

HERE'S my STORY

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FINDING MY MISSION

RABBI SHRAGA FAIVEL RIMLER

The Rebbe shaped my life in many ways. He guided me regarding my marriage prospects, advised me on how to earn a livelihood, and set my rabbinical career on the right course. My gratitude to him is without measure, and I would like to take this opportunity to relate just a few personal examples that demonstrate his love and care for his *chasidim*.

Back in the early 1950s, while I was still a student at the Chabad yeshiva in Brooklyn, I was in a quandary. People were constantly pestering me with dating suggestions, while my parents were reminding me every chance they got that I was now the right age for marriage. But I was not sure what to do. So, on my 23rd birthday, which that year fell on January 8th, I went to see the Rebbe for a blessing and asked him whether I should pursue any of the proposed matches. His answer to me was, "Why in the middle of the winter?"

He didn't say "go forward," nor did he tell me "it's not for you," he just hinted that I could wait until spring if I wanted to. When spring arrived I was selected, along with nine others, to go to Israel on a special mission. Shortly after Passover that year, terrorists had attacked the village of Kfar Chabad, killing five yeshiva students and one teacher, and the Rebbe sent us to help bolster the residents' morale.

The Rebbe didn't order me to go on this mission. He asked me, "Do you want to travel to Israel?" Truth be told, I didn't want to go, because the journey was hazardous and I knew it would upset my parents, so I answered evasively, "If the Rebbe wants me to go, then I want to go."

But that was not what the Rebbe wanted to hear,



as he immediately made plain: "I am asking *you*." So I said that I would go. This pleased him and he promised me, "If you go to Israel, you will find a marriage match."

We were scheduled to be in Israel for four weeks, and in the last week, I visited the family of my brother-in-law and did not join the rest of the group on their tour of holy sites. During this time, a match was proposed for me. Her name was Tziporah Schneerson and she was a direct descendant of Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the founder of the Chabad Movement. We met a few times and, feeling we were right for each other, decided to send a telegram to ask the Rebbe's opinion if the match was good. The Rebbe's answer came back immediately: "*Shidduch Schneerson nachon* — the Schneerson match is proper," along with this postscript, "*Bikkur b'mekomos hakedoshim* — Be sure to visit the holy sites."

We were married on the 7th day of the month of

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 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@jemedial.org

continued from reverse

Adar, 1957, with the Rebbe officiating at our wedding. He recited all the seven blessings under the *chuppah* and wished us a *Mazal Tov*. It was a wonderful way to start a marriage.

After I got married, I worked for a while as an administrative assistant for the National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education, but there came a time when I was just not making enough money to support my family, so I started looking around for a more suitable position. Someone suggested that I become a congregational rabbi because I spoke well in public. I asked the Rebbe's opinion and he encouraged me in this direction. So then I asked him how I should go about finding a vacant pulpit. He said, "There are many synagogues where the rabbis are immigrating to Israel. Look for a place like that."

It just so happened that I had friend who was a cantor, and through a contact in the cantor's union, he heard about a congregation in Brighton Beach whose rabbi was planning to move to Israel. As if on cue — just like the Rebbe said.

I applied for the job and was invited in for a trial. They must have liked the way I spoke because, shortly after the interview, I got the job.

Although I had no experience as a congregational rabbi, I succeeded at it largely because the Rebbe guided me every step of the way — not telling me what to do, just making sure I fulfilled my mission and didn't lose focus of what was important. For example, he told me, "If you will teach Torah to other Jews, then G-d will make sure you have a good livelihood."

Teaching Torah had to be my priority, the Rebbe said, and he urged me to increase the number of classes offered in the synagogue. In the beginning there were only classes in Talmud and Jewish law, but at the Rebbe's prompting, I started teaching the classic text *Ein Yaakov*, which explains the stories of the Talmud. I also added a Torah class with the commentary by Rashi. Not just a weekly class, but

each day the Torah was read — Mondays, Thursdays and Shabbat — as per the Rebbe's suggestion. Then the Rebbe suggested a daily mitzvah class based on the works of Maimonides. These classes were quite popular, and I did well as a rabbi.

Whenever controversial issues came up, the Rebbe always advised me to face them head on. For example, there was no eruv in my area — that is, a community fence which would permit people to carry objects on Shabbat outside their homes. Yet, people were lax about it, often carrying objects they should not have been. I was reluctant to speak out against this practice, because I knew my stance would make some folks angry, so I asked the Rebbe how to handle it. He said, "You have to speak out. If you don't, down the road people will complain, 'We were violating Shabbat, and you didn't warn us.' They will hold it against you. Do it gently, but do it. It's your obligation."

That was his way — he was always so keenly focused on what mattered most: G-d and his Torah and the spiritual welfare of every Jew. And this is what he taught, by his example, to all of his *chasidim*.

For more than 40 years, Rabbi Shraga Faivel Rimler has served as the spiritual leader of the New Brighton Jewish Center in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. He was interviewed in the My Encounter Studio in Brooklyn, in April of 2013.

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

This week in....

> **5722 - 1962**, in a letter to President Zalman Shazar, the Rebbe advised that an additional task be given to all Jewish Agency emissaries, that beside their cultural mission to strengthen Jews in the Diaspora about their connection to Israel, they should also reinforce their Jewish identity as well.¹ 8 Adar II

1. Igros Kodesh Vol. 24, Pg. 184

לעילוי נשמת
יחיאל בן יעקב קאפעל ומירל
בת נתן וואגעל

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