

HERE'S *my* STORY

A RABBI FOR LIFE!

RABBI DAVID HOLLANDER



By the late 1970s the Mount Eden neighborhood had begun to change, and my congregation dwindled away. I no longer even had a *minyan*, and I felt that the time had come for me to retire. Why I didn't do it has everything to do with the Rebbe.

I had known the Rebbe since 1950 when he recommended that I travel to the Soviet Union, where Jews were being persecuted. I began to visit the Soviet Union and I did this many times. On many occasions, I spoke with the Rebbe in preparation for these trips, and I'd also brief him upon my return.

I was born in Hungary, but I came to America as a youngster, before my Bar Mitzvah. My father was already here, he was a rabbi in upstate New York, and he enrolled me in Yeshiva Torah Vadaas in Williamsburg. From there I went to Yeshiva University — known today as R.I.E.T.S. — and to Brooklyn Law School.

In 1942, I received my rabbinic ordination, and shortly thereafter became the rabbi of Mount Eden Jewish Center, which was considered one of the largest congregations in America. It was located in the Bronx, not far from Yankee Stadium. I was the rabbi there for 36 years, during which time I was also elected as the president of the Rabbinical Council of America, and subsequently of the Hebrew Alliance of America.

Every year, on the day before Yom Kippur, I'd visit the Rebbe to get a piece of *lekach*, the honey cake which he handed out on that day, and also to get his blessing for the new year. But one year — it was 1985 — instead of going to Brooklyn to see the Rebbe, I had to take my wife to a doctor's appointment in Manhattan, and as a result, I almost missed him. By the time I got to Crown Heights, the Rebbe had finished receiving people, and everyone had gone... This was an inauspicious start to my year, and I was upset.

Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, the Rebbe's secretary, was still there so I told him how I felt, and he said to me, "You know, the Rebbe is due back in a half hour. Wait here. I'm sure that when he sees you, he will invite you in." And that's what happened.

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

The Rebbe came, and he asked me, "What are you doing here at this hour on Erev Yom Kippur?" I told him what happened, and he said to me, "If you are worried about the blessing, don't be — that you have already. If you're worried about the *lekach*, come inside and I'll give you a piece."

Once inside his room, the Rebbe said to me, "I give you a blessing that you should be successful as a rabbi and as a private citizen." When I heard



Rabbi Hollander in the Soviet Union

that, I latched onto the words "private citizen," and I said to the Rebbe, "Your blessing for me as a private citizen interests me, because I'm just on the verge of doing that very thing... of becoming a private citizen."

The Rebbe responded, "What?! What right do you have to have such ideas? I am older than you are, and I'm taking on *additional* burdens!"

He didn't leave it at that.

Later that month, I was standing in line after *havdalah* when the Rebbe was handing out wine from his cup. As I reached him, he reached across the table and poured some wine into my cup and in a loud and clear voice he called out, in real Brooklyn English, "Remember — *rabonus* (the rabbinate) for life!"

Rabbi David Hollander became known as "the oldest practicing rabbi in America." When he passed away in 2009, he was 96 years old, still following the Rebbe's directive. He was interviewed in his home in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn in February 2006.

In honor of our dear children

by

Anonymous

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

This week in....

- > **5730 — 1969**, the Rebbe conducted his last *farbrengen* ever in 770's main *sukkah*. After twenty years of doing so, the custom ceased due to the hazards of overcrowding. Eleven years later, in 1981, to the surprise and excitement of the *chasidim*, the Rebbe began the custom of giving a talk every night of *Sukkos* after *Maariv* inside the main synagogue of 770. 16 Tishrei
- > **5731 — 1970**, the Rebbe began a unique 'indoor *Sukkos*' *farbrengen* by delivering a *chasidic* discourse on the verse "*Halelu es Hashem kol goyim* — Praise the name of God, all you nations." Speaking passionately about the UN General Assembly's plan to dictate to the Israeli government to give back the land that Israel 'took' after the Six Day War to the Arabs, the Rebbe requested that gatherings of Torah and prayer take place at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and in Jewish communities around the world.¹ 16 Tishrei
- > **5752 — 1991**, after morning prayers and before visiting the *Ohel*, the Rebbe asked to announce that he would distribute dollars to be given to charity exclusively to children under the age of Bar and Bas Mitzvah. The Rebbe stood for two hours distributing dollars to children from across the New York area. 11 Tishrei

1. *Sichos Kodesh 5731*, Vol. I, p.69

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