

HERE'S *my* STORY

ON A MISSION FROM THE REBBE RAYATZ

RABBI YOSEF KRUPNIK

In 1966, I was learning on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the Yeshiva Jacob Joseph, famously known throughout the world as "RJJ." At the time, I had a study partner by the name of Alexander Stern who had a connection with Chabad, and he was constantly inviting me to see what a *farbrengen* with the Rebbe was like. Finally I accepted his invitation for *Yud Shevat*.

The tenth of the Hebrew month of Shevat is a most significant date on the Chabad calendar. It's the anniversary of the passing of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, also known as the Rebbe Rayatz, and the day when, a year later, his son in law Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson formally accepted the leadership of Chabad-Lubavitch.

I went to the *farbrengen* and I enjoyed it very much. The result was that I got home very, very late and the next morning I was late for *yeshiva*. Our teacher, Reb Shaya Shimonowitz, who was one of the real giants left over from the old *Mir Yeshiva* in Europe, realized immediately why the two of us were late that morning. When we walked into class he reprimanded us: "Don't you realize the importance of Torah? You lost time from Torah study... you missed a class!"

He reprimanded us very, very harshly and, to be quite honest, I was deeply hurt. Up to that point, I thought I had a very good relationship with him. This was the first time that he had come down on my case in this way.

When he finished the class and it was time to go to the



study hall, he asked Alex and me to stay behind. And I was sure that we were about to get the second round of rebuke, but that's not what happened.

When everybody else had left and it was just the two of us with Reb Shaya, he told us an amazing story. It seems that he understood how much his rebuke had hurt us, and he decided to make it up to us - telling us, by implication, that the time we spent at Chabad with the Lubavitcher Rebbe was not really wasted.

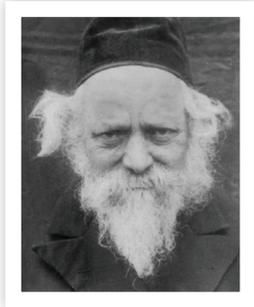
It seems that in 1937 when the Rebbe was not yet the Rebbe and studying in Berlin and Paris, he was sent on various missions by the Previous Rebbe. On this particular occasion he had to travel to Vilna, Lithuania - an important seat of *yeshiva* learning at that time - in order to get Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzinski to co-sign a letter that the Previous Rebbe had written.

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@jemediia.org

When the Rebbe arrived, it just so happened that Reb Chaim Ozer was meeting in his office with a visitor, another Torah luminary of the time, Reb Baruch Ber Lebowitz, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kaminetz, who just happened to be the leading disciple of Reb Chaim Brisker. The Rebbe was told that he was going to have to wait until they finished their meeting before he could go in.



As he waited, there were a few people in the study hall at the time who realized that he was a Lubavitcher *chosid*, and so they decided to harass him. They started asking him pointed questions on Talmudic topics

– did he know this topic, and what did he have to say about it, and so forth.

But the Rebbe didn't answer. Our teacher, Reb Shaya, was present as this was going on, because he was Reb Baruch Ber's escort, and he said that some of the people were really pestering him mercilessly. And still, the Rebbe said nothing, remaining quiet.

And then Reb Chaim Ozer opened the door. He stood listening to this, and then he beckoned the Rebbe to come in. The Rebbe went inside where he began to answer the questions that had been posed to him outside. Reb Shaya said he answered with great clarity and with great depth, quoting both early and late Torah commentators.

So Reb Chaim Ozer asked the Rebbe, "Why didn't you answer these questions outside, when they were harassing you?"

The Rebbe replied, "I didn't come to hold debates with anybody. However, I noticed that you observed their questions, and I became afraid that my failure to answer might have a negative impact on the mission given to me by my father-in-law." He feared that perhaps Reb Chaim Ozer might not agree to co-sign the letter of the Previous Rebbe, so he decided to clear up the situation.

After this exchange, Reb Chaim Ozer took the letter and

started reading through it. In the meantime, his illustrious visitor, Reb Baruch Ber, continued to talk with the Rebbe.

After a few minutes Reb Baruch Ber said to the Rebbe, "If you come and learn in my *yeshiva*, I guarantee that you will be the leader of the Lithuanian *yeshiva* world."

The Rebbe politely declined. He said he had his path, knew what he had to do and whom he had to answer to – meaning the Previous Rebbe. When he said this, Reb Baruch Ber started to cry.

Reb Shaya, who was present through this whole encounter, said he had never told this story to anybody before. And it was a difficult admission for him, I think, that the Rebbe, a *chosid*, potentially could have become the leader of a different segment of the Jewish world if he so chose.

Rabbi Yosef Dov Krupnik is a Kashrut administrator at the Detroit Council of Orthodox Rabbis.

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

This week in....

- > **5706—1946**, in a letter, the Rebbe asked the refugee students in the Lubavitcher *yeshiva* in Shanghai, China to publish books of *Chassidus*.¹ 27 Nissan
- > **5736—1976**, as part of the 'Year of Education,' the Rebbe requested that all children memorize six verses from the Torah.² 30 Nissan
- > **5750—1990**, after *Mincha*, the Rebbe gave an unexpected talk, declaring that the PLO was planning an attack on the Jews, and that everyone must take spiritual preemptive measures. The Rebbe instructed that every Jew increase in Torah study, prayer (by reciting Psalms) and giving charity in the value of three meals.³ 28 Nissan

1. Igros Kodesh Volume II, p.126. 2. Sichos Kodesh 5736 Volume II, p.144. 3. Sefer Hasichos 5750, p.413-415.

לזכות

הרה"ח ר' ישראל שיחי' פרידמן

לאריכות ימים ושנים טובות ובריאות

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