

HERE'S my STORY

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COMPLETELY UNWARRANTED LOVE

RABBI PINCHAS WEBERMAN

My ancestors came to America from Europe in the late 1800s and settled on the Lower East Side of New York. When the Williamsburg Bridge was built, they moved across the river, and established a *yeshiva* in Williamsburg, the famous Yeshiva Torah Vodaas.

Although I was not raised Lubavitch, I became a Chabad *chasid* through an interesting set of circumstances.

After I got married, I was teaching in a school in Borough Park in Brooklyn, and a fellow teacher who was a Lubavitcher suggested I meet his Rebbe. I wasn't so enthusiastic. I said, "I've met other Rebbes and I didn't see much difference between them." He said, "Come — I guarantee you'll see something different."

He was right. When I met with the Rebbe for the first time he was still a young man — this was in 1957 — but I was extremely impressed. I saw in him a depth of mind, clarity of thought, and I felt a very strong attachment to him from the start.

After that I would try to see him at least twice a year, and I would talk to him about many things. He gave me very good advice — he encouraged me to get involved in communal work outside New York. And that's what I did — I went to Miami and established a congregation there. And when I did that, he advised me on how to handle the donors, how to handle the board of directors and how to handle other rabbis in the community.

There came a time, in 1970, when I realized that we needed to rebuild the local *mikvah*. It had been built thirty years prior, when proper building materials were not available due to the war, and it was starting to deteriorate. So several local rabbis got together, and we raised the money to rebuild it. Some of us wanted to build the new *mikvah* according to a high standard, but we found out that the rabbi who was in charge of the design did not follow that standard, and the result was that his *mikvah* did not even qualify as kosher. But this



rabbi refused to change the design. And he found some rabbis to approve his *mikvah*.

We went to war over this issue — a war that took three years, during which time I lost my naïveté. I realized that rabbis who I thought were great, were not so great — indeed, some were quite small. Some were affected by honor, some by money, some by weakness of heart. But we won this war — partly because the major donor of the project passed away and his heirs wouldn't honor his pledge — and, in the end, the *mikvah* was properly built.

Some nine months after these events, I had an audience with the Rebbe. This was during the Three Weeks preceding *Tisha B'Av* when we mourn the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. I told the Rebbe about the "*mikvah* war" and about the people who were involved in it. I also told him that I would like to institute kosher slaughter in South Florida. The Rebbe agreed with this idea, and then he said to me, "Involve this rabbi who fought against you. Make him one of the supervisors. Let him certify the meat."

I was shocked. I said, "Rebbe, after such a war, how can

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 over 1,100 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. mystory@jemedi.org

continued from reverse

I involve him ... how can I trust him?"

The Rebbe's response was two-fold. He said, "The certifying rabbi has nothing to do with the kosher standard of the meat. He doesn't hold the knife in his hand, he doesn't check the lungs of the animal.



So as long as you know you can trust the *shochet*, the butcher himself, as long as you are satisfied with his expertise and standards, you need not be concerned about the certifying rabbi. He cannot do any harm, and bringing in his name cannot make anything worse."

And then he said, "Besides, we need to remember the things that happened during these Three Weeks. These things happened because of unwarranted hatred between Jews. And how do you overcome unwarranted hatred? With unwarranted love. Now, can you find a better example of unwarranted love than turning to this person who fought against you?"

This was the greatness of the Rebbe, and I saw so many examples of it over the years. Let me tell you one more story:

In the late 1970s my wife became pregnant and the doctor said the baby was in a breech position — upside down, instead of head first, feet first. It just so happened that right after we learned of this, we were in New York and, during this visit, we met with the Rebbe. Naturally, my wife's pregnancy came up and the fact that the baby was in a breech position.

In response to this news, the Rebbe asked me how we were returning to Florida. I said, "Well, we'll probably fly, as always." He said, "Well, there are clouds ... there are winds ... are you sure you want to fly?"

There are always clouds and winds when you fly, so the fact that the Rebbe made an issue of this meant he had something on his mind. Indeed, he said, "Find another way to go back. And when you do, take along a Tanya and some *mezuzahs*. And wherever you can, give these

out to people."

Taking his advice to heart, I decided to rent a car. I went to Avis, but when I got into the rental, the door wouldn't close. So I got into another one, but the lights wouldn't work; the third one had problems with the windows. So, I said to myself, "I'm not supposed to rent a car."

We decided to travel from New York to Miami by bus and make two stops along the way, staying overnight in motels. One stop was in Charlotte, North Carolina, where I delivered the Tanya to the local rabbi. The second stop was in Jessup, Georgia. There, I looked for a Jewish name in the phone book and found a "Weinstein." I called him and introduced myself. As it turned out his grandfather was a member of my congregation and I also knew his father's brother. I met with him and left him the *mezuzahs*.

We got on the bus and during the final stretch home, my wife felt the baby moving. When we arrived home, the doctor told us that everything was fine — the baby was no longer in breech position. It had turned itself around all by itself during that bus ride.

The birth was perfectly normal, and I will always marvel at the Rebbe's prescience and wonder how he could have known that changing our mode of transportation would fix the problem.

Rabbi Pinchas Weberman is the rabbi of the Ohev Shalom Congregation of Miami Beach which he founded. He was interviewed twice in his home, once in 2010 and the other 2011.

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

This week in....

> **5715-1955**, the Rebbe wrote to Rabbi Mordechai Perlow, requesting that he travel to Italy to investigate the orchards growing *esrogim* to be used on the holiday of Sukkos. The Rebbe gave detailed instructions how to conduct the investigation, including speaking with the neighbors of the fields and inspecting various fruits to ensure that the trees are not grafted. 11 Sivan

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Inspiration.

In honor of our dear friends

Rabbi Baruch Shalom and Rebbetzin Chanie Kantor

*by Jeremy, Shayna, Ethan, Hannah, Lisa and
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