

HERE'S *my* STORY

FATHERLY LOVE

MR. YAAKOV SCHIFFMAN

Before the war, my father learned in a yeshiva in Hungary. Although he was not from a chasidic background, he made sure that I got some exposure to chasidism.

When I was a kid he took me to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and also to Satmar and Bobov. He wanted me to experience the whole spectrum of Judaism — the modern side, the chasidic side, the non-chasidic side — to see what it's all about. That way, wherever I found myself, I'd be able to fit in.

In 1973, my Bar Mitzvah year, my parents sent me to a summer camp in Israel. When I came back, I learned that my father was about to undergo surgery. It turned out he had colon cancer, and from that point on his health went downhill.

Two years later, just before Purim, my father's condition took a turn for the worse. We went to the hospital, the doctors examined him, then they called me in and said, "You'd better go home; your father is staying here tonight." That night they opened him up, but they saw that there wasn't much they could do — just to try to make the end as painless as possible.

Of course, we didn't want to give up, so we went to several rabbis for blessings. We even tried the alternative medicines of the time. My father was losing a lot of weight — he was five-foot-six, but pretty soon he weighed barely ninety pounds. Nothing was working.

Then one cousin told us, "You should go to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe."

It was winter; the first week of the month of Kislev. Five of us went — my father and mother, my grandmother, my sister and me. My father was so ill... he was haggard; his face had lost its luster.

We entered the Rebbe's office. I stood in the back of the room, and my father spoke quietly with the Rebbe for a few minutes. When the Rebbe finished speaking with my father we began to leave, but suddenly the Rebbe said to me, "You stay."

I was already anxious with everything that was going on; I was only sixteen years old at the time, and I got very, very nervous.



The Rebbe said to me, "Kum ... Come over," gesturing that I should approach. He went over to his shelf and pulled out two Talmuds Tractate Brochos, and he said to me in Yiddish:

"By the laws of medicine, your father is extremely sick now, he's near the end. G-d will help, but your father will be depressed, and you're going to be depressed. You'll need something to give you strength. I want to teach you something which will help keep you going."

He opened up to page 10a and began to teach me the story from Kings II [20:1-6] which the Talmud is discussing. King Hizkiyahu is ill, and the Prophet Isaiah visits him. The prophet tells the king that his days are numbered and he should prepare to die, but Hizkiyahu refuses to accept this, and he says, "No, I have faith in G-d." Although the prophet says it is too late, Hizkiyahu begins to pray because, "even if the tip of the sword is pointed at your throat, you should never give up hope."

I was standing across the desk from the Rebbe, and he was sitting. But in middle of the story, the Rebbe motioned for me to come around the desk, and I looked into the volume together with him. He translated the dialog slowly into Yiddish, word by word, pointing to the place, like a father teaches his son.

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 the 800 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. mystory@jemedi.org

The point the Talmud is making through this story is that we should not mix into G-d's business. We have to do what we have to do, and G-d does what He does, and that's it.

I remember him pointing to the words with his finger, then looking at me, and pointing again. He had me repeat it until it was clear that I understood. Though my father was quite knowledgeable in Talmud, the Rebbe wanted to make sure that I understood the Talmud's idea well, and that I could explain it to my father, as well — that even at death's door you should never give up hope, you should never become depressed, and you should accept G-d's will. It took quite some time — about twenty-five minutes.

What stands out in my mind more than anything else is the earnest, loving way the Rebbe looked at me. I never saw that type of love. Here I was, a stranger to him, a young boy coming with his father who needed a blessing. He gave his blessing, but then he gave much more. He saw that this boy needed fatherly love, and he gave it.

When I came out of the Rebbe's office, I was sweating. As we drove home, I told my father what had happened, and he broke down and cried. As soon as we got home, we learned the piece at least three or four times.

I remember my father asked me a few times, "Do you understand why the Rebbe told you to learn this with me? Do you understand?"

Two and a half months after our visit with the Rebbe, my father passed away. It was Monday night, the 18th of Shevat, and the last thing he said to me was that I had given him tremendous *nachas*.

After he passed away, I was on the verge of becoming despondent. I didn't have relatives to look after me — my mother was an only child, and my father's whole family had been wiped out in the war — and I was only sixteen years old.

I don't know how to thank the Rebbe for this fact, but he sat me down and told me the facts of life. Everyone else had been telling me, "No, it'll be good; it'll be good." The Rebbe looked at me and told me how to be prepared for it.



I had times when things got tough. I left yeshiva for a while and wandered away. But then I remembered what the Rebbe taught me. Through those years, I probably learned that piece of Talmud thirty times, and it got me back on track.

The fact that I am a religious Jew and that I raised a beautiful family is because of that day when the Rebbe spent so much time with me and explained to me: When you have a problem and are feeling that you've hit rock bottom, remember never to give up, because G-d is there. Open your heart to Him, and He will help you.

Mr. Yaakov Schiffman lives with his family in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, New York. He was interviewed in the My Encounter studio in March, 2013.

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

This week in...

- > **5683—1923**, in a letter to his daughter, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, the Rebbe Rayatz described how he had spent time the past few days with her future husband in Rostov and become fluent in "Hilchos Mendel - the laws of Mendel".¹ 22 Tammuz
- > **5734—1974**, after spending 5 hours and 45 minutes at the Ohel of the Rebbe Rayatz, the Rebbe returned to 770 and announced that he would hold a surprise *farbrengen*. Since the morale of the Jewish people was low after the Yom Kippur War, the Rebbe explained that the purpose of the gathering was to strengthen the Mitzvah campaigns. The Rebbe ended the memorable *farbrengen* with the request to sing a *Simchas Torah nigun*.² 28 Tammuz
- > **5740—1980**, on his way to *Mincha*, the Rebbe was stopped by an Arab man who asked for a blessing for the health of his son. The Rebbe asked for his name and the boys name, and promised to pray for them at the Ohel of the Rebbe Rayatz.³ 25 Tammuz

1. *Igros Rebbe Rayatz Vol. 15, p. 31* 2. *Diary of Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Sosover*
3. *Diary of Rabbi Michael Seligson*

In honor of my parents 40th wedding anniversary
Rabbi Yitzchak and Henia Wineberg,
the Rebbe's shluchim to B.C., Canada
Rabbi Dovid and Sara Bayla Wineberg

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