

HERE'S my STORY

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DR. MORDECHAI REICH

When I was twenty-one and newly graduated from Yeshiva University, I decided to join a group of friends and spend the next year in Israel, learning Torah at Yeshivat Har Etzion.

Before leaving, I went to see the Rebbe to ask for a blessing, and during that audience I also asked his advice about what course my career should take. I was very interested in psychology, as my brother had taken that path, but I was also considering Jewish education because I loved teaching kids and I was successful doing that during my college years.

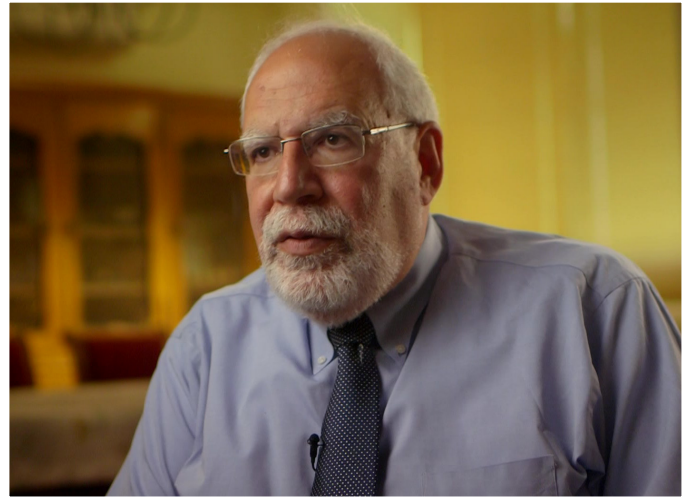
I arrived early for my appointment — this was in the summer of 1974 — in order to recite some Psalms in the Chabad Beit Midrash as my preparation for the meeting with the Rebbe, which I took very seriously.

As I was doing that, I remembered stories I'd heard about the famed 15th century Kabbalist, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, who could read people just by looking at their foreheads and knowing what they had done, both good and not so good. It occurred to me that the Rebbe might be able to do the same thing, and I began to tremble; I couldn't stop trembling for several minutes. At that point, a thought entered my mind, "Why am I so concerned about what the Rebbe is going to think of me? Why am I not more concerned about what G-d thinks of me? Shouldn't that be more important?"

I do believe that it was the Rebbe's presence that led me to this understanding, and I felt grateful to him for the awe of G-d that he instilled in me at that moment.

When I saw the Rebbe in person, I discussed my career choices with him, and I asked what he thought of psychology versus education.

He was all for me going into education. He said that a psychologist often deals with emotional illness of some sort or another, but a teacher can prevent such illness. A Jewish teacher in particular is educating children in a



healthy way of life, according to the Torah, which is the Tree of Life.

That was the Rebbe's point of view, but he was not heavy-handed about it. He didn't direct me to do this or that, he was just giving me his opinion and advice.

As it happens, I did not follow it. I became a psychologist and I hope that I've been helpful to my clients over the years, but I've often thought that it would have been better for me to have taken the path the Rebbe recommended — the path of Jewish education. Perhaps the Rebbe knew then how much I would take my clients' issues to heart, and how much happier I would now be if I had gone into education. But today I am trying to remedy that situation; I and my wife have started a parenting project which will use psychology to help parents in educating their children.

I may be one of the few people out there who didn't follow the Rebbe's advice. I really wish I had. But I think it's to his credit that he was not heavy-handed with me and he really allowed me to make my own choice. So I'm grateful

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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 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@jemedial.org

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for that also.

The most poignant part of that meeting with the Rebbe came when I asked him for a blessing for my trip to Israel, a blessing which he did not give. Instead, he asked me if I was familiar with the Torah commandments concerning living in Israel. I fumbled the question, because I didn't want to say "no," but the truth was that I did not really know the Jewish law concerning this matter. He suggested I study up on the subject, and he said this to me: "The Land of Israel is very holy and it will only absorb people who are ready for its holiness." Afterwards he gave me a general blessing for health and success, and I didn't realize until I had left his presence that he did not give me the blessing I had asked for.

As it turned out, I did not leave for Israel as planned. My father had a heart attack and I couldn't go for about six months because I needed to help my mother take care of him. Only afterwards was I able to leave and I learned Torah in Israel for about a year-and-a-half.

While I was in Israel I became engaged to my wife. However, when I informed my rabbi of our engagement, he said that — having calculated the numerical values of our names — there was a problem. The numerical values seemed to indicate that we might not be able to have a happy, unified relationship. This rabbi suggested that one of us should take on another name to alter the numerical values.

This matter weighed heavy on my heart when I returned to the United States. So I decided to see the Rebbe — I wanted to share the news of my engagement with him and to ask for his blessing. As well, I wanted to ask his advice about the name issue.

When I came to see the Rebbe, the tension I felt must have been written all over my face. I was really, really worried.

But when I told the story to him, the Rebbe simply smiled. He said to me, "How many names do you have?"

I said, "One — Mordechai."

"And how many names does your fiancée have?"

I said, "Two — Sima Esther."

"So do you think it would be fair for her to have three names and for you to only have one name? I suggest that you take on an extra name."

I then asked him what that name should be and told him that the rabbi in Israel had suggested Menachem or Menashe.

The Rebbe said, "Well, you know, you can take either name. Each one is equally good and effective, so feel free to choose either name — both will be good."

His response, delivered with such a warm smile, wiped out all the tension I felt. I smiled back at him and basked in his warmth and his support.

He didn't make a joke of it but, being exquisitely sensitive to the tension and the stress that I was under, he certainly lightened up the moment. He never said whether he agreed or disagreed with the rabbi in Israel who had made such a dire pronouncement, though I suspect he did not. Instead, he gave me many blessings — for the wedding to go well, for our life to go well, for happiness, for children, and more.

I came in a basket case but I went out very, very happy.

When I think about him today, I miss him deeply. I do. And I'm very grateful that he was in my life. He was a wonderful person and a great leader, one we need so much in this day and time.

Mr. Mordechai Reich is a psychologist practicing in Efrat, Israel, where he lives with his wife and their five children. He was interviewed in his home in June of 2015.

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

This week in....

> **5751 - 1990**, after Saddam Hussein threatened to wipe out Israel with scud missiles in the months prior to the Gulf War, the Rebbe spent much of the Shabbos *farbrengen* denouncing those who stridently declared that the upcoming destruction was due to the Jewish people's sins. The opposite was true, the Rebbe protested, an unprecedented number of Jews who had no previous Jewish education or upbringing have been returning to Judaism! *10 Teves*

לעילוי נשמת

ר' שלמה בן הרב ניסן יצחק ופרומא שרה טעלושקין

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