

HERE'S *my* STORY

BURNING QUESTION

RABBI TUVIA BOLTON



that one evil was. I was thinking that, as soon as he finishes speaking, I will take some LSD, which was the answer to all the world's problems.

And then he named that one evil in the world — theistic Jews and their jealous G-d.

Now I didn't really have any Jewish identity to speak of — I was minimally aware that I was Jewish. But this person was saying that from all the people in the world, from all the races and the religions, Jews were evil.

So, instead of taking his word for it and taking LSD, I decided that I was going to figure this out for myself. This man had said that Jews were evil, and I wanted to understand what he found in Jews that was so bad and how he knew that.

To find out about Jews, I read the Bible and I was amazed to see — reading the Book of Genesis — that the Bible is totally not biblical. I mean, Abraham didn't do any miracles. Isaac and Jacob didn't talk about heaven; they didn't talk about hell. They didn't give any sermons. They didn't have any rituals. These are the things that religions are made of, and there wasn't any of this here.

So I became obsessed with understanding Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All the other religions I could understand — I had studied comparative theology in college, especially Eastern philosophy, and I knew that religions typically promised you new powers and revelations, or new pleasures and enlightenments. But here there were no promises at all. Even some of the promises that G-d did make to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He didn't fulfill in their lifetimes. Moses never got to the Promised Land. So I didn't understand what Judaism was all about really.

To get answers, I went to a lot of different rabbis and to a lot of different synagogues. And nowhere did I find answers that satisfied me until 1971, when I met a Chabad *chasid*. This was Rabbi Itche Meir Kagan, a wonderful person. I asked him my questions and he said,

continued on reverse

I was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1945 to a non-religious Jewish family. In those days everybody made a Bar Mitzvah, even the non-religious, and the joke was that the Bar Mitzvah of people like us was ninety-nine percent Bar and one percent Mitzvah.

In 1963, I went to University of Michigan and learned philosophy for four years and graduated with a bachelor's degree. In the course of the four years I spent at the university, I managed to throw away the one percent of Mitzvah that I had in my Bar Mitzvah and, at that point, I used the other ninety-nine percent of Bar literally — I became a barroom singer in the university town, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Then came a day when a well-known professor who had taken massive amounts of LSD appeared at the University of Michigan. I went to see him along with thousands of people — the place was mobbed, standing room only. He spoke about the importance of taking this new psychedelic drug, opening up new vistas in your soul and becoming who you really are. And he said that whoever was enlightened in this way would not hurt anyone. He said that there's only one evil in the world ...

I was sitting at the edge of my chair waiting to hear what

MY ENCOUNTER
with the **REBBE**

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continued from reverse

"You have to see this man," and he pointed to a picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. And so I did. It was a twelve-hour car ride from Michigan to New York, but I went.

I found myself at a *Farbrengen* at the Chabad Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway, and when I walked in, there were something like 500 to 700 *chasidim* there, singing a beautiful *chasidic* song. I loved music — I was a professional musician — but I had never heard music like that. This music put me in a whole different state of mind, open and positive.

And then the Rebbe started speaking. He spoke for about two hours in Yiddish, which I didn't understand at all, but I was watching him and I was watching the *chasidim*. I saw that the Rebbe didn't talk like a guru; he didn't try to put people into a trance. Instead, he was engaging the audience. The whole atmosphere was something I had never really experienced before. It wasn't spiritual. It certainly wasn't physical. It was something that was very real.

I started thinking to myself: Who is this man? This cannot be a normal person. But he's not an angel or some sort of a mystic. So who is he? And then it hit me — he is a Jew just like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And I said to myself, "He is a Jew, and I'm a Jew. I'm staying here."

And this is what I did. I stayed to learn how to be like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, how to make the world a better place. I learned at a *yeshiva* called Hadar Hatorah. I really threw myself into learning day and night. But I still had one burning question — one thing that bothered me very much.

And then I had an audience with the Rebbe, which was called *yechidus*, meaning "together in oneness." Its purpose was to awaken a level of your soul, which is that part of your soul that wants to get things done in this world, to fix this world and make it a better place.

When I saw the Rebbe, I confided in him my big problem. I told him that Eastern religions never appealed to me. Their philosophies — about enlightenment and nirvana — were interesting, but basically they were selfish religions, concerned only about the self and not the well-being of others. But Christianity was different. Christians followed a man who said, "Throw away everything, trust only in G-d, and this way you will find holiness." I never, for a second, thought that this man was G-d, but I did think that he had a new and important message. So I said to the Rebbe, "This idea keeps haunting my mind. What should I do?"

And the Rebbe said, "Your job is to learn Torah and completely forget about this thing. Any truth that might be found in that religion is all taken from the Torah."

I asked, "If I learn the Torah, will I be able to prove Christianity false?"

The Rebbe replied, "No, that's not your job. Your job is to concentrate on what is good. You must learn Torah, and you must learn the Talmud, and Jewish law and *chasidic* teachings."

As soon as the Rebbe said that, I became calm. It was as if I became a different person. It was as if, spiritually, he strengthened something inside of me, and I realized that happiness was not going to come from this direction. With just a few words, the Rebbe lifted a huge burden from me, and from then on, I could concentrate on being a Jew.

Rabbi Tuvia Bolton is the dean of the Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel. He was interviewed in his home in March of 2014.

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

This week in....

> **5687 — 1927**, the Rebbe Rayatz was arrested for spreading Judaism throughout Soviet Russia. On that night, as the Rebbe approached the Rebbe Rayatz's apartment, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka called out from the window, "Schneerson, guests have arrived!" Understanding what this meant, the Rebbe quickly ran to the homes of several *chasidim* to save the *chasidic* manuscripts from the hands of the government. *15 Sivan*

> **5727 — 1967**, the Rebbe urged *chasidim* to utilize the opportunity of the uplifted spirit amongst Jews worldwide following the Six-Day war, to reach out to their fellow Jews to embrace more *mitzvos*, specifically the commandment of *tefillin*.¹ *9 Sivan*

> **5735 — 1975**, while seeing off the guests who had come to spend Shavuot in 770, the Rebbe handed a new bi-lingual Tanya to residents of English speaking countries, and a Hebrew Tanya to those from other countries.² *16 Sivan*

1. *Sichos Kodesh 5727 Vol. 2, p. 190* 2. *Sichos Kodesh 5735 Vol. 2, p. 200*

In honor of our dear Rebbe
by Anonymous

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