

HERE'S *my* STORY

THE MOSHIACH TIMES

RABBI DR. DOVID SHALOM PAPE



The very first time I heard the Rebbe speak was on Purim 1973. He talked about how Mordechai turned to children when he realized that there was a threat to the survival of the Jewish People. Mordechai gathered 22,000 children around him and began to learn Torah with them because he knew that the power to silence the enemy came from "the mouths of babes." That first experience captured for me how deeply the Rebbe cared about children and about children's education.

Children, said the Rebbe, are the "Army of G-d," *Tzivos Hashem*. They have pure hearts which are free of sin, and they will lead the Jewish People in welcoming the Moshiach.

Eight years later, the Rebbe founded a youth outreach organization called *Tzivos Hashem* and this organization, shortly thereafter, began to publish a children's magazine called *The Moshiach Times*, of which I eventually became editor.

The first cover of *The Moshiach Times* was designed by Adel Bachman. It showed a row of boys and a row of girls holding placards; on each placard was a letter spelling out AHAVAS YISRAEL, meaning "Loving of fellow Jews." When the directors of the Lubavitch Youth Organization saw this cover, they were aghast: "How can you have

boys and girls on the same cover?" they demanded. "If you look at any of the other religious magazines, *nobody* has pictures of girls on their covers!"

It was decided to show this cover to the Rebbe. His answer came back quickly, and he saw nothing wrong with the girls. Instead, he said that the emphasis should be on the *mitzvah*, "Love your fellow Jew as yourself." And these words were added to the cover in Hebrew and English.

The second issue also had boys and girls on the cover, and the same objections were raised. Again, the Rebbe was consulted, and he said the cover was fine.

When I first started working on the magazine in 1983, the cover for the Tishrei/September issue proved challenging. The idea was to depict a boy coming home from camp with all his camp equipment and, as he enters his room, he sees waiting for him there all the things he will need for the beginning of the new year: his school books, a calendar, a shofar, a charity box, and so forth. It was a very detailed sketch.

When we showed it to the Rebbe, he had two comments — that the *tzitzis* on the boy had to be more clearly drawn and that there had to be a girl in the corner.

I said, "I don't know where a girl can fit in here. What would a girl be doing in a boy's room? It doesn't go with the composition." But the Rebbe insisted and eventually we figured out how to get her in there. And that's how it was established that there should be a boy and a girl on every cover.

As for the content of the magazine, I hired David Berg, who wrote "The Lighter Side" for *Mad Magazine*. He was a wonderful writer and humorist, and he had a great Jewish heart. I asked him to prepare a series of cartoons that would, in a humorous way, illustrate basic ideas in Torah. To do this, he invented a fat character called Schlemiel who would always misunderstand things, and then there would be a couple of boys who would correct him. In between was a joke. It was cute and funny but I was not sure that kids would get it. So I sent it to the Rebbe.

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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 900 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. mystory@jemedi.org

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The Rebbe had no problem with the humor, but he replied that we should avoid drawings of people that are not realistic — he gave an example of big noses, or big stomachs — because this is a basic educational mistake.

He said, “Even though this is a common style in comics, and the children are used to seeing this kind of thing, it’s a mistake. Whatever is simple and normal is best with regards to children.”

And he added the very powerful words, “*l'daati*” which means “in my humble opinion,” as if to say, “You don’t have to listen to me, it’s just my opinion.” But, of course, we got the point.



As time went on, the Rebbe campaigned to change the awareness of people about what should be shown to children. For example, he thought that we should avoid depicting non-kosher animals, that we should depict the tablets of the Ten Commandments accurately as square not rounded, that we should depict handmade *shmura matzos*, and that at least some of the adult males depicted should have beards.

The Rebbe paid attention to every little detail. Obviously, every time we got an answer from the Rebbe, this became a guideline for future issues.

One time, for Purim, the cover showed children visiting a senior citizen’s home. Lots of *hamantashen* cookies and graggers were shown because the Rebbe had said earlier that children should see the things that appeal to them. And we had a charity box right in the middle with the words “Talmud Torah” — Torah day school, on it. So all the commandments of Purim were depicted. We thought it was a great cover, but the Rebbe pointed out that the emphasis on Purim is giving charity to the *needy* and not to Torah institutions. It was easy to fix, but who would have thought of it if the Rebbe didn’t point it out?

One summer issue depicted children going away to camp. The boys were shown on one bus, the girls on another and the parents were shown saying good-bye.

What did the Rebbe say about this cover? “You have to add the square tablets of the law.” We didn’t know how to do that on this cover. The summer issue was coming

out about a month after Shavuos — the holiday that celebrates the giving of the Torah, *Mattan Torah* — and the tablets didn’t seem to fit with the theme of going away to summer camp.

But this is what the Rebbe wanted, so we drew the tablets in the heavens, with their rays shining down on the buses and the people. This added a new spiritual dimension to the whole picture — now the cover was saying that, even though the children are going away to camp, the spirit of *Mattan Torah* is going with them. They had not left the Torah behind on Shavuos.

So the Rebbe’s comments led us to add another perspective to the whole scene. And it’s really extraordinary how — time and again — he guided us to add so much more depth to what was being presented on the cover and, indeed, how we communicated Torah ideas to children.

Rabbi Dr. Dovid Shalom Pape, a children’s author and teacher of chasidic philosophy, is editor of the popular children’s magazine The Moshiah Times. He was interviewed in New York in November of 2013.

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

This week in...

> **5727 — 1967**, in response to the query of a *shliach* in a private audience, the Rebbe explained that Chabad’s approach is to maintain strong to Torah values, *and* reach out to all Jews, including those who disagree with these ideals. Ultimately, it will do more good for the individual, as he will be drawn closer to Judaism, as well as for the community, since he will become a source of pride to the community around him.¹ 21 *Sivan*

> **5735 — 1975**, seeing off the guests who joined him for the holiday of Shavuos, the Rebbe delivered a talk on the steps to 770. The departing guests from Great Britain each received a copy of the newly-published bi-lingual Hebrew-English *Tanya* from the Rebbe’s hand. Guests from other countries received an original Hebrew-language *Tanya*.² 16 *Sivan*

1. *Sichos Kodesh* 5727 Vol. 2, p. 407 2. *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. 13, p. 181

In honor of our dear friends

Rabbi Yehuda and Rebbetzin Miriam Shemtov

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by Jeremy, Shayna, Ethan, Hannah, Lisa and Brandon Swartz

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