

HERE'S *my* STORY

CALLING THE SHOTS

GENERAL YOSSI BEN HANAN

In the 1980's, I was heading up IDF's research and development. I was 43 years old and I was nearing the end of my career in the military. One day, I got a call from the IDF's Chief of Staff, General Levy, who was better known as *Moshe va'Chetzi*, which literally means "Moshe and a Half." He was called that because he was a very tall man.

He said to me, "Yossi, look, I know that most people your age who have achieved your position leave the IDF. But I'm asking you to continue to serve, and to become Commander of the Armored Corps."

Basically, he was asking me to leave my desk job — a job I held for three years — and to put my boots on again and to return to the field.

I was very hesitant. We were expecting a baby, and I had really planned to wind down my career... So I said to him, "I need to think about this. I need some time to seek some advice."

"Advice? From whom?"

"What does it matter? I want to ask somebody."

It so happened that I had a trip scheduled to the United States the following week, and I requested to meet with the Rebbe. It was arranged that I should speak with the Rebbe when he was giving out his dollars for charity. The long line that was always there was stopped, and I got to speak with him for a couple minutes.

In advance of this, I had written him a letter, so I believe he knew the gist of my dilemma. When I saw him, I said: "Rebbe, I know I'm not worthy of a response to my letter — I admit that I am not that Torah observant — I am not so righteous that you should spend your time on me. But if, nevertheless, you are willing to hear my question, then I will ask."

He responded, "Of course."

And so I asked him: "Has the time come for me to leave



the army? Or should I agree to the request of the Chief of Staff and become Commander of the Armored Corps?"

At first he did not respond at all. And then he gave me an answer which lives with me until this day. He spoke in the third person but his words were meant for me. In short, this is what he said:

"One can fulfill one's obligation by defending the Land — by protecting the integrity of the Land, the integrity of the Nation and the integrity of the Torah."

I was quite shocked. Here, the Rebbe was telling me that I could fulfill my obligation as a Jew by defending the Land of Israel! In other words, he was telling me to stay in the IDF.

I said, "Rebbe, I hope G-d will give me the strength to defend all three."

Then he addressed me directly, in the second person: "Strength, you already have. But when strength is locked in a box, it is the opposite of strength. I certainly need not explain this to you as a general."

I understood. I had my answer. I said, thank you.

Then I asked a blessing for my son. He gave me a dollar,

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as he gave to everyone, and he blessed me to succeed in life. I took the dollar and, as we do in the army when we face a commander, I backed away.

I had taken no more than two steps, when I heard, "Yossi!"

Like a little child, I came back to the Rebbe. And he gave me another dollar. When he did, he looked deeply into my eyes and said, "A double portion of blessing."



I understood his intent. It was as if he was saying to me, "I emphasize my advice and double it. May you be doubly blessed."

Two days later I returned to Israel, and I went to see the Chief of Staff. I said, "I have an answer for you: I will stay in the army. I accept command of the Armored Corps."

He was pleased, but when he heard that I reached that decision after consulting with the Rebbe, he was astonished.

"What?!" he said, "You went to the Lubavitcher Rebbe to ask him what to answer me? I'm the Chief of Staff! The Chief of Staff asks something of you, and you tell me you need to think, to seek advice. Then you travel to America, to see a rabbi who's never been in Israel, and he tells you to stay in the army? What happened to you, Yossi?"

I said, "Moshe, you just don't understand, but I will answer you with a question: How long will you be Chief of Staff?"

He said, "Another seven months."

I said, "How long will the Rebbe be the Rebbe?"

Years later, when "Moshe-and-A-Half" was sick, I used to visit him often, and he once brought up that conversation. He said, "Yossi, you were right, I was wrong."

Parenthetically, I can tell you that I remained Commander of the Armored Corps for four-and-a-half-years, which is longer than anyone else. It was difficult, but it was worthwhile. I am glad I followed the Rebbe's advice.

And I will say this — there is no doubt in my mind that the Rebbe understood the "art of war." He was well-versed in military history, in strategy, warfare, and he could express

his opinion decisively on strategic issues at all levels. And whenever he issued a clear position concerning Israel, he always did so with great love, with great deliberation, with great care, and with tremendous respect for those in the field — for the IDF and the strategic leadership of the State. But he did it with the vision and perspective of one who sees the existence of Israel in the wider context of the Middle East, in the midst of this Muslim ocean that surrounds us, amidst international pressures, the superpowers, US-Israeli relations. He was well-versed in all the nuances of these issues.

All the leaders of the State of Israel, all of them, came to him as students before their teacher. Yitzchak Rabin, Ariel Sharon — who told me personally about several encounters he had with the Rebbe — Menachem Begin, Zalman Shazar. They all came and listened to his guidance.

Major General Yossi Ben Hanan served as Commander of the IDF Armored Corps and of Israel's National Security College. He is a recipient of one of the IDF's highest awards, the Medal of Courage for valor during the Yom Kippur War. He was interviewed in Paris, France in September of 2009.

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

This week in....

- > **5741 — 1981**, the Rebbe requested of Rabbi Avrohom Lison, an elder *chasid* known for his acrobatic talent, to perform for the children's rally. The Rebbe was present during the performance, clearly enjoying the presentation.¹ *1 Sivan*
- > **5741 — 1981**, at the children's rally in honor of the upcoming holiday of *Shavuos*, the Rebbe unexpectedly spoke in Russian, addressing Jewish children in communist Russia. He passionately called for all Jewish children to unite under the slogan "Jewish children of all countries — unite!" and encouraged the children to go to synagogue and listen to the Ten Commandments being read from the Torah on *Shavuos*.² *1 Sivan*

1. *Yoman Shnas Hakhel*, p. 143 2. *Sichos Kodesh 5741 Vol. 3*, p. 555

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**Rabbi & Rebbetzin Benzion
& Henya Milecki**
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and grandchildren

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