

HERE'S my STORY

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"WEREN'T YOU ANGRY ABOUT THE LETTER?"

MRS. ADEENA SINGER

My name is Adeena Singer. I grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa, where my parents migrated in 1965, and where my father, Rabbi Nachman Bernhard, opened the first Orthodox elementary school, then called the Menorah Primary School.

During those early years, my father, being a Chabad *chasid*, had a lot of contact with the Rebbe — letters, phone calls, back and forth, and I grew up with a very strong idea that the Rebbe was our intimate, loving, warm teacher, guide, grandfather. That's how I thought of him. I was too young to know his teachings, but I knew that he cared about me and, in turn, I cared about him — I would do what he needed me to do.

When I was thirteen, my father was asked to leave by the South African government because he was too outspoken politically. He stood very strongly for human decency and against the concept of apartheid, which he believed was completely against everything that Torah holds as good and true. I remember the police banging on our door in the middle of the night, and for years they wouldn't give us permanent residency — we had to renew our residency every three months, until we were told to leave.

At that time, my father decided to immigrate to Israel. I was very excited about this idea but the Rebbe told my father that he had to complete what he started in South Africa, and he asked people in high places to intervene so that my father would be allowed to stay. I was very disappointed that we might not be going to Israel after all, and I decided to appeal to the Rebbe myself.

I wrote to him on my most special paper — it had pink, green and yellow stripes with beautiful pink hearts down the side — putting all the passion of a thirteen-year-old into the letter:

Dear Rebbe:

During the past nine years my father has proved himself to be a great scholar and Torah leader. Like many other tzaddikim he has a great wish to go and live in Eretz Yisroel ... I, too, can think of nothing better than going on Aliyah to



The Oxford Shul, South Africa

Israel. I do not want this because of the fun and excitement of moving, but because it is not like settling in just another land...it is settling in the Holy Land, a Promised Land and a Land in which you do not have to be ashamed to be a Jew.

In Eretz Yisroel...my father could still have a lot to do with saving Jewish souls, even if he were not a practicing rabbi. As a girl of thirteen who wants to see her father and family happy, I implore you please to take into consideration my feelings about living in Israel when the matter comes up...

While writing this letter, I have a picture in front of me. It is a picture of a great man to whom G-d has seen fit to give all the power of a great tzaddik. I can see in his eyes a message written to any Jew who may need it. It is a message that says that he can help with the help of G-d. He can help in a friendly, warm manner. This man is you. I have been taught that a tzaddik has been given one particular gift, a gift which I beg of you to use now. This gift is the power of a tzaddik to ask anything of G-d and He will give a positive answer. I now ask you to ask G-d to see fit that we should go to Israel...

Sincerely, Adeena Bernhard.

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

In reply, I received a long letter, which I quote in part:

Miss Adeena Bernhard

Blessings and greetings:

First of all, I am gratified to note your concern, indeed profound concern, for your parents. This does not surprise me of course, knowing your father and your upbringing, but it is nevertheless gratifying to see it expressed in a letter.

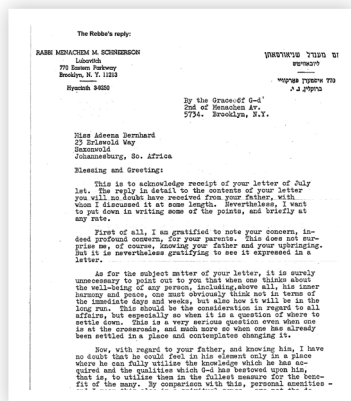
As for the subject matter of your letter, it is surely unnecessary to point out to you that when one thinks about the wellbeing of any person, including above all his inner harmony and peace, one must obviously think not in terms of the immediate days and weeks, but also how it will be in the long run. This should be the consideration in regard to all affairs, but especially so when it is a question of where to settle down.

This is a very serious question, even when one is at the crossroads, and much more so when one has already been settled in a place and contemplates changing it. Now, with regard to your father and knowing him, I have no doubt that he could feel in his element only in a place where he can fully utilize the knowledge which he has acquired and the qualities which G-d has bestowed upon him. That is, to utilize them in the fullest measure for the benefit of the many. By comparison with this, personal amenities — and I mean this also in a spiritual sense — are not the decisive factor and perhaps no factor at all ...

On the basis of what has been said above, supported by what you and all the other members of the family have seen of your father's success, not only in your city, but South Africa as a whole, you will surely realize without any shadow of a doubt that your father will feel in his element and be truly happy if he continues his present situation in your country...

With blessing, M. Schneerson.

This was part of a very long, thoughtful letter written to a teenage girl. And it really demonstrated the Rebbe's sensitivity and caring — but what really amazed me was



what happened some years later.

In 1979, I was studying at a seminary in Crown Heights and I had an opportunity to meet the Rebbe when my father went in for a private audience with him. Naturally, I was very nervous what this experience would be like.

When we came into the room, the Rebbe raised himself from his chair to greet my father with such a beautiful, warm smile, with such genuine joy at seeing him — and my father, of course, felt the same way.

After the Rebbe greeted my father, he turned to me and asked, "Are you still angry with me?"

I felt deeply embarrassed and I said, "Well, I didn't know that I was angry with you."

The Rebbe said, "Weren't you angry about the letter?" He was concerned that I still had bad feelings about the letter he wrote to me when I was thirteen and wanted to go to Israel. I was not angry, of course, but I was deeply touched that he cared that much about my feelings to still remember the issue after so many years.

Mrs. Adeena Singer currently lives with her family in Johannesburg, South Africa. She was interviewed in August of 2014.

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

This week in....

> **5725 — 1965**, in a private audience with an officer in Israel's Department of Education, the Rebbe talked about their great achievements with Jewish youth in the US in the past five years — which the Rebbe previously hadn't thought possible — and encouraged him that the same potential existed in Israel as well.¹
5 Adar 1

> **5726 — 1966**, in response to a group of students from Israel requesting to postpone their return to Israel after their studies in 770, the Rebbe wrote that they could only remain if they are studying diligently, as *halachically* one is allowed to leave the Holy Land only for a valid reason, such as to study Torah diligently abroad.²
2 Adar

1. Personal diary of MM Wolff 2. Personal diary of SB Wolpo

Dedicated in memory of

Rabbi **Daniel** מ"ח **Moscowitz**,
Regional Director Lubavitch Chabad of Illinois

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By the Shluchim in the state of Illinois

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