

# HERE'S my STORY

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## DEEPER THAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

**RABBI AZRIEL CHAIKIN**



I grew up in Georgia, Soviet Union, where my father served as a rabbi. He had gone there on the advice of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, whose directions he always followed.

From my earliest years I remember my father speaking about the Previous Rebbe. It was as if the Rebbe was part of the family. He was our *Zeide*, our grandfather. My father taught me that, when something disturbing happens and you need advice, you write a letter to *Zeide*.

In 1941, when the Soviet Union entered World War Two, my father was arrested and charged with "engaging in an occupation that was not healthy for society," meaning being a rabbi. He was sentenced to nine years in prison, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise because otherwise he would have been drafted into the army. Likely, he would have been killed since the Red Army used people like him as cannon-fodder.

While my father was in prison, I reached Bar Mitzvah age, but there was no celebration because my mother was afraid that I might be arrested too. As my Bar

Mitzvah present I got to visit my father in prison. He said to me: "Listen my son, you have to learn Torah. You have to learn Jewish law. You have to learn what to do because you don't know what will come. Here in prison I have to know Jewish law well, so that when I'm forced to do certain things on Shabbos, I do them in a way that doesn't violate Torah. So you must learn well."

After this I enrolled in Tomchei Temimim, the Chabad *yeshiva*, in Kutaisi. I stayed there until my father was released from prison in a general amnesty following the end of World War Two, and we left for Europe. Again, this was on the advice of the Previous Rebbe.

My father eventually accepted a position as a rabbi in Sweden, while I came to study at the Chabad *yeshiva* in New York. But after a few years in Sweden — this is in 1950 when the Korean War started — my father became frightened that the Cold War between the Soviets and the Americans would cause another world wide conflict. He decided that it would be prudent to leave Europe and migrate to Canada. He wrote about this to the Previous Rebbe, but, in the meanwhile, the Previous Rebbe passed away. Sometime after that, I received instructions from my father to direct his question to the future Rebbe who, at that time, had not yet formally accepted leadership of the movement.

I brought my father's letter to the future Rebbe, explaining that my father was in urgent need of advice. After he read it, he looked away for a moment. Then he said, "Your father is afraid that another world war is coming. But I don't see a world war. Still, if he would feel more calm with a visa under his pillow, let him apply for a visa."

I wrote to my father what the Rebbe said, and he applied for a visa. But he didn't leave Europe right away — he was calmer because he had the visa, and he waited another two years before immigrating to Canada.

Meanwhile, back in New York, I became involved in publishing some of the Rebbe's talks, and I was also

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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 the over 1,100 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. [mystory@jemedial.org](mailto:mystory@jemedial.org)

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privileged to be present when some interesting people came to visit him. One audience I remember in particular was when a group of students came to meet the Rebbe.

The students started asking questions of the Rebbe. One of them asked if the Rebbe used the techniques of psychoanalysis — Freud's system — in giving advice.

The Rebbe said, "No, a person's soul is much deeper than what mere psychoanalysis can penetrate. Freud's theory concerns the ego and relates to people as if they were guinea pigs."



The student then asked, "Does a Rebbe ever use Freud's system for himself? Does he ever go to a doctor?"

The Rebbe smiled and said jokingly, "If a Rebbe has a pain in his leg, he has to go to a leg doctor. If he suffers in his head, he has to go to a head doctor."

Then he spoke to them about the energy they had as young people, and how to use it out for the sake of Judaism. He said they should use it now because, once they get older, they will not have as much.

One of the students — a smart aleck — said, "No, it's not true. Leon Trostsky, the Marxist revolutionary, was as energetic in his later years as he was in his youth."

The Rebbe answered, "If you'll read what he wrote in his earlier years and what he wrote in his later years, you'll see that there was a difference."

When I finished *yeshiva* studies, the Rebbe dispatched me to Morocco, where his earlier emissaries — Rabbi Michoel Lipsker, Rabbi Nisson Pinson and Rabbi Shlomo Matusof — were already doing outreach with thousands of children lacking a Jewish education. But more teachers were needed.

First though, the Rebbe said, I should obtain my American citizenship, and only once I had an American passport, should I go to Morocco. This was very sound advice because, years later, I was deported and needed that passport to save my skin.

In Morocco, the Rebbe's emissaries established *yeshivas*

in the major cities — Casablanca and Meknes — but my job was to set up schools in the outlying towns where Jews lived, using local teachers.

While in Morocco I got married — my wife was Rabbi Michoel Lipsker's daughter — and settled in Agadir, a place in the mountains around which there were many small Jewish villages. I established a *yeshiva* there — which was very successful and attracted hundreds of students from the surrounding areas — and I also built a *mikvah* there.

Then I was thrown out of Morocco.

When I first went there, Morocco was a French protectorate. But then Morocco became independent and a new governor came to Agadir. He wanted me out. People in the community came to plead on my behalf, but he said, "For him you plead? Don't you know he is an Israeli spy?! In his school he teaches Hebrew — he doesn't even know Arabic."

So I had to leave. It's a good thing that I was an American citizen and I had an American passport because, otherwise, they would have put me in prison. My skin was saved thanks to the Rebbe.

After I left, there was a big earthquake in Agadir and many people were killed. But I and my family were fine because we got out in time.

*Rabbi Azriel Chaikin has been the Rebbe's emissary in Morocco, Scandinavia, Belgium and Ukraine since 1955. He was interviewed three times in the My Encounter Studio, once in 2010 and twice in 2015.*

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## This week in....

> **5721- 1961**, in a letter to Knesset member Menachem Begin, the Rebbe thanked him for his assistance in making an *eiruv* for the settlement Bar Giora in Israel. The Rebbe explained the beauty of keeping Shabbos unites all Jews, and that through keeping Shabbos, the Jewish People remained in existence in exile both physically and spiritually.<sup>1</sup>  
12 Menachem Av

1. Igros Kodesh Vol. 20, page 306

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by Anonymous

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