

HERE'S my STORY

Generously
sponsored
by the



Crain-Maling
Foundation

POSITIVE THINKING

RABBI YEHOSHUA (JOSH) GORDON

I grew up in a Chabad family. In fact, I was six months old when the Previous Rebbe passed away in 1950, and my mother brought me in a carriage to the funeral. When I was three, it was, the Rebbe who did my *upshernish*, that is gave me my first haircut. As a child, I frequently accompanied my father to the Rebbe's *farbrengens*, and I remember it all as very exciting — the whole idea of being a Lubavitcher *chasid* was very exciting.

Naturally, I attended Chabad *yeshivas*, and — as was the custom — from the time of my Bar Mitzvah, I would have an annual audience with the Rebbe on the occasion of my birthday. I remember when I was sixteen years old, I had a dilemma weighing heavily on my mind, and of course, I asked the Rebbe's advice.

What was my dilemma? I couldn't decide if I should continue studying in *yeshiva* over the summer, or if I should go work with young children in a summer camp. It might sound silly to ask the Rebbe something like this, but it was quite important for me to do the right thing, and I was ready and willing to do whatever the Rebbe thought best.

The Rebbe said, "Work in the summer camp." And the reason he gave was "*Naase mocho velibo zakin elef pe'amim kacha*," meaning that, through giving to others, one's heart and intellect became refined a thousand-fold.

A few weeks later, at a *farbrengen*, the Rebbe repeated this teaching and explained it further. He said that G-d grants us a gift when we set aside our own concerns and devote ourselves to others, and then our heart and intellect become refined a thousand-fold. That means a person could spend a thousand hours studying and trying to reach a higher consciousness, but the one who devotes himself to others acquires the same consciousness within the hour.

This teaching impacted me for a lifetime, and I have shared it often with others in many venues.

In 1973, I was offered the opportunity to become the Rebbe's emissary and to open a Chabad House in the area north of Los Angeles known as San Fernando Valley, or "The Valley." It happened near the occasion of the



Rebbe's 70th birthday and, on that momentous occasion, he sent me a special blessing. He blessed me to make firm decisions with alacrity, and to work hard with faith and trust in G-d.

I took the Rebbe's message to be a universal message. If you want to succeed, you need, first of all, to work hard. You have to wake up very early in the morning and pound the pavement. But that's not enough. You have to do it with alacrity. And with everything you do, you must have a tremendous amount of trust in G-d that your work will succeed.

The Rebbe's gift to us, his emissaries, was showing us how to keep our focus on the forest, and not to get confused by the trees. His responses and advice always emanated optimism, as he urged us to go forth with confidence and fearlessness. And we did, because we felt that the Rebbe was always holding our hands.

On one occasion, my wife and I faced a very serious challenge in our lives. The particulars are not germane to the story I want to tell but, suffice it to say, it was a very debilitating time for us.

continued on reverse

MY ENCOUNTER
with the REBBE

An oral history project dedicated to documenting the life of the Rebbe, Rabbi Manachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. The story is one of thousands recorded in over 1200 videotaped interviews conducted to date. These stories are based on the recollection of the individuals recounting them. Please share any corrections, comments and suggestions. mystory@jemediia.org

continued from reverse

I suggested that my wife write to the Rebbe about it, and she did — she sat down and wrote a ten-page letter explaining everything. The day her letter arrived in New York, I got a call from the Rebbe's secretary with his answer:

"Time and again in your holy work, you have imagined that the situation you find yourselves in is the end of the world, but then you saw how the situation flipped over and become visible and revealed good... You must follow the command of the Tzemach Tzedek to think optimistically, and things will turn out well."

What an answer! I have this answer hanging on the wall of my office with a picture of the Rebbe, and I have it on my dresser at home. This answer is a teaching which I try to remember every day — that, as bad as things may look, they looked bad last time too, but everything turned out fine.

With that encouragement from the Rebbe, we decided to move forward and do what we had to do. And, a couple of days later, with a snap of a finger, the problem was solved. I believe that this was a direct result of the Rebbe's blessing.

Another example I would like to give is what happened with Chabad of Encino, which we first opened in 1975 on Hayvenhurst Avenue. This was a very busy street that functioned as a freeway exit, but some of the neighbors were not happy that we were functioning in an area zoned residential. They challenged us in court, and we thought of abandoning this site. But, whenever we wrote to the Rebbe about our frustrations and difficulties, he always encouraged us to stay on. So we followed his guidance.

We finally reached an agreement which allowed us to keep the Chabad House where it was in Encino, but we had to move the youth center elsewhere.

We chose Burbank Boulevard in Tarzana, and when we saw the positive response from the neighborhood, we decided to build our headquarters on this site. Next to us was Tarzana Preschool and buying that building would allow us to expand. But, when we asked the Rebbe, he said this was not a good idea and that we should ask advice of the real estate people and Chabad supporters in the area. We did so and realized that the building was overpriced. As I recall, it would have cost us \$340,000, which was a great deal of money in the early 1980s.

A few years later, the recession hit, and the asking price for the property went down to \$280,000. We offered \$240,000 and closed at that price. Of course, before we

made the offer, we asked the Rebbe, who said this time that it was a good idea.

That's how the Rebbe, sitting in Brooklyn, saved us a hundred thousand dollars!

To begin construction, we applied for a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation. I gave a presentation to their 75-member board, but when they heard that all we had was just a \$50,000 pledge to start the project, one of them said, "Rabbi, it's never going to happen."

So I got very angry, and I said, "Sir, the Lubavitcher Rebbe gave me his blessing. It's going to happen! You wait and see. With your help or without your help!"

They clearly believed we were never going to build anything, but they did give us \$25,000 for the architect. And, of course, we did build. The end result is that we now have a magnificent 22,000 square-foot facility — Chabad of The Valley — consisting of a synagogue, a youth center and a school.

That building stands there because we followed what the Rebbe taught us: work hard, have faith, be optimistic, believe that you can — with G-d's help — accomplish the impossible. That building stands there because of the Rebbe's guidance and blessing.

Rabbi Yehoshua (Josh) Gordon has served as the Rebbe's emissary in the Los Angeles area since 1973; he is presently the executive director of Chabad of The Valley. He was interviewed in the Chabad of Encino Center in September of 2011.

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

This week in....

> **5740-1979**, after Rabbi Dovid Okonuv, a young Chabad *chasid* who had emigrated from Russia, was murdered in Crown Heights on his way to shul, the Rebbe cried bitterly at a public address, instructing that an institution which teaches Torah specifically to Russian Jews should be founded in his memory. This would surely cause great pleasure to his soul. The next day such an institution was founded, and the Rebbe chose its name; Ohel Dovid.¹ 7 Cheshvan

1. Sichos Kodesh 5740 vol. 1, pg. 315

לרפואה שלמה לכל חולי ישראל

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

A project of:



JEWISH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA

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

© Copyright, Jewish Educational Media, 2015