

HERE'S *my* STORY

A JEW FROM MARYLAND

RABBI TZVI HERSH WEINREB

I didn't consider myself a Lubavitcher, but I lived in Crown Heights for a short time after I got married. I would attend the Rebbe's *farbrengens* from time to time, but my relationship was always from a distance.

I mention this because of what happened later on.

Three years after we married, my wife and I moved away to Silver Spring, Maryland, where I attended the University of Maryland. I received a PhD in psychology and began working as a psychologist in the local school system. Besides this, I used to give classes in Talmud — one on Shabbos afternoon for the general public, and one on Tuesday night for a smaller group who wanted to learn on a deeper level.

I was in my early thirties, so I suppose I was too young for a midlife crisis — or maybe I arrived at a midlife crisis earlier than most people — but around this time, I was torn with a number of very pressing questions:

Should I stay in Torah learning, or should I continue in psychology? And if so, how should I further my career? Should I move into private psychotherapy work or accept an offer from one of the county social service organizations in the area? Also, I wasn't sure what was best for my children in terms of educational options in Silver Spring.

In addition to all these dilemmas, like everybody else I guess, I had my own questions of faith and trust in God, as well as some philosophical questions. I was in a state of uncertainty.

All these questions had me depressed, and I was unsure what to do or where to go. I spoke to various close friends, and one of them — a Chabad *chosid* — suggested that I visit the Rebbe.

And so it was that in February of 1971 I called the Rebbe.

The Rebbe's secretary answered the phone in English, with a simple, "Hello, who's this?"

Now as I was talking to the secretary, in the background — I recognized his voice from the *farbrengens* I had attended — the Rebbe was asking in Yiddish, "Who's calling?"



I replied, "A *Yid fun Maryland* — A Jew from Maryland."

I told the secretary that I have many questions which I would like to discuss with the Rebbe — questions about what direction my life should take, questions regarding my career, questions of faith... I explained that I was at a very uncertain stage in my life and I didn't know where to turn.

I spoke in English and, as I was talking, the Rebbe's secretary was repeating and paraphrasing my words in Yiddish — I imagine he was doing this so that the Rebbe should hear.

And then I heard the Rebbe say in the background, in Yiddish: "Tell him that there is a Jew who lives in Maryland that he can speak to. *Der yid hayst Veinreb* — his name is Weinreb."

The secretary asked me, "Did you hear what the Rebbe said?"

Now, I couldn't believe my ears. I knew for sure I had not given the secretary my name, but the Rebbe had just said my name! I was taken aback and I wanted to hear it again. So when the secretary asked whether I heard, I said no.

The secretary repeated the Rebbe's words to me: "*S'iz doh a Yid in Maryland mit vemen er zol reddem. Zayn numen iz Veinreb.*"

So I replied, "But my name is Weinreb!"

And then I heard the Rebbe say, "*Oib azoi, zol er visen zayn az amol darf men reden tzu zich* — If that's the case, then he should

continued on next page

know that, sometimes, one needs to speak to himself."

The secretary also seemed stunned by what was taking place. He just stopped, and I could hear his breathing. And then he said to me, "The Rebbe said that sometimes it's best to talk to yourself. Isn't your name Weinreb?"

"Yes, my name is Weinreb, but maybe the Rebbe means a different Weinreb."

"No, the Rebbe's saying 'Talk to Weinreb,' and he explained that you must talk to yourself."

I thanked him very much, and the call ended with that.

I believe I understood what the Rebbe was trying to tell me. If I could put words in his mouth, he was saying, "You're looking for answers outside yourself. You're not a kid anymore, you're a man. You are thirty years old, you are a father, you are a teacher of Torah. You have to have more self-confidence. It's time to grow up and listen to yourself. Don't be so dependent on others. Trust yourself."

And from that point on I became much more decisive. I think up to that time I had a tendency to be very ambivalent, I was not a risk-taker, I was a procrastinator when it came to making decisions. But from that point on, I became decisive.

The Rebbe could have picked up the phone and told me what to do, but I wouldn't necessarily have listened to what he told me, and I wouldn't have accepted it in the same way I accepted this. Like many people, I suppose I had a natural resistance to being told by others what to do, and I think the Rebbe had insight to know that it was better if I heard the answer from myself than if I heard the answer from him.

That the Rebbe understood that, I think, was part of his great wisdom.

A few months after that life-changing phone call, there came an opportunity to express my gratitude to the Rebbe in person. I had come to visit my in-laws in Brooklyn and my father-in-law encouraged me to go to the Rebbe to thank him. The

Rebbe was blessing people in a small public audience, and I went over to him and said, "My name is Weinreb and I'm from Maryland." And he gave me a big smile of recognition.

I saw the Rebbe many times, and I saw many pictures of him, but that particular smile meant a lot for me.

I left Silver Spring, and eventually I made a career change from being a full-time psychologist to becoming a rabbi of a synagogue. For many years I was the rabbi of *Shomrei Emunah*, a wonderful congregation in Baltimore. Later in life, I was offered to take over as the Executive Vice President of the Orthodox Union, a position I accepted, though it was a difficult decision to leave my Baltimore post.

Since 1971, there have been times when I faced difficult questions in life and, before I sought advice from anyone else, I would listen to my inner voice. I would set aside time to first study some of the Rebbe's teachings — like *Likkutei Sichos* — in order to connect again, and then I'd follow the advice he gave me: to talk to myself. And I've encouraged other people to do the same.

Before you go asking this and that of another person, first talk to yourself and listen to what you have to say about it — sometimes your own advice is the best advice.

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb is the Executive Vice President Emeritus of the Orthodox Union, a position he has held since 2002. He was interviewed in the My Encounter studio in New York in May, 2013.

In loving memory of
ר' שמואל נטע הכהן ע"ה
בן יבלח"ט ישראל דוד ש"י
Yahrzeit, 2 Tamuz

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

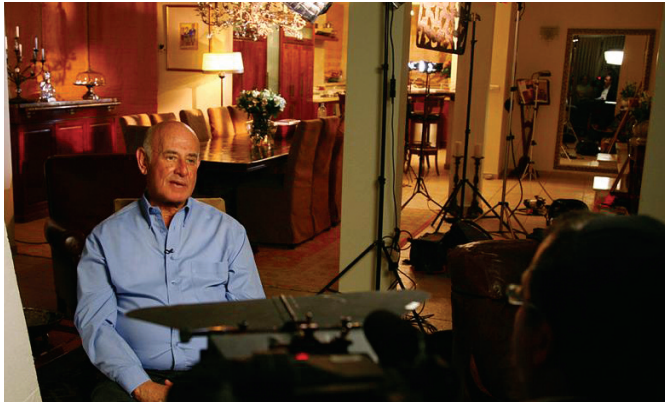
Saving gems, one at a time

"For many years, I didn't share this story; I felt that it was private. Several months ago, I was speaking with Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, and he told me about his encounter with the Rebbe. I said, 'Look, if you're telling me about your personal experience with the Rebbe, I'll tell you about mine.' And I told him my story. After finishing, he then turned to me and said, 'Why are you keeping this story secret?'" —*Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb*



PROJECT OVERVIEW

MY ENCOUNTER WITH THE REBBE



The *My Encounter with the Rebbe* project aims to document the unknown and untold stories of the Rebbe such as this one. Tens of thousands of individuals visited with the Rebbe privately, and many times that number communicated with him in writing.

It is these untold, undocumented firsthand accounts — the story of a generation — that the *My Encounter* project seeks to preserve.

Ranging between one and seven hours in length, these 800+ interviews document the Rebbe's far-reaching influence and impassioned leadership, serving as a tool to teach and inspire.

A Special Thank You

We would like to thank our generous partners:

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTORS

Dear Friend,

As we approach Gimmel Tamuz, we're asking you to please join us in this project.

The Rebbe writes of Yud Shevat, the Yahrzeit of the Rebbe Rayatz:

"...charity should be given to causes associated with our Nosi, my revered father-in-law, of sainted memory. Donations should be made on behalf of oneself and on behalf of each member of one's family..."

During recent years we have been recording precious testimonies about the Rebbe and how he affected Klal Yisroel.

The portions of these interviews that have been published — in *Living Torah*, online, and in our many video series, have inspired impassioned feedback from children and adults across the spectrum.

Here's My Story, a weekly inspiring story for your Shabbos table is read by many thousands across the world every week.

Please take part in this important project by donating today. Visit myencounterblog.com for dedication opportunities.

Thank you for your encouragement and your support.

Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin
Executive Director, JEM

Rabbi Yechiel Cagen
Director, My Encounter project

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- ☐ Join the **Dollar-per-interview** campaign
Amount: \$ _____ per interview*
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- ☐ **\$180**
- ☐ **\$500** — *Here's My Story* dedication
- ☐ **\$750** — Interview in the My Encounter Studio
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Email interviews@jemedia.org for details
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