

HERE'S my STORY

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SEPHARDIC RECORDINGS

MR. JOSEF CAYRE



I first met the Rebbe in 1975, together with Rabbi Abraham Hecht from my congregation, the Congregation Shaare Zion. Although Shaare Zion is a Sephardic congregation, at the time, we had as our leader an Ashkenazi rabbi who was a follower of the Rebbe.

This did not matter to us because Rabbi Hecht was brilliant and great, and actually was also one of my closest friends. He often consulted with the Rebbe and, on one occasion, I asked him to please take me with him the next time he went to Chabad Headquarters in Crown Heights.

He did better than that — he arranged a private audience for me and my family. I went with my mother and my wife and with our children. And it was a fascinating experience.

It was 1975, and I was in the record business at the time. When I mentioned this to the Rebbe, he said to me, "There's something very important that I want to ask you to do for your community. I want you make a recording of the best cantor you can find singing your High Holiday liturgy. It is important that the children of your community understand how their grandparents and their parents prayed."

I did as he asked. When the recording came out, my community was thrilled, because some of the people had never heard the chants sang in the correct manner.

Since the Sephardic community stretches around the world, we made audio cassettes — at that time there were no CDs — and we provided them for free to as many Sephardic synagogues around the world that we could. And the recordings continue to be in use until today — the cantors listen to them to learn the proper way to chant our prayers for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

So the Rebbe's advice resulted in a resounding success. This happened thanks to the Rebbe's interest and respect for the Sephardic community — he was concerned about Jews everywhere — and thanks to our Rabbi Hecht, who followed his directives.

All the while, the Rebbe was very sensitive to the issues involved. He would always try to offer his guidance without appearing to interfere, because he certainly didn't want members of the Sephardic community thinking that Rabbi Hecht was following the dictates of a *chasidic* Rebbe. He knew that his intentions could be misunderstood or might even generate antagonism.

The Rebbe said to me, "Your Rabbi Hecht cares very much about your community." And I responded, "Well, he needs to come to you for guidance, we understand that. In fact, we all come to you for guidance. So don't let that be a problem." I felt we only benefitted from his involvement.

Indeed, I myself benefitted from his guidance personally — and more than once.

There came a time, when I invested a great deal of money in a new invention. It was a watch that would take your pulse and your heart rate, measuring beats per minute. This invention was way ahead of its time and completely unheard of. I know they have these kind of devices nowadays but, back then, this was something truly unique.

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 came to the Rebbe and explained what it was all about. He said to me, "You know, I don't think you should do this. There is a possibility that people might think that their heart is fine, and they could ignore signs of a heart attack based on it. Or, if the alarm went off to indicate that something was wrong, it could scare them and make matters worse. I think there is something about this device that is not right."

After he told me this, I went home and spent a sleepless night wondering if I should or shouldn't continue with this business, which I thought would be so profitable. By morning, it was clear to me that I should follow the Rebbe's advice. So I called up the fellow with whom I had invested my money and told him, "I'd like to sell my stake. I don't want to be a part of anything like this."

As it turned out, I couldn't sell it, so I just turned over my stake to him, and I forgot all about it.

Sure enough, several months later someone was electrocuted with this particular device. The person didn't die, thank G-d, but the liability was huge. However, thanks to the Rebbe, I was out of it.

That was not the only time that the Rebbe's advice helped me.

After a time, I went into the video business, concentrating on films that were in the public domain – that is, films that were not copyrighted and anyone could produce a copy. After that, I started to produce children's movies together with my brothers — our company was called Good Times Home Video.

While I was telling the Rebbe about this new business, he said, "A lot of children's movies are violent — especially at the end — and they scare the children. Why don't you make yours without scaring children? Why don't you make yours with a happy ending?"

This is what we did, and it was a resounding success.

There were many times that people came, trying to buy me out. But each time I sought the Rebbe's advice and, each time, he said, "Why sell?"

"Because they are offering a lot of money."

He said, "Just stay in control of the business. If you want to sell, then sell less than fifty percent, so that you always stay in control."

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These were great words of advice, which I followed to the letter. And I urged others to do likewise.

One time, I came into our office and saw my brother looking very despondent. I said to him, "Stan, what's the problem?" And he said, "My best friend in Florida is going in for a big heart operation, and the doctor told his wife that chances are he won't come out of this. So I just feel awfully bad."

I said, "I'm going to go see the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and I will tell him all about your friend."

This is what I did, and when I did, the Rebbe said, "Have your brother call his friend's wife right now and tell her that this operation will be a huge success, and that his friend will be walking out of the hospital on his own within three days."

I thanked the Rebbe for the good news, but I was afraid to tell my brother what he said because I was worried that it wouldn't happen.

The next morning, I got a call from the Rebbe's office asking, "Why didn't you tell your brother what the Rebbe said?"

I questioned no more, and I made the call right away. And, indeed, the gentleman walked out of the hospital three days later, and he was fine.

This is how I learned that the Rebbe's advice was never wrong.

Mr. Josef (Joe) Cayre is a businessman, philanthropist and co-founder, along with his brothers, of Good Times Home Video. He was interviewed in his home in Brooklyn in January of 2007.

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This week in....

> **5736-1976**, in face of the unrelenting criticism, the Rebbe held a surprise *farbrengen* to strengthen and encourage the idea of doing Jewish outreach on the now-famous "Mitzvah Tanks". 29 *Tammuz*

1. *Sichos Kodesh 5736 Vol. 2, p. 519*

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