey the decree of the Pharaoh and not only let newborn boys live but to teach them to lead a Jewish life. And, writes the Rebbe, this same task belongs to Jewish girls today — to educate the children, prepare them for the coming of the Moshiach, and show them how to lead a life of Torah.

The second letter, written nine years later, is addressed to me, but it pertains to the girls as well. The Rebbe mentions that over the Sukkos holiday, students from our school came to visit the Chabad headquarters in Brooklyn and made a very good impression — their behavior was exemplary and their clothing was proper and modest. The girls apparently asked him about wearing shorter skirts — at that time, shorter garments were popular — and he writes that according to *Halacha* all Jewish girls, wherever they go, should make sure their knees are nicely covered, whether standing or sitting. He goes on to say that there are some places in the world where

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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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women wear even longer garments, and when one goes to a place like that, it is Jewish law — and not just being stringent — to be dressed in a way that will appear decent to everybody.

That is what he said, and this letter has been copied and quoted by many of the students who became teachers, in many, many countries wherever they went to live and work.

Rebbetzin Shlomei: In 1968, we visited the Rebbe for the first time in America, and after that we made a point of visiting him every couple of years. The last time we went was in Sukkos of 1979, a year before we retired from the school.

During Sukkos, the Rebbe did not officially receive people in his office, but he invited us in and he asked somebody to bring us chairs. It was a more personal visit — he inquired about our children, and he knew exactly their birth order. I think the Rebbe understood that there were people who were opposed to our running the seminary because we were not Lubavitch, and so he wanted to publicly recognize us and show everybody that we were accepted.

On another occasion, he asked a favor of me. He asked if, while I was in North America, I could take a side-trip to Montreal and speak to the French women there. I did that, and I wrote a report about it, as he had requested, and in that report I included my return flight information.

I was at Kennedy Airport, waiting for my flight home to Paris, when I heard that the flight was delayed. And then, about twenty minutes later, I heard my name being paged. When I responded, I learned that I had a phone call from Rabbi Binyomin Klein, the Rebbe's secretary.

Rabbi Klein said that the Rebbe had received my report and had told him to phone me where I was staying. But by the time Rabbi Klein did, I was already on the way to the airport. So then the Rebbe said to call me here. When Rabbi Klein said that it



was too late, the plane was already in the air, the Rebbe said, "No, call."

What was so important? Rabbi Klein said that the Rebbe wanted to thank me for my report and to wish me a good journey and much success in life.

When I put down the phone, they announced that the flight was ready to leave and, though I asked, I could not find out what had caused the delay. But I was very moved by the Rebbe's caring and by his message to me.

Rabbi Chaim Yaakov and Rebbetzin Danielle Shlomei directed the Beis Rivkah seminary in Yerres, France for 22 years. They were interviewed in their home in Jerusalem in May of 2006.

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

This week in...

- > **5711 — 1950**, the Rebbe wrote to Rabbi Shlomo Matusof, encouraging him in his new position as the Chabad representative to Morocco, speaking of the great merit of disseminating Judaism and Chassidism to Jews unfamiliar with it.¹ 8 Kislev
- > **5712 — 1951**, the Rebbe sent his blessings and wishes to the committee of the newly established Chabad Yeshivah in Melbourne, Australia, which was to be opened three days later, on the 10th of Kislev.² 7 Kislev
- > **5733 — 1972**, prior to the first gathering of the Organization of Descendants of the Alter Rebbe, the founder of Chabad, the Rebbe sent his blessings for the event, along with a host of directives for the organizers. The gathering has since become an annual tradition, gathering scores of the Alter Rebbe's descendants.³ 13 Kislev

1. Igras Kodesh Vol. 4, p. 63 2. Igras Kodesh Vol. 5, p. 65
3. Igras Kodesh Vol. 28, p. 49

In loving memory of our dear father

ר' שמואל נטע הכהן ע"ה
בן יבלח"ט ישראל דוד שי'

Birthday, 9 Kislev

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