

# HERE'S *my* STORY

## A SHABBOS AFTERNOON IN MEXICO

**PROFESSOR SHLOMO EKSTEIN**

We were a group of about twenty young people - all counselors in Bnei Akiva, all educated in the Jewish schools of Mexico. I was a leader of this group. It was 1954 when we arrived in New York, and we were taken into the Rebbe's office. He sat at his desk, and we were seated in front of him. He invited me to approach, and he requested a list of all the students' names. Of course, I had it prepared.

As I handed it to him, I looked at him. The expression on his face was so warm, so radiant, so caring. I will never forget it. He immediately won me over.

Then he asked, "What would you like to discuss? Do you have a specific question?"

I said, "I am a youth counselor in Bnei Akiva, as are all the members of this group. We are returning to Mexico shortly to serve as counselors for another year or two until we move to Israel. In our work, we invest all our efforts, all our strength, into the Jewish child. But then the kids leave us. Not only do they leave Bnei Akiva, they leave the entire atmosphere of the Jewish community. Some of the boys even marry non-Jewish women, or the girls marry non-Jewish men, and they abandon Judaism totally. Our question is: Where do we draw the strength to deal with all this?"

The Rebbe looked at me and at the entire group, and he said: "I understand you all, and I will try to tell you how to approach this issue. The verse in *Tehillim* states: 'Those who sow with tears, will reap with joy.' This means that if someone 'sows with tears,' with his whole heart, then whatever he wants to accomplish - in the field of Jewish



education, in sharing the light and warmth of Judaism - if he does so with all his heart, he 'will reap with joy.'

"There will be a harvest. But there's no guarantee that the one who sowed will see the harvest. The harvest will certainly take place, although you may not see the results."

And then the Rebbe explained his point by telling us a story, and this story has been with me to this day. Although sixty years have passed, I will never forget this.

He said, "Let's take an example: You're sitting on a Shabbos afternoon speaking to your group... you're delivering a talk, and a Jewish boy walks by the synagogue where your meeting is being held. He doesn't know what Bnei Akiva is, or what exactly you are doing there. But out of curiosity, he comes in, sits in the corner and listens. You

*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 800 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. [mystory@jemedial.org](mailto:mystory@jemedial.org)

don't want to cut your speech short in the middle, so you figure: 'At the end of the speech I'll go over to him, I'll ask him who he is and encourage him to join in.'

"And what are you speaking about? You're explaining that we are the children of our forefather Abraham, and



this gives us - and the entire Jewish people - uncommon strength. The fact that Abraham believed in G-d gives us the strength to put all our trust in Him,

and it gives us the desire to perform His will and keep His *mitzvos*. This is what makes us the Jewish People. And this has kept us going for thousands of years, to this day.

"The boy hears what you are saying, but he decides not to stay until the end. He gets up and leaves. You didn't get a chance to approach him. You don't know who he is, and he doesn't know who you are. He leaves and continues on his way.

"Later on, he studies in college, meets a non-Jewish girl, falls in love with her, and decides to marry her. But her parents make a condition: 'You can only marry our daughter if the wedding is held in a church.' He agrees. They're on their way to the church, and they are coming closer and closer. Suddenly the boy looks up and sees the crucifix atop the church. And he thinks to himself, 'Just a moment! How can I go in there? How can I be part of this? I recall once hearing...'

"He doesn't remember where he heard it, or from whom. All he remembers is that he once heard: 'We, the Jews, are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and this obliges us to continue the tradition. This is why the Jewish nation lives and survives to this day.' He thinks: 'How can I go now and erase all this? I can't!'

"And then, at the last moment, he tells them: 'I'm very sorry. I can't go through with this wedding.' He leaves them, goes back, and seeks out his Jewish roots.

"He doesn't know where he heard the words that changed his life at the crucial moment, and you don't know to whom you spoke that day when he wandered in.

"But there is a harvest."

He then looked at us and said, "You must each invest your fullest effort into Jewish education. You are assured that something good will come of it, although you might not necessarily merit to see it."

*Dr. Shlomo Eckstein, a professor of economics, was President and Rector of Bar Ilan University in Israel. In his youth, he was a leader in the Bnei Akiva movement in Mexico.*

## This week in...

- > **5689—1929**, the Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, wrote a letter to his son instructing him to cease his practice of fasting so often. He instructed him, instead, to stay up learning Torah all Thursday night.<sup>1</sup> 2 *Adar I*
- > **5710—1950**, several weeks after the passing of the Rebbe Rayatz, the Rebbe writes to a number of individuals, urging them to continue the work entrusted to them by his father-in-law: "Not with sighs, nor through despair, sadness nor weakness, G-d forbid, will we be saved...[we must] contemplate the directives he gave us... and fulfill them literally, and with added energy."<sup>2</sup> 30 *Shevat*
- > **5722—1962**, Moshe Sharett, who had previously served as Israel's prime minister, visited the Rebbe in his study at 770 from 4:20 until 5:10 am. 5 *Adar II*
- > **5750—1990**, the Rebbe instructed to print a chassidic discourse in honor of the first *yahrzeit* of his brother-in-law, Rabbi Shmaryahu Gourary.<sup>3</sup> 6 *Adar*

<sup>1</sup> Likkutei Levi Yitzchok - Igros Kodesh p443-444. <sup>2</sup> Igros Kodesh 3, p239.  
<sup>3</sup> Sefer Hasichos 5750 p324. Published in Sefer Hamaamorim Melukat 4, p217-220.

In honor of  
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