

# HERE'S my STORY

## FAITH IS CONTAGIOUS

MR. DAVID CHASE

**M**y name is David — Dovid Ben Aryeh — Chase. I was born in Poland, and I grew up in the Silesia region, in the town of Sosnowiec, which is outside the city of Katowice. I went to *cheder* there when I was young, and I also belonged to the Zionist group, HaNoar HaTzioni. But all that ended when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, when I was ten years old.

I and my family were shipped out to Auschwitz, although my older sister managed to escape that fate. She hid out during the war pretending to be a Christian. But my little sister and my mother and my father perished.

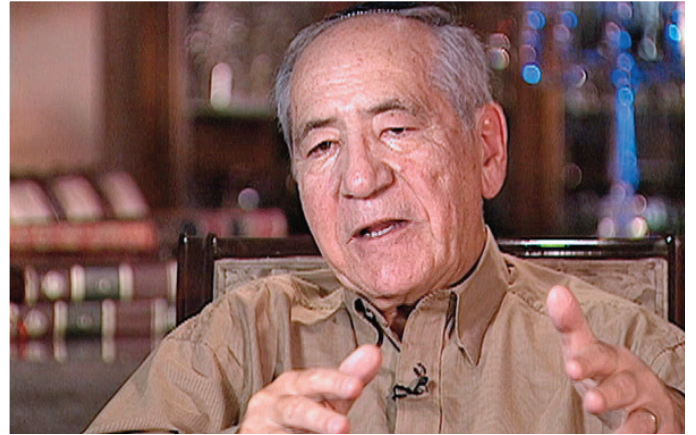
My sister who survived married an American soldier, and they brought me to the United States. I wound up in Hartford, Connecticut, where I opened up a construction business, and I took off from there. As my business interests expanded, I became involved in an enterprise in New Jersey where I met Rabbi Moshe Herson, who became my good buddy, like my brother.

Rabbi Herson was running a Chabad school in a poor area of Newark, and he was in desperate need of financial help. I checked him out and found that he was a very special person, with a level of selflessness and dedication to *Yiddishkeit* that I had never encountered before. I decided to help him with fundraising, and before I knew it, I was on the Board of Directors of his school — the Rabbinical College of America, which we moved to Morristown — and up to my neck, gratefully, involved with Chabad-Lubavitch.

In 1968, I met the Rebbe of blessed memory, and it was love at first sight. When I encountered this great human being, this great educator, this wonderful, humble *tzaddik*, I was changed forever. And I became totally devoted to him.

In 1981, around the time of the Rebbe's 79th birthday, I received a letter from him:

*"Dear Reb Dovid Tuvia: It is not proper for a friend to ask a friend for a birthday gift. But in your case, because of*



*the relationship that we have, I would ask you to give me a birthday present — to put on tefillin every day, and say at least the Shema in English or in Hebrew. And if you can't do any more, I'll be satisfied with that."*

How could I say no?

From the day I made that commitment, I have put on the *tallis* and the *tefillin* every day without fail. Even when I've been on the water, when it was tough to stand up and pray because the waves made the boat shaky, I have still done it. And also when I fly.

One time I was flying on business from New York to Warsaw with a group of people, all non-Jews, who were interested in opening up an insurance company in Poland. When daybreak came, I excused myself to say my morning prayers. No one commented on it, but four or five years later, I got a call: "Mr. Chase, do you remember we flew to Warsaw together?" I said, "Yes, of course I do." He said, "I want you to know that you are responsible for a tremendous change in my life ... I never believed in G-d, I never followed anything, but when I saw you doing what you did — setting aside business as secondary, in order to pray — that made such an impact

*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 900 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. [mystory@jemedi.org](mailto:mystory@jemedi.org)

continued from reverse

on me. And because of that I changed my whole life and I'm grateful to you. I'll never forget the kindness and direction you showed me."

I said, "Don't thank me, thank the Rebbe, because this is the way I was taught by him!"

Before I went to Poland to do business there, I asked the Rebbe if it would be okay, considering Poland's record of anti-Semitism. He said, "Go ahead, go. And try to help the Jews who are still there. But don't encourage more Jews to come to Poland at this point, not until there is no more anti-Semitism." He also told me to reciprocate in some way the deeds of the righteous gentiles in Poland who did help the Jewish people.

With that mandate, I went to Poland. This was in the late 1980s, before Lech Walesa became the President of Poland; he was then the head of the Solidarity Trade Union at the shipyard in Gdansk. I met with him and I said to him: "Mr. Walesa, I would like to come back to Poland to help because you still have a lot of Jews living there. However, I am concerned about the anti-Semitism."

He said, "I can tell you right now, Mr. Chase: Your G-d is my G-d."

"Do you mean that?"

He said, "I honestly do."

I said, "Then I will come. If you respect my religion, if you respect G-d, I will work with you."

As a result, we started a bank — the Solidarity Chase Bank which today is called the General Electric Capital Bank — and we started a cable company which became the country's largest. We worked together with Ronald Lauder setting up Jewish programs in Warsaw, including a kosher restaurant which is frequented mostly by non-Jews.

Once, when I flew into Poland on a rented plane, Lech Walesa called me up and asked me, "Would you do me a favor and give me a lift? I can't afford to go by plane and I'm very pressed for time..."

I said, "Be my guest."

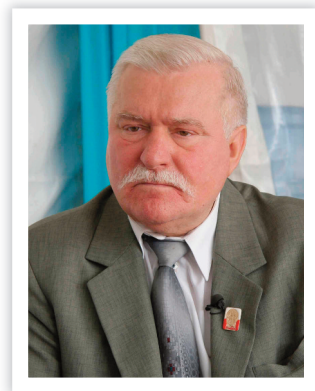
During the flight, I said, "Before I left for Poland, the Rebbe gave me a dollar bill, and he told me, "Give this to somebody who will deserve it, who can help the Jewish people." I did not tell Walesa exactly who the Rebbe was, but I said, "Take the dollar, put it in your pocket, and when you become President — and you will — then I'll tell you

the background behind it."

As G-d would have it, he won; in 1990 he became the first democratically elected President of Poland. And the next time I saw him, he said to me, "Now David, tell me, who is the person to whom I owe my gratitude?"

I said, "The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson."

Years later, we went to Israel by Polish "Air Force One" — ten ministers, Walesa and I. On the trip we visited the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv. In that museum there is a display of photos of many, many Jews from different countries, and it includes a picture of the Rebbe.



Former president of Poland, Lech Walesa

When Walesa saw the Rebbe's picture, he bowed.

Next to us was standing General Yitzchak Arad, the head of Yad Vashem, and he asked me, "What is he doing?"

I said, "It's very simple — that's his Rebbe!"

If you should ever meet Walesa, ask him to show you the inside of his wallet, and you will see the Rebbe's dollar bill, which he carries with him to this day.

*David Chase is a businessman and philanthropist and is one of the founders of the Machne Israel Development Fund. He was interviewed in New Jersey in July of 2008.*

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

## This week in...

> **5716 — 1956**, after a brutal terrorist attack in Kfar Chabad, Israel, which took the lives of five children and their teacher, a group of rabbinical students sent by the Rebbe to raise the morale of Israel's Jews arrived in Israel.<sup>1</sup> *5 Menachem Av*

1. *Igros Kodesh Vol. 13, p.18*

In loving memory of  
our dear parents and grandparents

**Burt & Ruth Stein**

By the Cagen family

You can help us record more testimonies  
by dedicating future editions of *Here's My Story*

A project of:



**JEWISH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA**

interviews@jemedia.org | myencounterblog.com | 718-774-6000  
784 Eastern Parkway | Suite 403 | Brooklyn, NY 11213

© Copyright, Jewish Educational Media, 2013