

# HERE'S my STORY

Generously  
sponsored  
by the



Crain-Maling  
Foundation

## BIRD'S EYE VIEW

MR. YITZCHAK RAPPAPORT

The first time I met the Rebbe was in 1971, when I came to New York with my parents, right after we were allowed to leave the Soviet Union. It was a very emotional encounter because of my family's history, and because of the Rebbe's role in our release.

My father had been imprisoned twice for teaching Torah in an underground yeshiva at the behest of the Previous Rebbe. His crime was being a "Schneersonsky" — a *chasid* of the Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson. The first time he served five years in prison, and the second time he served ten years. My mother also served almost ten years in prison. She was a messenger for the underground, and she paid dearly for her activities.

I was only a toddler when they were jailed, and I was raised by my grandfather. I didn't see my parents until I was 11 years old, when they were released during a general amnesty following the death of Stalin.

From the moment they were let out of prison, my parents tried to leave Russia, but every time they applied, they were refused. It was a never-ending cycle of applications and refusals, applications and refusals. Meanwhile, I was educated in the Soviet system and earned a degree in electrical engineering, all the while trying my best to avoid school and work on Shabbos and Jewish holidays, which was a never-ending struggle.

And then, in 1971, we were suddenly granted an exit visa. It was hard to believe that it was really happening. We flew to Vienna, and from Vienna to Israel, where we were taken to Kfar Chabad. There we learned that we were being sent for a short visit to New York, so that we could have a personal audience with the Rebbe.

Of course, we credited the Rebbe with our release. Without the attention that the Rebbe was pouring into Russia, we would never have come out. I have absolutely no other explanation. Who else paid that much attention? Who else did so much for the Russian Jews in general and for *chasidim* in particular? No one. There wasn't anyone. So it's an open and shut case. There's just no discussion



as far as I'm concerned — if it was not for the Rebbe, we would never have come out.

By the time we arrived in New York for our meeting with the Rebbe, we were emotionally spent. We had been on an emotional rollercoaster since landing in Israel, reuniting with long lost relatives and friends, and when we walked into his office, my mother broke down in tears right away; my father wasn't himself, and neither was I. But the Rebbe's kindness and goodness helped us regain our composure and come to our senses. When he looked at us, a feeling of calm and wholeness permeated us.

He asked us many questions which my mother answered because she had been the messenger during those difficult times, and she knew the people that the Rebbe was asking about.

After this audience, we returned to Israel, where I started learning at the Chabad yeshiva, Tomchei Temimim, and then got married — with the Rebbe's blessing — and went to work for the Israeli Air Force as an electronics engineer.

Then came the Yom Kippur War of 1973. In the first few

*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](mailto:mystory@jemedi.org)

continued from reverse

days of the war, the Israeli Air Force suffered many casualties — our planes fell like flies. The reason was that we were still using old technology from the Six Day War which was several years out of date, while the Arabs had very advanced and sophisticated equipment supplied by the Russians.

Fortunately, the Americans immediately sent reinforcements and established an air-bridge, so that anything the Israeli Air Force needed was provided within twenty-four hours or less.

But after the war ended, it was clear that Israel had to resupply itself with the latest and the best. And I was one of two candidates chosen to investigate and find the equipment in the United States that would be appropriate for Middle Eastern warfare.

As I was flying to Austin with a stop-over in New York, I took the opportunity to arrange my second audience with the Rebbe. In preparation, I wrote out a note requesting the Rebbe's blessings for my Torah studies, for my work helping Russian immigrants, and other personal matters, but I didn't mention anything about the mission that brought me to the US.

When I came into the Rebbe's office and handed in the note, the Rebbe looked at it and immediately asked, "What are doing in New York?"

In response, I described my mission, and this led to many questions from the Rebbe — highly detailed questions — which made me realize that I was missing some vital information that I needed if I were to succeed in my assigned task.

Of course, going in, I knew that the Rebbe had an engineering degree, but this information was peripheral — it didn't play any role in my image of him as a Rebbe. So I was surprised and impressed that he was able to conduct a discussion like this, on a very technical engineering level.

And, moreover, he actually taught me something. I had been looking at the problems we were trying to solve in the Air Force from too close a perspective — one foot away from my face. But the Rebbe lifted me up fifteen thousand feet and from there I saw a very different picture. And I realized that there were holes in that picture.

Even though I thought I was the expert on this subject, I didn't have the answers to some of the issues he raised. For example, he asked me about frequency hopping, which has to do with protecting the location of a radar. And he

asked me about infrared technology, specifically about an evasive technique used to get away from an infrared missile. And his questions were very technical, like "What is the spectral footprint of the engine?"

I didn't know what it was.

The Rebbe's questioning and desire not to leave any stone unturned caused me to examine a whole slew of things that, truthfully, I hadn't given any credence to, or hadn't thought about, or didn't know about. And because of that, we could have ended up with inferior equipment.

It was only later on that I realized what had happened in that audience — the Rebbe ensured the success of my mission.

The best way for him to help me was to do exactly what he did — to analyze, to examine, and bring me to understand where the gaps lay. And I suspect that this was his intention all along.

*Yitzchak Rappaport is director of Magic Information Systems Inc. and currently lives with his family in Toronto, Canada. He was interviewed in Brooklyn in March of 2010.*

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

## This week in....

- > **5731 — 1970**, audio of the Rebbe's *Farbrengen* is transmitted live for the first time via a telephone connection to various locations around the world, including Israel. These *Farbrengen* "hookup" broadcasts became a connection of life and vitality for *chasidim* around the world allowing them to hear and learn directly from the Rebbe even as they were located across the globe. 6 *Tishrei*
- > **5750 — 1949**, the Rebbe distributed a packet containing a letter in honor of the new year, addressed "To the Sons and Daughters of Israel, Wherever They May Be", a recently published discourse by the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Rebbe of Chabad, and a piece of honey-cake. The distribution lasted for approximately four and a half hours, during which the Rebbe stood on his feet, greeting thousands of men, women and children, and wishing each one "a sweet year."<sup>1</sup> 6 *Tishrei*

1. *Beis Chayenu* issue 14, p. 2

לזכות  
לובא בת סאניא  
לרפואה שלימה וקרובה  
ולאריכות ימים ושנים טובות ובריאות

You can help us record more testimonies  
by dedicating future editions of *Here's My Story*

A project of:



JEWISH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA

interviews@jemedia.org | myencounterblog.com | 718-774-6000  
784 Eastern Parkway | Suite 403 | Brooklyn, NY 11213

© Copyright, Jewish Educational Media, 2013