

# HERE'S my STORY

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## THE ETERNAL SOUL

**MRS. CHANA SHARFSTEIN**



**Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Zuber**

**O**n December 31, 1953, my father, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Zuber, was strolling through a park near his home in Boston, Massachusetts, when he was accosted by a drunk who beat him viciously. The next day, at the young age of 56, he succumbed to his wounds. Five years later, on April 1, 1958, my mother, Mrs. Zlata Esther Zuber also passed away.

Thus, at age 25 years old, I was left an orphan, and I was totally devastated. So I wrote a long and tearful letter to the Rebbe pouring out my sorrow at the loss of my parents.

Every day I anxiously awaited his reply, but no reply came. Whenever my husband came home from 770, the Chabad Headquarters, I would ask him if there was a message for me. But there was nothing. So, feeling that I could wait no longer, I arranged an appointment to see the Rebbe myself.

I walked into the Rebbe's office and just stood there and cried. Through my tears, I looked up at the Rebbe and saw him looking back at me with such sadness, kindness and compassion. He said, "I don't know what else I can

tell you, I wrote everything in my letter."

I was thunderstruck. "I never received a letter!"

The Rebbe's whole demeanor changed, and he looked agitated. He said that he clearly remembered answering the letter and was sure it was mailed out. But since it never arrived, he began to tell me what he had written. And it was much better hearing it in person.

Two weeks later, the letter did finally arrive, and I realized what had caused the delay. Not long before, we had switched apartments and the letter had been mailed to our old address. When I received it, I read it carefully and what was written there served to comfort me then and has done so throughout many other situations in my life.

First, the Rebbe explained that it is obviously impossible for a finite human being to understand the ways of G-d, for the Creator of the World is infinite and incomprehensible.

Then he wrote about the passing of my parents, explaining that the soul lives on forever:

*This principle has even been discovered in the physical world, where science now holds as an absolute truth that nothing in the physical world can be absolutely destroyed.*

*It would be silly and illogical to assume that just because a certain organ of the body ceases to function, affecting other physical organs of the body, the spiritual soul would also be affected thereby. The truth is that, when the physical body ceases to function, the soul continues its existence, not only as before but even on a higher level, inasmuch as it is no longer handicapped by the constraints of the physical form.*

During my audience the Rebbe had explained this idea through the following example: "If you set a paper on fire, it ceases to be paper, but it is not completely obliterated. Although it is now reduced to ashes, it still exists having only changed form and shape. This is how we can understand what happens to a human being. Anything that has ever been created or has ever existed will always remain, though in a different shape or form."

As well, the Rebbe explained at great length that the

*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@jemedi.org](mailto:mystory@jemedi.org)

continued from reverse

attachment we have to our loved ones is not a physical relationship but rather a spiritual one. Long after their bodies have disintegrated, we can continue to bring pleasure to their souls, which continue to exist in a better world. And for this reason, we should not grieve too much. In the letter, he cited this parable:

*When a person is called away from the provincial town to the capital to serve in a higher capacity, to occupy a position of honor in the royal palace or royal academy, those dear ones left behind in the province would not regard the departure of their beloved as a tragedy. On the contrary.*

His words spoke to my heart. They caused me to realize that, though it is hard for us — the ones who are left behind — the deceased are in a much better place; they are safe, secure and serene.

Three years later I gave birth to a baby girl whom I named after my mother. She was my third child, and unlike my older children, who were very energetic and at times wild, she was calm and undemanding. The only problem was — she was too calm. I would walk past her crib and her eyes would follow me, but she would never reach out her arms to me. I was starting to get a bit concerned.

Finally, when she was eighteen months old, I took her for a neurological test and I was informed that she was autistic.

Now, I had a Master's Degree in Education, but I had never heard of autism (which was a poorly-understood disorder at the time) and neither had my daughter's pediatrician. Bewildered, I immediately turned to the Rebbe.

I arrived at the Rebbe's office with my little Zlatie in tow. As soon as we walked in, the Rebbe motioned that we should sit down. So I sat her on one chair and then occupied the chair next to her. I began voicing all of my concerns while the Rebbe listened attentively. Then he took out a pencil and a sheet of paper which he pushed across the desk towards Zlatie. Without giving a second thought, she picked up the pencil and began scribbling on the paper. And I saw the Rebbe's delight in the big, broad smile beaming from his face.

"I don't know why they are making such a big deal about her," he said. "The way she is reacting is perfectly normal."

Those words just lifted my spirits enormously and gave me tremendous hope. They cut through all of the confusion that I felt inside.

Then the Rebbe took out a silver dollar and held it in front of my daughter. She immediately reached over and

took it from him, which I saw pleased the Rebbe also.

Before sending me on my way, the Rebbe gave me several suggestions. One of them was that I should enroll her in a nursery school which would advance her development, as she would be learning from the children around her.

When I returned home I realized that the Rebbe had given me courage and hope. He had implied that there was a lot that I could do with my child. In retrospect, had he not conveyed that message, I would not have bothered to do as much as I did with Zlatie. But because he validated her potential, pointing out that she was reacting normally, he gave me tremendous hope. I needed that hope, and I needed that courage to keep going.

When she refused to speak, I worked with her until she did. I taught her blessings, which she pronounced before eating, and I made sure that every opportunity available to her was maximized, even though there was not much in terms of therapy in those days. I was able to do all that because of the Rebbe's encouragement. He saw a striving soul in my daughter and, because he did, so did I.

*Mrs. Chana Sharfstein is a noted author, educator and tour guide. During March of 2014 her daughter, Zlata Ester, passed away at the age of 53. Mrs. Sharfstein published Zlata's Story, a book describing the experiences of a mother raising an autistic daughter. She was interviewed in the My Encounter Studio in April of 2014.*

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

## This week in....

> **5735- 1975**, upon returning from the Ohel, the Rebbe announced that he would be leading a farbrengen that evening. At exactly 9:00 p.m., the Rebbe began to deliver a chasidic discourse. Chasidim later took note that at that very moment, President Ford addressed Congress, speaking of the relations between the US and Israel. 29 Nissan<sup>1</sup>

1. Diary of SB Shur

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