

HERE'S my STORY

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YEARNING FOR ISRAEL

MR. MICHAEL ALLOUCHE



I was born in La Flèche, a little town in France, to a family of Jewish immigrants from North Africa. We were the only Jewish family in town, but — even though I was educated as a proud Jew among non-Jews — we were not fully Torah observant. Over the years, I progressively became more religious, especially after I joined a Zionist religious youth movement called Tikvateinu and visited Israel for the first time. As a result, I developed a strong aspiration to live there.

At the age of 20, I went to Toulouse where I was accepted to study in the famous University of Aerospace Engineering. And it was there that I met the local Chabad emissaries — Rabbi Yosef Matusof and his wife Esther.

After I graduated and got married in 1978, I travelled with my wife and baby daughter to New York, where we had our first private audience with the Rebbe. It was a very emotional and awe-inspiring moment for me, and it initiated a connection which increasingly

deepened over the years.

When I started to work as an engineer for Airbus Industries in Toulouse, my work brought me frequently to the United States, and during each visit, I always spent Shabbat with the Rebbe.

In 1982, I wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking if the time was right for my family and me to make *aliyah* — to immigrate to Israel. The Rebbe's answer came: "If your job today allows you to be Torah observant, then it is preferable that you stay where you are for the time being." I must confess that I was a bit disappointed, but I followed the Rebbe's advice and stayed in Toulouse. My family certainly played a role in the Jewish community in the city, since very few Torah-observant families lived there, and we served as an example to others.

Then, in 1985, I was offered a job in Israel. At this time, the State of Israel decided to become more technologically independent and it launched its own fighter aircraft project, called the Lavi. I was invited to work on this project. Excited at the prospect of moving to Israel, I asked the Rebbe's advice again. Surprisingly, the Rebbe replied: "How can you make this decision when the situation is so volatile in *Eretz Israel*? You should decide about half a year before your *Aliyah*."

I didn't really understand what the Rebbe meant by "volatile." The prototype of the Lavi was already flying and the project was moving forward successfully; indeed the Lavi was so successful that it was said to be better than the American F-16 fighter jet. But I decided to "wait and see."

One year later, my family and I visited the Rebbe on the 12th of Tammuz, for the Chabad holiday commemorating the release of the previous Rebbe from Soviet prison. During the audience the Rebbe held with guests who were visiting for the occasion, the Rebbe said: "Every Jew has a mission in this world."

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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@jemedia.org

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He is meant to bear witness to the oneness of G-d by keeping Torah wherever he finds himself... And this is why G-d finds reasons to send Jews to distant places so that they can best fulfill their mission." Till this day, each time I travel for my business, I remember these words, looking for the inner dimension to my professional mission.

A few months later, in 1987, I suddenly got an attractive proposal to work as an aerospace engineering consultant in a "distant place": South Africa. Again, I went to the Rebbe. His reply was almost immediate: "Accept the proposal."

It was only then — two years later — that I understood the Rebbe's reference to the situation in Israel as "volatile." Exactly at the time when we moved to South Africa, the Lavi project was cancelled due to US government pressure. Almost all the engineers working on the project lost their jobs!

The move to South Africa was the best preparation for my family's *aliyah*, both spiritually and materially. Thanks to the wonderful Chabad community there, we strengthened our knowledge of *chasidic* teachings. Since that time, I began translating the works of Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz into French. Rabbi Steinsaltz once summarized the Rebbe's advice and recommendations to me as follows: "The Rebbe has chosen for you the 'long shorter way' to the Holy Land."

We lived in South Africa for five years. In 1991, when my employment there ended, I had to decide my next move. My preference was moving to Israel, and making my life-long dream of living there come true!

I send a letter to the Rebbe, through the late Rabbi Yosef Wineberg. The Rebbe answered that I should ask advice from friends and that I should check my *mezuzos* and *tefillin*.

Before I had a chance to respond, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Wineberg: "When will you let me know what happened when he checked his *mezuzos* and *tefillin*?"

I was astonished! The Rebbe received thousands of letters, yet he cared so much about every Jew that he remembered the smallest details. But his concern was as deep as that of a father who cares about every detail in his child's life. I was very moved by this.

I immediately reported back to the Rebbe and also relayed the encouragement of my friends to make *aliyah*. The Rebbe's reply was unambiguous: "Blessing and success!" And, indeed, I subsequently accepted a job in the field of Aerospace Engineering.

Before making *aliyah*, I decided to visit the Rebbe once more. I wanted simply to thank him. This was my thirteenth trip the Rebbe in fourteen years. I arrived in February 1992 just one week before the Rebbe suffered a stroke. I told the Rebbe, "Thank you for all you brought to us during the past fourteen years," and the Rebbe responded beautifully: "You should have immense success in all your enterprises!"

Amazingly, we arrived in Israel "about half a year" (the exact words of the Rebbe) after we initiated the decision process about our *aliyah*.

And to this day, thank G-d, the Rebbe's words and blessings accompany me in all my enterprises.

Mr. Michael (Michel) Allouche lives with his wife and family in Israel, where for the past 24 years he has worked as an internationally recognized expert in the field of Unmanned Aircraft Systems. He was interviewed in the My Encounter Studios in January of 2016.

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

This week in...

> **5748- 1988**, on his way to the Ohel, the Rebbe passed by the groundbreaking ceremony of Beis Rivkah's Campus Chaya Mushka in Crown Heights, giving the school's director, Rabbi Avraham Shemtov, 470 dollars, the numerical value of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka's name, as his participation in the project. The Rebbe also mentioned that he was on the way to visit the Rebbetzin's resting place. ¹ 24 Adar

1. Yoman Shnas Hakhel, p. 194

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear father

Yahrzeit, 22 Adar

Reb **Chaim Kaneti**

By **Michael** and **Ricki Verbitsky** and family

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interviews@jemedia.org | myencounterblog.com | 718-774-6000
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