

HERE'S my STORY

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NEVER ON FRIDAY!

MR. DUDU FISHER



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I am descended from a *Misnagdic* family — that is, from those who opposed Chassidism — and yet I am walking this earth because of a blessing from a Chasidic Rebbe, the Rebbe Rayatz, who was the Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch from 1920 to 1950.

This is what happened:

During the time that the Rebbe Rayatz was staying in Riga, Latvia, my grandparents were living on the outskirts of the city. In January of 1932, in the freeze of the winter, my grandmother went into labor with my mother, and things started to go wrong. She was rushed to the hospital where the doctors decided that it was necessary to abort the baby in order to save her life.

My grandmother, Frieda Gisha, was unwilling to accept the doctors' verdict but, fearing for her life, she asked her sister Leah to run to the nearest synagogue and pray for her. She said she would not make any decision until Leah returned.

So, in the middle of the night, Leah, my great-aunt, did just that — like her sister asked, she ran to the nearest synagogue and started praying. She went up to the holy

ark, where the Torah scrolls are kept, grabbed onto the curtain and pleaded with G-d for the life of her sister and her unborn baby.

As she was praying and crying, a woman tapped her on the shoulder. Leah did not know who this woman was — perhaps the cleaning lady — but when this woman said, "Come with me," she followed her.

Together they went to where the Rebbe Rayatz was staying at the time and asked for his blessing. They received it in writing, and I still have it — it is a treasured possession in my family. It says: "With the help of G-d, everything will go well. You will give birth to a healthy and living child."

continued on reverse



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@jemedia.org

continued from reverse

Leah took this blessing and rushed to the hospital, where she was informed that her sister had just been taken into the delivery room. A short while later Frieda Gissa gave birth in a totally normal way to my mother, Miriam, whom the doctors had recommended aborting.

Our family has kept the Rebbe's note for these many years. It is preserved in a safe, and we take it out only when a relative is giving birth so she can take it to the hospital with her. I myself have a copy, and I carry it with me wherever I go.

Two years after my grandmother gave birth to my mother, my grandparents left Latvia and went to live in Israel. It was just in time. The members of my family who stayed behind — fourteen in total — were murdered by the Latvians in the streets. We have witness testimony from those who saw it happen.

Meanwhile, my mother grew up in Israel with an unusual attachment to Chabad, despite her father's anti-Chassidic attitudes. Later on, it was in her house, and with her help, that Rabbi Menashe Althaus started the Chabad Center in Tivon.

Myself, I enlisted in the IDF, and after I completed my army service, I started singing professionally. I was a cantor for many years. Then, while I was in London for a cantorial concert, a cousin invited me to see the musical, *Les Miserables*, and when I went back to Israel, I told my manager that I wanted to take part in the Hebrew production.

He had no idea what I was talking about, but he quickly found out that the show — called in Hebrew, *Aluvay HaChaim* — was coming to a theater in Tel Aviv. I got the part and became famous for it. While I was performing in Tel Aviv, Sir Cameron Mackintosh, the world producer of *Les Miserables*, saw my performance and asked me to come to Broadway.

I was stunned. Of course, every singer wants to appear on Broadway, but I turned him down. I said, "I don't think this will be possible for me, because I am an observant Jew — I don't work on Shabbat or on Jewish holidays."

He said, "Let us meet again to see how we can solve this problem."

Meanwhile, the story leaked out to the media and the Israeli newspapers blared, "Dudu Fisher goes to Broadway," which was by no means a done-deal.

My mother saw that this whole thing was making me depressed, and she suggested, "Why don't you go see the Rebbe?" I said, "What am I going to talk to him about — Broadway? So many people are coming to him with real troubles like poverty and illness. How can I bother him with

this?" She insisted, "The Rebbe's blessing helped us once before; it will help us again."

This was 1992. It was no longer possible to see him in a private audience, but it was possible to receive a dollar for charity and a blessing every Sunday.

When my turn came the Rebbe gave me a blessing and told me not to worry; everything would turn out well. His exact words were, "G-d willing, you will hear good news soon. You will go from strength to strength."

And that is exactly what happened. In fact, the outcome was nothing short of a miracle, which never happened before or after — it was a one-time only occurrence.

I got the part. And not only that, the *Playbill* featured the announcement that, for religious reasons, Dudu Fisher would not be playing the part of Jean Valjean on Friday nights and during Saturday matinees.

They called me "the Sandy Koufax of the theater" — referring to the great Jewish baseball player who refused to participate in the 1965 World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur.

Personally, I consider it one of the biggest achievement of my life. When I leave this earth, I hope that people will remember me for this — that I would not violate Shabbat and that I showed it was possible to make it in the world without compromising one's beliefs.

But, most of all, I am ever so grateful to the Rebbe for helping me to get this message across to the Jewish world at large.

A famed Israeli cantor, Dudu Fisher played the role of Jean Valjean in the musical Les Miserables in Tel Aviv, in New York and in London, where he performed for Queen Elizabeth. He was interviewed in July of 2015.

לע"נ ר' ישראל יעקב זוגתו מרת קריינא ע"ה לאקשין
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This week in....

> **5730 - 1970**, in a letter to Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, the Rebbe advised not to engage in polemical debates because no one has been found to have moved closer to Judaism as result. Alternatively, the Rebbe wrote, speaking publicly about the foundations and beauty of our faith is a much safer and productive method to strengthen Judaism.¹ 24 Adar

1. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 26, pg. 338

לעילוי נשמת
פנחס בן זאב ונעכע בת אליעזר
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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