

HERE'S my STORY

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A CHILD'S GIFT

RABBI CHAIM SHLOMO DISKIN

While I was studying in the Chabad Yeshiva in Brooklyn — where I had the merit to spend three-and-a-half years in the early 1980s — I made it a point of observing the Rebbe as much as possible. As a result, I saw and learned some amazing things. But nothing impressed me more than the Rebbe's sensitivity and love for little children.

It was the Rebbe's practice to visit the Ohel, the resting place of his father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe, on a bi-weekly basis. Whenever he went, he went alone. And he would take sacks full of letters sent by people asking for blessings — for health, for livelihood, for marriage, for family, for success. He would spend many hours praying and reading those letters. Often he would spend the whole afternoon there, coming back only before nightfall to join the *minyan* for prayers.

The one time of the year when people would join the Rebbe at the Ohel was the day before Rosh Hashana and, in 1982, I decided to go as well.

I got there early in the morning, just before the Rebbe arrived, and I picked a good spot to stand — as close as possible to the *tziyun*, the tomb itself — from where I could see the Rebbe clearly.

First he prayed; then he opened the huge sack that he had brought with him and started pulling out letters one by one. He would read each letter very quickly, tear it and let it fall onto the *tziyun*. He read hundreds of letters — one after the other, one after the other, reading each one, tearing it and letting it fall. After a while, it seemed as if a cascade of paper was falling, falling, falling onto the Tziyun.

Here he was, a man in his 80s, standing for hours on end, reading an endless stream of letters that contained all the troubles of so many Jews — letter after letter.



As I was watching him, he pulled out a packet of papers — not white like the other letters, but colorful, like drawing paper — and started reading these colorful letters just as he did the others. When he tore them and they were falling before my eyes, I recognized from the big square letters and fanciful decorations that they were from children in kindergarten. A teacher somewhere must have told the kids to request blessings for the New Year, and then sent all their scribbles in one packet.

At that moment it occurred to me that just a second ago, the Rebbe might have been reading a letter from a poor person asking for livelihood, or another asking for recovery from a terrible illness, or a CEO asking for success in a business deal, and now he was reading a child's letter and giving it the same treatment as the rest. He had such a feeling for children that their little hopes, wishes and requests mattered to him just as much as those of any person of stature.

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 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

Almost every day, he used to give children coins for charity and urge them to deposit these coins in the *tzedakah* box. As this was known, children would line up outside the synagogue, waiting for the Rebbe to arrive for the afternoon prayers.

He would give each one a coin and point to the *tzedakah* box. I usually stood nearby, and I would lift the children one by one, so that the Rebbe wouldn't have to bend down so many times to hand them their coins.

Often, the Rebbe would look around and ask me, "Did this child get?" It was so important to him not to leave any one out.

Sometimes he would already be walking away and suddenly he'd notice a kid hanging back in the corner and he'd call him over to give him a coin.

Years later, when I was married with children of my own, I brought my two girls to him — one was three at the time, the other a year-and-a-half. I was holding the older one by the hand and the younger one in my arm, waiting for the moment when the Rebbe would walk through the hallway and give out coins to children.

While I was standing near the open front door, the little one in my arms became fascinated by the cars whizzing by outside. At that moment, the Rebbe came out and gave a coin to my older daughter. I wanted the younger one to get a coin too, but she was not looking at the Rebbe; she was still looking at cars. I was trying to turn her, when the Rebbe did something extraordinary. He took a coin and playfully passed it before her eyes. Her attention diverted, she reached for it, and he gave it to her and showed her how to put it in the *tzedakah* box.

He had such a way with children!

I learned of another example of his care from my wife, who was a teacher at the Yavne Chabad School in Kiryat Tivon. While she worked there, the teachers decided that the children should write letters to the Rebbe, knowing how seriously the Rebbe took these letters.

One of the boys was especially interested, and he asked his teacher many questions. "Where does the Rebbe live?" She told him in the United States. "Does he sometimes come to Israel?" She replied that he

never had.

This boy decided, therefore, to send some of the Land of Israel to the Rebbe. So, in his envelope, he included a handful of soil from the Land.

The teacher saw that this one letter was thicker than the rest, and she asked the boy what was inside. He replied that it was soil, a gift to the Rebbe. She was uncertain whether to mail it or not. She imagined the Rebbe opening the letter and the soil falling out, making a mess on his desk. But then she decided that it was not her place to scrap this boy's gift, so she sent his letter along with the others.

A short while later, the Rebbe's answer arrived. This boy got the same blessing as all the other kids, but his letter also contained a postscript. The Rebbe had written, "P.S. Thank you very much for your thoughtfulness in sending me soil from the Holy Land."

Naturally, the boy was thrilled.

It is a cute story, but what it conveys is the special care that the Rebbe gave each child, and especially the child who tried to do something out of the ordinary — the thoughtful kid. The Rebbe went out of the way to commend his thoughtfulness. But, really, it shows how uncommonly thoughtful the Rebbe himself was.

Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Diskin, currently the chief rabbi of Kiryat Ata, has served as the Chabad emissary in Israel since 1983. He was interviewed in June of 2014.

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

This week in....

> **5712-1951**, the Rebbe thanked Rabbi Avraham Sender Nemtsov for sending him a list of students who studied in the first Lubavitcher Yeshiva in the town of Lubavitch during the year 1909-1910, and requested that he compile a list of the all the students who attended over an extended period of time.¹ 18 Teves

1. Igros Kodesh vol. 5 p. 150

לזכות הר"ר יוסף יהושע משה ב"ר שמואל הלוי
ומשפחתו שיחיו

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