

HERE'S my STORY

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MR. DOVID KESTENBAUM

In the 1970s my father, Nash Kestenbaum, was president of the National Council of Young Israel, and as such he had extensive dealings with the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Chiefly, Jewish outreach was very important to my father, which, according to him was not Young Israel's main objective. So my father felt that it was better to channel it through Chabad, and he gave a lot of support to Chabad and the Rebbe in this regard.

I remember that the Rebbe sent him off on various assignments. I was a child then and didn't know the details — all I knew was that my father was driving off to Albany, the seat of New York State government, on a mission for the Rebbe. And when he came back, he and the Rebbe would meet for hours.

I also know that my father arranged funding for Lubavitch efforts in Central and South America, and that, at the behest of the Rebbe, he opened up a chain of kosher kitchens on college campuses under the Young Israel name.

At first, my father didn't want to do it. He said he had enough on his plate already. But the Rebbe kept nudging him. After finally, the Rebbe presented him with a list of thirteen campuses and said, "I've made all the arrangements myself. Everything is taken care of. I've spoken to all the deans, and everything is in place for the kosher kitchens to open up. We have the locations for you on campus; we have cooks. All we now need is the Young Israel name and Young Israel funding."

Hearing that, my father agreed. He said, "I don't really want to do this but if the Rebbe himself went out and made all the arrangements, how can I say no?"

Even Chabad people in those cities did not know that these kitchens had been opened at the behest of the Rebbe, and as a result, there was cooperation between the two organizations.



My father could never say no to the Rebbe. Once, he was doing an appeal for the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach, and he brought me along. I was surprised that, in the middle of his speech, he started talking about *Taharas Hamishpacha*, the Jewish laws of family purity, and the importance of having children.

Afterwards, I asked him, "Why are you doing this? You're supposed to be fundraising for the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach." He said that the Rebbe and Rav Soloveitchik both asked him to go on a campaign across North America convincing people to keep *Taharas Hamishpacha* and to have children, because the Jewish people needed the next generation.

He had many lengthy meetings with the Rebbe relating to this and to other assignments the Rebbe gave him, but he kept all that private. Even when people asked him, "Why were you with the Rebbe for so long? What did the Rebbe say to you?" he wouldn't say anything. His opinion was that you can never accurately tell over what a great Torah sage said.

But there is one story that he did tell, and this is a remarkable story which I would like to share.

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

continued from reverse

In 1973, while my father was leading Yom Kippur prayers in his synagogue, the Young Israel of Long Beach, he was interrupted by an urgent message that Israel had been attacked and was at war, and that he was needed immediately in Washington.

He stopped the prayers and the local police rushed him to Long Beach Memorial Hospital where a helicopter was waiting on the roof, ready to take him to the Kennedy Airport for a flight to Washington. Once he arrived there, he met with President Nixon's Chief of Staff, with a number of generals and whoever else was necessary. His task was to arrange an airlift of weapons and military equipment to Israel that very day.



Mr. Henry Kissinger

After he had accomplished what he had been asked to do by Golda Meir, who was Prime Minister at the time, my father called various Jewish leaders, including the Rebbe, to inform them what was going on.

He told them how badly the first day of the war went, that Israel was in danger of losing the war, and about the airlift that had been arranged.

Hearing this, the Rebbe said to my father, "Don't worry, everything is going to be fine. They are going to march on to Damascus."

So my father responded that he didn't think this was likely, considering the terrible casualties that Israel had suffered in the first day of the war. In fact, my father said, the country was in danger of being overrun — the situation was dire.

But the Lubavitcher Rebbe insisted, "They are not going to be overrun. They're going to be so successful; they're going to march on to Damascus."

So my father took the Rebbe at his word, and he was relieved that all would end well and thrilled that the Israeli army would win and even march on to Damascus.

When it was over, he called the Rebbe again and said to him, "Nu, what happened? They stopped forty

kilometers away from Damascus; they didn't march on to Damascus."

And the Rebbe got so very upset. He said, "Is it my fault that Henry Kissinger intervened and stopped them?" Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State in the Nixon administration. "Is it my fault that Henry Kissinger stopped them from going forward? Had it not been for him, they would have been able to march on to Damascus. Can you imagine if they had taken Damascus, the trump card that they would have had for negotiations? There would have been peace forever."

In the 1970s, Mr. Nash Kestenbaum was president of the National Council of Young Israel, during which time he had many interactions with the Rebbe. His son, Mr. David Kestenbaum, recalled aspects of their relationship in an interview with JEM recorded in his home in Toronto in June of 2012.

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**, in response to reports of the profound impact made by the group of young Shluchim he had sent to Israel in the summer of 1956, the Rebbe wrote a public letter to all Chabad *chasidim* living in Israel, directing that they transform the excitement into positive action¹. 5 *Elul*
- > **5739 — 1979**, during a short visit of the Gerrer Rebbe, Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter, the Rebbe requested that he issue a *halachic* ruling regarding Jewish law's mandate to protect the people of Israel. 9 *Elul*
- > **5750 — 1990**, as tensions grew in the Middle-East and with the Gulf War looming, the Rebbe reassured many individuals who came to seek his guidance during the 'Sunday Dollars', that the land of Israel was safe and they should go forward with their plans to travel there². 5 *Elul*

1. *Igros Kodesh* Vol. 13, p. 429 2. *Beis Chayenu* issue 54

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whose bracha will always
keep our father safe

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