

HERE'S my STORY

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MACHINE VS. MYSTIC

DR. LES ROSENTHAL

Although I am a dentist, I have a good singing voice and I dabble in cantorial music. In 1981, I was asked to sing for a Conservative synagogue, which held its High Holiday services at the Sheraton Universal Hotel in Universal City, north of Los Angeles. The hall was full — probably 1,500 people were there — and I had a solo to sing, the prayer *Unesaneh Tokef*. One bar before the solo, a massive headache struck me and I fell to the ground — they had to carry me off the *bimah* in the middle of Rosh Hashanah.

I was taken to a room where I could lie down and rest for a while. But two hours later, the headache had not gone away, its intensity was unchanged, and it was clear this was not a good thing.

At that point, I was taken to the hospital, where they took X-rays of my skull and neck, and came back with the diagnosis, "You have a tumor in the pituitary gland. It's destroying the bone, and the pressure is causing the headache."

At that point a neurologist was called in who ordered a tomograph, in order to get a better picture of the bone destruction. After he got the results, he said, "There is no tumor. There is no destruction of the bone."

Relieved, I thought, "That's good — I'm going home!"

But he said, "Since we do not have a cause for your headache, we need to do further tests." He ordered a CAT-scan.

The CAT-scan revealed that behind my right eye, in the middle of the grey matter, I had an aneurysm — a blood vessel that had blown up like a balloon — and it was about ready to burst. If it burst, death would be instant.

When my wife heard that, she became hysterical. She was pregnant with our third child and the idea of being alone with three young kids without a husband scared her witless.

She began to push me to go the next step — an aortic angiogram — which the neurologist recommended. This



involved putting a catheter into a major artery in my leg and feeding it up to the aorta, then releasing a dye. This test allowed the doctors to map where the blood vessels are and see if it was possible to stop blood flow to that particular blood vessel with the aneurysm.

If so, then they could make a hole in my head or else remove the eye to get to the affected area, and then they could put metal clips there so that the aneurysm wouldn't burst. While that might sound good, the problem with such a procedure is that the particular blood vessel could be feeding some vital part of the brain, and once it is clipped-off, a stroke could result. That did not sound like a risk I wanted to take.

There was another option, which, unfortunately, did not sound much better. This called for surgically exposing the aneurysm and coating it with glue to reinforce its walls. In this procedure, the surgeons would have to destroy a lot of tissue to expose the aneurysm and that could also cause a deficit in brain function.

Neither of these options sounded good to me, but my wife

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MY ENCOUNTER
with the **REBBE**

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was very upset and pushing the doctors to do something. Finally, I told them, "Okay, we'll do this. But only on the condition that, if you're going to do the aortic angiogram, you must have an operating room ready, so you can move me and do the next procedure. If I ever wake up, I want it to be over."

Everyone agreed, and that's when Rabbi Joshua Gordon stepped in. He was the Rebbe's emissary in the Los Angeles area, director of Chabad of the Valley, and we had taken advantage of his Shabbat hospitality a number of times. At his table, we heard about the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and we attended classes where the Rebbe's teachings were discussed.

Rabbi Gordon said to me, "You have to write the Rebbe a detailed letter about what's going on here. You have to ask him for a blessing."

While I was moving toward Torah observance, I was still skeptical about the mystical aspects of Judaism, and I didn't know what good a blessing could do. I said to him, "Listen, it's not my thing... I mean, what does some old guy, 3,500 miles away, know about what's going on in my head?"

I know that sounds pretty disrespectful, but that's where I was coming from at the time.

Rabbi Gordon's comment was, "Why not write the letter? What harm could it do for you to write it? You will be asking for a blessing from a very great man who has given blessings to many, many people who — as a result of his blessings — have had wonderful things happen in their lives."

So I relented. I actually wrote a three-page letter by hand and sent it off.

Four days later, the answer came in the form of a phone call to Rabbi Gordon. Essentially, the Rebbe's message to me was, "There is nothing wrong with you. If you have to take this last test for your own peace of mind, I give you a blessing that it should be successful. But there's nothing wrong with you."

Since I had already decided to do the aortic angiogram I went through with it. When I woke up, I saw, standing over me, the radiologist who specializes in reading neurological films. His faced look very somber, almost miserable.

But I was happy. The very fact that I woke up made me happy. I could think! I could see! I could speak! I didn't care

about anything else.

The radiologist stared at me for a few moments, and then he said, "I've never seen anything like this before — that something so clear on a CAT scan should turn out to be absolutely non-existent in an aortic angiogram. You are fine. You have absolutely nothing wrong with you at all. I have no clue why you had that headache."

The bottom line is — I haven't had that headache since. Not since 1981.

Afterwards, we threw a big party catered by one of the kosher restaurants in Los Angeles, since our house was not kosher enough as yet. My neighbors thought I had died and it was a wake, because they saw all these black-hatted rabbis coming over. But then they saw me dancing in the street, celebrating this miracle.

It didn't take more than that to make me Torah observant and a loyal follower of the Rebbe and of Chabad, which I am to this day. My whole family was profoundly affected as well. All our kids attended *yeshivas* and seminaries, and today, everyone in the family keeps Shabbat, keeps kosher. They all lead religious lives. And we are now expecting our fifteenth grandchild.

This whole level of *nachas* would not have been mine if it wasn't for the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He sent a Jew — whom he had never met and who knew nothing about him — such a saving blessing.

*Dr. Les Rosenthal practices dentistry in Encino, California. He was interviewed in his home in September of 2011 His story was featured on a **Glimpse through the Veil, Volume 1.***

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

This week in....

> **5718 - 1958**, in a letter to a Holocaust survivor who was unsure whether to accept compensation from Germany, the Rebbe advised that she should demand the highest amount possible, and she shouldn't worry that by doing so she absolves the Germans of their guilt. The Rebbe added that a fifth of the amount she received should be given to charity.¹
25 Elul

1. *Igros Kodesh vol. 17, Pg. 349*

לזכות שניאור זלמן בן חיענא ומשפחתו שיחיו

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