

# HERE'S *my* STORY

## THE FOUR ANSWERS

RABBI MOSHE FELLER

I've been the Chabad emissary to Minneapolis-St. Paul — the Twin Cities of Minnesota — for over 50 years.

In 1971 — together with Rabbi Manis Friedman — I started Bais Chana, a program where non-religious girls could learn about Judaism. The first year we had 11 girls, the second year we had 47, the third year we had a 110, and it grew from there. Who would have thought that the kernel for Bais Chana — which became a citadel of Torah for women from all over the world — was planted in such an unlikely spot as Minnesota?

A couple of years after we started Bais Chana, which was a seasonal program, a full-time, year-round seminary for girls was founded in Crown Heights called Machon Chana. Because so many girls from Bais Chana were now learning at Machon Chana, and my wife and I were the father and mother figures for these girls, we were invited to lead the Passover Seder there. We did this every year starting in 1974.

In those years, it was the Rebbe's custom to visit the Seders at various educational institutions before he went home to conduct his own. During the Rebbe's visit in 1978, the following took place:

The Rebbe came in and looked around the whole place. He looked at the classrooms, went upstairs to the dormitory, and even went to the kitchen. More than a hundred women, including students, teachers and helpers, were watching his every move. As he was leaving, he turned to Rabbi Rabbi Groner, his secretary, and said, "*Ver fregt da de fir kashes* — Who's asking the Four Questions here?"

"Feller's son," Rabbi Groner replied, referring to my



son Mendel who was nine years old at the time.

The Rebbe was on the stairs coming up from the basement dining room where the Seder was being held; he looked over the banister at Mendel and asked him in Yiddish, "*Du vayst de fir kashes? Du vayst de fir kashes baal peh?* - Do you know the Four Questions? Do you know them by heart?"

My son — a good *chasidic* kid that he is — froze! He was stunned that the Rebbe was talking to him, and he didn't know how to respond.

So the Rebbe asked again in English: "Do you know the Four Questions? Do you know them by heart?"

This time, Mendel nodded, and the Rebbe smiled and pointed at me, "But does he know the answers?"

Everybody laughed. It was a nice moment.

We had a beautiful Passover night. It must have been 4 a.m. when I got to sleep and so the next morning I didn't make it to the Rebbe's *minyán*. I

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

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came later. When I arrived at the Chabad Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway, I was called into the Rebbe's office.

The Rebbe was there still wearing his *tallis*, and when he saw me, he sternly declared, "What I said last night in Machon Chana was not a joke.



Everybody there took it as a joke, but I didn't mean it to be funny."

And then he went on: "A child doesn't understand rituals. A child is thinking, 'We went through this

whole thing last year! Why are we going through it again?' That's what he is asking in his heart. So the father has to get across to the child that it's not the same thing as last year — it's a new thing. It's a new reliving of what happened last year. Do you understand this?"

I didn't respond — so the Rebbe repeated himself.

And then I said, "I understand. The Rebbe is referring to the *chasidic* explanation of the teaching of the Sages that, in every single generation and every single day, a person must see himself as having personally gone out of Egypt. We are meant to be constantly reliving the Exodus from Egypt and to see it as if it's a new experience."

The Rebbe nodded, "Yes. That's what I mean." Then he told me, "When you go back to Machon Chana, tell this to them and explain that I didn't mean to make a joke."

Of course I said I would, but also, because I am an opportunist and here I was talking to the Rebbe one-on-one, I said to him, "Today happens to be my birthday. I had my own 'personal Exodus' on the midnight after the first Seder." My father, of blessed memory, took my mother to the hospital during the Seder and I was born around midnight.

So the Rebbe laughed and said, "It's the same message. Every time you have another birthday it's the same idea. Every birthday has to be a whole new

experience."

And then he gave me blessings galore.

*Rabbi Moshe Feller has served as the Chabad emissary to Minnesota for more than 50 years. Rabbi Feller was interviewed in 2006 and in 2010.*

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

## This week in...

> **5711 — 1951** instituting a new practice, the Rebbe conducted a *farbrengen* immediately after the Seder on the second night of Passover, offering deep insights into the text of the Haggadah, and encouraging a joyous atmosphere with song and dance. This custom lasted until 5730-1970.<sup>1</sup> 16 Nissan

> **5732 — 1972**, the Rebbe sent a message through his secretaries to gather children to come to a special *farbrengen* to be held later in the afternoon. At the *farbrengen*, the Rebbe requested that all of the children stand together and he gave each child a little bit of wine to say a *l'chaim*, and requested that they choose a *chasidic* melody to be sung. Afterwards, the Rebbe requested that they recite the Ma Nishtana — The Four Questions, in unison.<sup>2</sup> 16 Nissan

1. *Toras Menachem* Vol. 3, p. 9 2. *Sichos Kodesh* 5732 vol. 2 p. 147

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