

# HERE'S *my* STORY

## SPEECHLESS

**MRS. RIVKAH TILLIM**

I don't remember how old I was, maybe thirteen years old, when I caught a very bad case of bronchitis. There was a danger of pneumonia and my parents and grandparents were terrified. I guess in Europe, if someone coughed, it meant tuberculosis or worse, and they were beside themselves.

I did have a terrible cough and it took a very long time for it to get better. I don't remember this part so clearly, but I do remember we went from one doctor to another and I was given one antibiotic after another. Nothing seemed to work.

All the coughing made me hoarse - first a little, then very, very hoarse. It became harder and harder for me to speak, until one day I stopped speaking altogether.

We went to all kinds of doctors who had all kinds of theories, but the bottom line was that I could not talk and they could not help. Sometimes when I think back, I wonder: Perhaps it was psychological?

And then my parents took me to the Rebbe. We went in as a family, with my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, squeezing into the room until you couldn't fit a pin in! Everybody received a blessing and then the Rebbe said, "All of you please go out, I want to speak to her alone."

I was astonished and stunned that everybody had to go out and that I was going to have a private audience with the Rebbe. I remember being in such awe of him.

As soon as everyone left I remember feeling completely comfortable and calm, as if I was there with my own grandfather. And he spoke with me as if we were on the same level.



He asked me what I like to do, how old I am, what I do in my spare time. I remember the conversation, answering him in a whisper.

He went on to ask me what I want to do someday. I replied, "I love little children and I hope to be a mother and teach young children." The Rebbe responded that was a very good goal and that is what I should do.

As the conversation progressed, my voice became stronger. I can't say I spoke normally, but I did start talking with more force. I was mesmerized by his presence and it was as if he compelled me to talk.

The only way I can describe it is: He spoke and I answered. I can't explain it in any other way.

Then he asked me what I wanted to do now. I said, "When I get to a certain age, I'd like to be a *Bnos* leader." *Bnos* was a program in Bais Yaakov schools where on Shabbos,

*continued on reverse*

older girls mentored younger girls. They would explain the Torah portion to them and give out snacks.

He said, "That's a very good thing and that's what you should do." He gave me a blessing and I remember backing out.



My parents, who were waiting outside, asked me how it went and I answered them. Everybody went absolutely *wild!* I was talking!

My brother Yoel would later tell the story:

*I was home during their meeting with the Rebbe. Before my parents even returned from their audience I received a call from someone who said to me: "Your sister is talking!"*

*She had not been talking for I don't know how many months, and it was a terrible situation. So I asked the person who called: "How do you know?"*

*He replied, "She met with the Rebbe and she came out talking!"*

*"How do you know?" I persisted.*

*"Everybody is talking about it!"*

*I was waiting to find out if it was really true, waiting for my sister to walk in. When she finally arrived home I asked her, "Can you talk now?" "Yes," she said, "I'm talking."*

*It was shocking, absolutely shocking to hear her talk after all that time. Thank G-d, she recuperated...*

Slowly I got better and went back to school. I remember when they asked for volunteers to be a *Bnos* leader I raised my hand. I had been waiting for that moment to happen and said to myself, "I can fulfill the mission given to me by the Rebbe to become a *Bnos* leader!"

I can tell you that the Rebbe affected my life in many ways. I happened to be a very good student and had been encouraged to go to college "to make something of myself." But I always had a feeling that wasn't for me.

I wanted to go to a teacher's seminary, but my parents were very against it. They said, "What do you need it for? Get an office job and make some money!" My reply was, "Remember, the Rebbe told me that I should teach young children..."

I went to a seminary half the day and worked the other half, paying my tuition from my own earnings and following through with the Rebbe's directive. It wasn't easy to get a job afterward, but thank G-d I was successful. I feel this is because I had the Rebbe's blessing and vision in front of me. He somehow looked into me; he saw who I was, what I needed and what I really wanted. He had a profound influence on me because he gave me the strength to fulfill my mission in life.

That's the real miracle of my story: More than a mute girl who started to speak, the real blessing of the story is that I became who I was meant to be.

*Rivka Chaya Tillim grew up in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn. She currently lives in Monsey and is the mother of eleven children. She, her father, and her brother were interviewed in April, 2011.*

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

## This week in...

- > **5692—1932**, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka's younger sister, Sheina, became engaged to Rabbi Mendel Horonstein in Riga, Latvia. In his journals, the Rebbe documented the exact wording of the *tenaim*, as well as the talk of his father-in-law, the Rebbe Rayatz, at the celebration.<sup>1</sup> 18 Iyar
- > **5736—1976**, at the Lag B'omer parade the Rebbe requested that children memorize an additional six verses from the Torah chosen by the Rebbe, totaling twelve altogether.<sup>2</sup> 18 Iyar

<sup>1</sup> Reshimos Hayuman, p. 231-232. <sup>2</sup> Sichos Kodesh 5736, Volume II, p. 197.

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