

HERE'S *my* STORY

THE MEETING THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

DR. IRVING WOLINSKY

I was born in Brooklyn, on May 7, 1923, to immigrant parents. My father had received minimal education in Europe, and his employment opportunities in America were very limited; he found it hard to find work. But my mother had a brother in Somerville, New Jersey, who invited them there and helped them set up a little grocery store, which also had living space in the back.

My parents were generally Torah observant except that they kept the grocery open on Saturdays — and that business failed, by the way. So I was raised as a traditional Jewish kid, until I went to college, when I got too smart for *Yiddishkeit* and dropped it all.

I attended City College and the New York University Medical School for dentistry. As this was during World War Two, I and the other medical students were placed in the ASTP, the Army Specialized Training Program, and later in the inactive reserves.

After I completed my education in 1947, I opened an office in Brooklyn on New Lots Avenue. One of my patients was a Lubavitcher *chasid*, and I happened to mention to him that I was having a number of problems. My mother was sick with a heart condition; my wife was suffering from postpartum depression; and my financial situation was dire — my practice was not generating the necessary income. I was planning to move my office to Bayside, Queens, but I was not sure if things would go better in a new community. And on top of everything, the US Army was sending me letters about being re-activated for service in the Korean War.

Hearing my troubles, my Lubavitcher patient suggested that the Rebbe might be able to help me sort things out. I was reluctant to go, but in the end, I made an appointment to see the Rebbe.

This was toward the end of 1950. I don't remember exactly when, but I know that the Rebbe was not yet officially the Rebbe, although everyone seemed to think of him as such.

I was told to show up at 8 p.m., but when I arrived there, there was a long line — so many people were ahead of me. I could tell there'd be quite a wait.



After a while, I grew impatient and wanted to leave, but I figured if so many people were lining up to see the Rebbe, it might be worthwhile to stick it out.

As I was waiting there, the Rebbe suddenly came out of his office and dashed out of the building. I happened to look out the door, and I saw him run across Eastern Parkway, which is a busy thoroughfare.

A short while later he came back. The *chasidim* who were there said that he had gone to see his mother.

Finally, after a five or six hour wait — it was well after midnight — I went inside.

I told the Rebbe all my troubles — about my mother being ill. I remember being quite explicit about her condition and my concern that she was not going to live much longer. He asked me about the quality of her medical care, and I said it was the best available — top doctors from New York Medical School, which is where I had gone to school. He said that, hopefully, they would be able to help her.

Next I told him about my wife's postpartum depression. He understood completely what I was talking about, and he said when the time comes and she is ready, I should go to one of his secretaries and get a referral to a top psychiatrist or psychologist.

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And finally, I talked to him about myself — that I was not doing well financially even though I'd been in practice for three years already. Things looked very bleak; I was afraid that I would be poor like my parents for my entire life; and this thought made me very despondent. I felt like I was spitting into the wind, and it was just coming back to hit me in the face. No matter what I did, I just wasn't going anywhere.

He heard me out, and then he started asking me about my religious background. He asked me what I felt when, as a child, I recited the *Shema* — "Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One."

I remembered doing it with my maternal grandfather who told me that it's good to say it before you go to sleep so you rest well. Then the Rebbe said to me, "This is what you should do every night, so that you have a peaceful night, and this is what you should do in the morning so that you have a peaceful day." He also mentioned that putting on *tefillin* might help.

Then he asked me if I worked on Shabbos, and I had to admit that I did. So he said, "When you move to Bayside, perhaps you could conduct your business so that you don't work on Shabbos." And even though he didn't say it in those words, the implication was that my business would do better because of that.

I also told him about my fears of being sent into the Korean War and to this the Rebbe said, "*By mir iz recht ir zolt nisht gayn in di army* — It seems to me that you will not go into the army." I didn't know what he meant by that, but I didn't ask.

That pretty much was the gist of the interview and, I must say, I was somewhat disappointed — I don't know what I expected, but I thought it would be more than this.

A couple of weeks passed and, suddenly, I received a letter from the War Department saying that my records had been transferred. I was not in the US Army anymore. And I thought, "I guess this is what the Rebbe meant. But how did he know?" I remember saying jokingly to my wife Eleanor, "You know, this Rebbe must have connections in Washington because he got my records transferred from the army to the navy just so I would put on *tefillin*..."

Meanwhile, I started my practice in Bayside, which was a commuters' town; people came home late from work, so they went to the doctor on Saturday. It was unheard of to be closed on Shabbos. But I said to myself, "You know, it might not hurt to follow his advice." So I decided to make a change and not work on Shabbos anymore.

Surprisingly, even though I was closed on the doctors' busiest day, my practice grew. Every week, I had more

patients. And I tried to understand — because I'm a mathematical sort of guy — how this could logically work, but I couldn't.

I also followed the rest of the Rebbe's advice. I started to put on *tefillin* every morning; I started to say the *Shema* and go to *shul*. And even if I was not completely Torah observant, I felt I was more satisfied with my life, more peaceful, and more at ease in general.

My mother lived another ten years. My wife got better. And I went from feeling despondent and feeling like a failure to being happy and satisfied, and the impetus for that change was the Rebbe. Financially, I have done very well since, and I credit all my success — the whole picture — completely to the Rebbe.

Dr. Irving Wolinsky currently lives in Bayside, Queens. He was interviewed in New York in January of 2014.

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

This week in...

- > **5723 — 1963**, Rabbi Zalman Vilenkin, the Rebbe's childhood teacher, passed away. The Rebbe participated in the funeral by assisting to carry the coffin and travelling to the cemetery for the burial, something which he did only very rarely. The Rebbe also insisted on paying for the burial expenses.¹ 23 Iyar
- > **5727 — 1967**, as fears of impending war was brewing in the Middle East, the Rebbe declared at the Lag B'omer parade that G-d is the protector of the Land of Israel, and will ultimately deliver it from harm. The Rebbe urged the children to assist in protecting their brothers and sisters in Israel by doing an additional Mitzva and by learning words of Torah.² 18 Iyar
- > **5744 — 1984**, in a talk, the Rebbe spoke about the significance of the groundbreaking *Chasidus* classes on the telephone that were scheduled to be launched the next day, stating, "It will now be possible for anyone to study *Chasidus* from the privacy of their home at any given time."³ 17 Iyar

1. *Di Yiddishe Heim* no. 18 (Kislev, 5724), p. 4. 2. *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. 7, p. 331
3. *Toras Menachem* 5744, Volume 4, p. 1743

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by Menachem Mendel ben Rivkah

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