The Rebbe was part of my life for as long as I remember. Perhaps my earliest memory of him dates to when I was three years old, when I had my Upshernish, the ceremony that takes place when a chasidic boy’s hair is cut for the first time.

At that time, my whole family had an audience with the Rebbe. They were in his office, discussing serious things, and I was doing what a little kid does — I was running around the floor, playing. The Rebbe beckoned me over and took out of his drawer a gold apple which today I know was a “Golden Delicious.” I’ve never seen an apple like that. My mouth began to water and the Rebbe smiled at me and gave me the apple, saying, “Make a blessing.”

The proper blessing for an apple is Borei pri ha’etz — “Blessed be G-d... Who creates the fruit of the tree.” But I got mixed up and instead said Shehakol nihiyeh bidvaro — “Everything comes into existence with G-d’s word.”

My father, a staunch chasid who was a man of immense humility and kindness and goodness, must have been mortified. I could see the sweat coming off his forehead. His little kid just made the wrong blessing in front of the Lubavitcher Rebbe — my G-d, what could be worse?

But the Rebbe immediately diffused the situation. He said, “This is no problem at all because the Shehakol blessing consolidates all the obligatory blessings. It’s not a problem.” And everything was good and fine because the Rebbe said so. Of course that’s the Torah law, if you mistakenly replace the Ha’etz with Shehakol, it’s okay.

Sometime around my Bar Mitzvah, my family had another audience with the Rebbe, and this one — above all — I will never forget. After speaking with my father, the Rebbe turned to me and addressed me in a manner of a general speaking to a soldier. He said me, “When you grow older, you will become my personal emissary.” These words touched me very, very deeply, even at that young age. And they set forth my purpose in life and became my guiding light. From that moment on, I felt a great connection to the Rebbe, something which has given me strength in the difficult times and stood by me in the good times too.

In 1980, I became the Rebbe’s emissary in California, in the area north of Los Angeles known as the Valley. And here I would like to relate a story about the Rebbe’s influence on the people of my community.

Chabad of the Valley had a special supporter who made a lot of money through stocks, bonds and commodities. Then, he decided to invest heavily in real estate, and not only didn’t it go well, he was in danger of losing all his money. He was depressed beyond description, and I wrote to the Rebbe immediately.
The Rebbe answered, “Check his tefillin and check his mezuzahs, and I will think of him in prayer.”

We took his mezuzahs down, and we checked them. It was a palatial home and there were a lot of mezuzahs, so we had our work cut out for us. We checked his tefillin as well. The mezuzahs were fine, but there were a couple of little problems with the tefillin — nothing major — which we corrected. Still, his financial issues did not improve. In fact, things went from bad to worse. The situation was untenable, and I wrote to the Rebbe again.

This time the Rebbe’s answer was only “Check the mezuzahs.” He did not mention the tefillin again. We checked all the mezuzahs again, and we found nothing wrong. Meanwhile, the man’s financial situation continued to spiral downward, and he was at his wits’ end.

I wrote to the Rebbe for the third time, and he gave the same exact answer, “Check the mezuzahs.”

Now we know that a mezuzah has an amazing ability to protect a person. It galvanizes G-d’s hovering protectiveness. So we did not take the Rebbe’s advice lightly, especially since he was telling us to do this for the third time.

I called in an expert in the law of mezuzahs, Rabbi Aaron Abend of North Hollywood. He came to a meeting with the man and his family, and we all sat together and pondered, trying to figure out what we were doing wrong here.

Suddenly, the wife said, “Remember that door to the alley that we nailed shut? It’s still a door, but we never use it anymore. There’s a lot of foliage that has grown around it, so I don’t think we checked the mezuzah over there.”

As fast as we could, we ran out there, worked our way through all of the shrubbery and, lo and behold, we found a door that had been nailed shut with a small mezuzah on the doorpost. When we examined this mezuzah, we saw that it had one problem — in the last phrase, kiymeh hashamayim al haartez, the words al haaretz were missing. Note that al haaretz, means “on the earth” and this clearly relates to real estate.

That mezuzah was corrected, and the man’s financial situation turned around!

Can you imagine — the Rebbe was in Brooklyn, New York, and yet he knew that there was a mezuzah in California, across the whole continent, that had a problem. He told us to check it not once, not twice, but three times, until we found what was wrong. It was just amazing.

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