

HERE'S *my* STORY

HUMILITY

DR. ELLIOT UDELL

In 1977, when I graduated from the New York College of Podiatric Medicine, after doing a residency at Maimonides Hospital, I opened an office in Crown Heights. Part of the reason I chose Crown Heights was that, although not being Chabad Lubavitch myself, I had a very nice feeling toward the Chabad community.

Of course, before I opened up my office in Crown Heights, I wrote to the Rebbe to ask for a blessing. And an answer came back that the Rebbe would give me a blessing on one condition — that the *halachic* authority of Crown Heights would rule that I was not violating Jewish law concerning unfair competition, meaning that my opening a practice would not put someone else out of business and deprive him of a livelihood. The Rebbe was very strict about this issue — that one person wouldn't harm another in this way.

I did what he asked, and then he gave me a blessing.

I started working in Crown Heights, and then one day a call came into my office that there was a woman who wanted me to make a house call. I did not usually make house calls, as the streets could be dangerous for a doctor carrying his medical bag, but I took the call to find out the woman's problem and why she couldn't come into the office.

It turned out she was an elderly woman who had recently fractured her hip, so I asked her, "What is your name?" And she said, "My name is Mrs. Schneerson, and I live on President Street."

So five minutes later, as I was leaving the office with my medical bag my secretary said to me, "I thought you didn't make house calls?" I replied, "If I practiced in London and Queen Elizabeth called, I would also make a house call, even if she lived in a bad neighborhood."

Now, I wasn't a hundred percent certain that it was the Rebbetzin who asked for the house call — it could have been someone else with the same name, but as soon as I walked in the door, I knew she had to be the Rebbetzin. It



was the only Lubavitch house that I had ever visited which didn't have a single picture of the Rebbe.

After that, I used to go and see her every couple of months to take care of her feet. This went on for many years. And I remember her always very gracious, lively and friendly whenever I came there.

Shortly after that, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Groner, the Rebbe's secretary, called me and asked if I would make a house call to the Rebbe. By that time, I didn't have an office in Crown Heights anymore, but of course I went.

The first time I treated the Rebbe, he wanted to pay me. To me it was a big honor, and I didn't want to take any money. But he said to me, "That's not the way this works. I'm giving you a check for your services and I expect you to cash this check."

When I left, I said to Rabbi Groner, "I really don't want to cash the Rebbe's check; I feel it's not proper." But Rabbi Groner said, "If you don't cash the Rebbe's check, the Rebbe will never allow you to come here again. He is very insistent, whenever anyone does a professional service for him, that he pay the person. He doesn't accept no for an answer."

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

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So I made a copy of the check, but I cashed it. On subsequent visits I told him that his insurance will pay for everything. And he accepted that.

The Rebbe was in his late 80s and early 90s during the years I took care of him. He typically called me in before a Jewish holiday because that's when he'd have to stand on his feet for hours on end.



I remember one particular instance just before Passover. A few days before the holiday, the secretary asked me to come take care of the Rebbe. The Rebbe was very busy in the office for Passover, and they asked if I could come to his house late at night.

I came to his house. And when I got there, the person who opened the door said that the Rebbe was resting. I said, "Fine. Don't worry about it, I'll go home. I'll come back tomorrow."

He said, "Wait one moment..." When he returned, he told me that the Rebbe wanted me to stay: "You made the trip here. He doesn't want to waste your time."

I said, "I don't mind coming back tomorrow."

"The Rebbe insists that you stay."

Five minutes later, the Rebbe hobbled down. I could see he was very, very tired. He had been up maybe for twenty-four hours or more, dealing with all kinds of issues. But he woke up and limped down.

I said to the Rebbe, "You know, I can come back tomorrow." But he insisted. "No. You made a long trip here. I want you to take care of me now."

I felt bad and, to this day when I remember it, I feel uncomfortable because I put him out of his way when he had been resting. I could've come back, but he didn't want to waste my time.

My time, he didn't want to waste! But who was I? A young doctor. And he was the world's greatest rabbi. And yet he was so humble not to impact my schedule by making me come back. And that has impressed me to this very day.

I can sum it up this way:

My specialty is pain management of the lower extremity of the foot and wound care. I lecture all over on this subject, and I've published many papers on it, so I get VIPs coming to me from all over the country for care, for some very serious, painful problems. Some of my patients are quite famous. But not one of them is as famous as the Rebbe was — he was known throughout the world. And yet, he was the most humble person that I ever met — I have never met anyone as humble.

Dr. Elliot Udell is a doctor of podiatric medicine specializing in foot and ankle pain management as well as in wound management. He was interviewed in his home in January, 2009.

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

This week in...

- > **5738 — 1978**, in a passionate talk on the subject of Jewish education, the Rebbe asked that everyone present at the *farbrengen* send him a report of what each has personally done to benefit Jewish education. "As for someone who doesn't send a report, this can only mean one thing: he has done nothing in this area..."¹ 23 *Menachem Av*
- > **5739 — 1979**, at the *farbrengen* of *Shabbos Mevorchim Elul*, the Rebbe asked those present to create a fund to help needy individuals and families cover the expenses of the High Holidays and the festivals of the month of Tishrei.² 25 *Menachem Av*
- > **5741 — 1981**, Camp Gan Israel in Parkville, New York was officially recognized as its own entity by the United States Post Office and was given its own post office. The Rebbe spoke at length about the significance of this event according to Torah and *chasidic* teachings.³ 22 *Menachem Av*
- > **5741 — 1981**, in a talk, the Rebbe strongly criticized those who suggested that new Jewish Russian immigrants must be forced to only move to Israel and no other country.⁴ 27 *Menachem Av*

1. *Sichos Kodesh* 5738 Vol. 3, p. 294 2. *Sichos Kodesh* 5739 Vol. 3, p. 610
3. *Sichos Kodesh* 5741 Vol. 4, p. 465 4. *Sichos Kodesh* 5741 Vol. 4, p. 508

In honor of the *yahrzeit* of the Rebbe's father,
Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneerson,
of righteous memory

Max and Leah Cohen, Manchester, UK

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