

HERE'S my STORY

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"OUT OF CONVICTION AND WITH LOVE!"

MRS. CHANA ZAKHEIM



Rabbi Shabsi Katz

My name is Chana Zakheim. I was born and brought up in Pretoria, South Africa, where my father was a rabbi. Although there was no Chabad community around us, we always had a Chabad connection. For one thing, my father was a fourth generation Lubavitcher, and I remember my grandfather telling me when I was a little girl about what it was like to visit the Rebbe back in Russia — how he went by horse and cart or sled to visit the Rebbe in Lubavitch. My father also visited the Rebbe often — but, of course, he visited him in Brooklyn.

I had my first personal encounter with the Rebbe in December of 1975, when I came with my father for a private audience during Chanukah. At that time I was about to turn 21; I had just finished my university studies to be a social worker, and I was preparing to look for a job. It was quite an opportune time to visit the Rebbe.

Before the audience there was the celebration of *Yud-Tes Kislev* — a special day for Chabad when the Alter Rebbe, the founder of the movement, was freed from

imprisonment by the Russian czar. There was a *Farbrengen* gathering at which the Rebbe spoke, and I can say that, from that time, the Rebbe became a part of my life and a major influence on everything I have done.

A night or two after the *Farbrengen*, my father and I met with the Rebbe. The last time my father had seen the Rebbe was three years prior, when the Rebbe urged him to stay in South Africa "out of conviction and with love." Now, as we walked in, the Rebbe looked up and said, "Ah, Rabbi Katz! You're still in Pretoria out of conviction and with love."

Well, that completely floored me. Having just sat waiting outside the Rebbe's office and seen the number of people who had passed through his door in the last three hours, I realized what a huge multitude must have passed through that door in the last three years! And yet, it was as if the Rebbe was continuing the conversation.

I don't remember what else the Rebbe said to my father, but I do remember that I requested a blessing for my career. He asked, "Why for a career?" I explained that I had just finished studying for a degree in social work, and that I would like to work with Jews and to help Jews.

To that the Rebbe responded, "You need a blessing to get married."

I must have turned a little pale because it was the last thing that I was thinking of at that point and, seeing my reaction, the Rebbe said, "Okay, I'll give you a blessing for your career, but I'll also give you a blessing for a *shidduch*."

When I returned to South Africa, I was asked to write an article about my experiences in Brooklyn. I did so and the article I wrote was published in the Jewish newspaper in Pretoria. A copy was sent to the Rebbe and the response I got was: "*Tshuot chen chen la*." This is a quotation from the prophecy of Zachariah which concludes the Haftorah of Chanukah, and which literally means, "Shouts of 'Grace, Grace to her!'"

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@jemediia.org

continued from reverse

I took it as a compliment, but it was not until several years later, when I met my husband, that I realized the full meaning of why the Rebbe used this particular wording. My husband's name is Chanan and mine is Chana. So, within our names are spelled out the two Hebrew words for "grace" — *chen, chen* — "*Tshuot chen chen la.*"

After I got married and was expecting my second child, I learned that I would have to have a Caesarean Section because the baby's head was very high. I was in the most terrible emotional state, because it was the last thing I wanted. My husband didn't know how to calm me down, and for some reason he thought to say to me, "You're a Lubavitcher, write to your Rebbe."

I wasn't in a fit state to write to anyone, but I phoned my father who got the word to the Rebbe and, within hours, I had a reply.

The reply was two-fold. First the Rebbe instructed us to "print a *Tanya*," and this we immediately did. We decided to print one with an English translation, and it was the first *Tanya* with an English translation that was printed in South Africa. The Rebbe also instructed us to consult a doctor "who is a friend." This we also did. And after a very dear friend of ours who was a doctor spoke with my obstetrician, he gave us this advice: "Your doctor has got very sound reasons for wanting to do the Caesarean Section. Don't argue with him, go ahead and do it."

I was awake during the surgery, and I can remember the doctor calling for help when he was getting the baby out. I said, "What's the matter?" But he didn't answer me. Later he explained, "I have to tell you, your Rebbe knows what he's doing." I asked him, "Why do you say that?" He said, "The baby's cord was so tight around her neck that one contraction prior to a normal birth would have strangled her. She would not have survived."

So I have a 25-year-old daughter, named Chava Tanya who is my gift from the Rebbe, and she's paying the Rebbe back today. She and her husband are working as Chabad emissaries in Tel Aviv and doing wonderful work.

My husband and I eventually left South Africa and made *aliyah* to Israel. When we first got there, we had a very difficult time. And I wrote to the Rebbe, in particular asking for a blessing "for my husband's peace of mind."

The Rebbe responded with instructions to check our mezuzahs. And we found that the one on the front door

had major problems with the words *nafshecha*, meaning "your soul" and *ha'aretz*, meaning "the land." I had asked for peace of mind for my husband because he was having trouble in the Land of Israel, and here was my answer.

Shortly afterwards, my husband found a job and got peace of mind, and we became very much a part of the Israeli scene. I couldn't imagine living and bringing up my children anywhere else. They are all very involved with the Chabad community here — my daughters and my sons all consider themselves Lubavitchers.

As I said, the Rebbe had a profound effect on our lives, and continues to have a profound effect on our lives, and to lead us in everything that we do.

Mrs. Chana Zakheim is the daughter of Rebbetzin Jill Katz and Rabbi Sidney (Shabsi) Katz, who served the Jewish community of Pretoria, South Africa, from 1954 to 1991. She was interviewed in Brooklyn in December of 2008.

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ע"י בניהם ר' נחמן ור' אברהם ומשפחתם שיחיו

This week in....

> **5705 — 1944**, the Rebbe recited *kaddish* after the passing of his father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, for the first time in the presence of the Rebbe Rayatz. Both the Rebbe and the Rebbe Rayatz shed tears.¹ *1 Tishrei*

> **5750 — 1989**, to the surprise of all, the Rebbe called a *Farbrengen* in honor of Rosh Hashanah, the only instance in which the Rebbe held a *Farbrengen* on Rosh Hashanah.² *1 Tishrei*

1. As witnessed by Rabbi YD Groner 2. *Hisvaaduyos* 5750 Vol. 1, p. 9

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