

HERE'S my STORY

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THE WORLD IS MY TEACHER

RABBI LEIBEL POSNER

I come from a Lubavitch family. In fact, my father was educated at the Lubavitch *yeshivah* in Russia. He subsequently immigrated to Israel, where he married my mother, and then they moved on to the United States. That is where I was raised and where I also attended a Lubavitch *yeshivah*.

Together with my brother Zalman, I enrolled in the Lubavitch *yeshivah* when it first opened in New York in 1941. This was right after the Previous Rebbe, the sixth Rebbe of Lubavitch, was rescued from Nazi Europe and established his headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

During those early years, it was my privilege to get to know the Previous Rebbe's son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who later became the seventh Rebbe, although during the years I am talking about — 1941 to 1951 — he was known as Ramash.

While I was studying in the Chabad *yeshivah*, on Shabbat *mevarchim*, the last Shabbat before a new month, there was a *kiddush*. Typically, the *kiddush* blessing was made on wine, and there was also vodka and other drinks, as well as some cake. Ramash would sit at the head of the table, as the group would sing some songs and then he would speak for about forty minutes or so. Often, he would choose a subject that was relevant to the guests who were there, relating the lesson to our service of G-d.

One time, when a pants manufacturer named Mr. Denberg was visiting from Montreal, the Rebbe described the whole dry-cleaning process and how it served as a metaphor for our service of G-d. Unfortunately, I do not remember the details of that lesson.

Another time, he used an example from geometry. There is a theorem in geometry that a radius can be inscribed in a circle to form an equilateral hexagon — this means that if you inscribe the radius (which is half the width of a circle) on the inside, from point to point to point, you will have exactly six equilateral sides. And he said this really is an amazing thing because a radius is half a diameter, but a diameter can be fit into a circle only once. Yet, if you cut it in half you can fit it in six times, and this is something remarkable.



"What can this teach us about the service of G-d?" he asked, and explained that we have six days of the week and then the seventh, Shabbat. If we have six perfect days of service of G-d, then we have a complete Shabbat. And if we have a complete Shabbat, we can have a complete six days of the next week in the service of G-d.

Then there was the time when the guest was Samuel ("Sammy") Reshevsky, the Polish chess prodigy who became a leading American chess grandmaster; he was a Torah-observant Jew who lived in Crown Heights at the time. Seeing him at the *kiddush*, Ramash said, "From everything we can learn how we can serve G-d, even from chess."

He began by telling a story about the famed *chasid* Monya Monyasohn who played chess with the future sixth Rebbe of Chabad in his youth. The two were playing when the Rebbe Rashab — the fifth Rebbe — walked by. The Rebbe Rashab stopped to watch but didn't say anything because he didn't want to interrupt the game. But when they were finished he explained how a particular move that had been made during the game was a lesson in how to serve G-d.

Ramash then went on to explain what could be learned from chess. In a chess game, we have two kinds of pieces

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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 1400 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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— the officers and the foot soldiers. The basic difference between a foot soldier and the officer is that the officer can move in different directions, jumping squares and so on, but the plain soldier can only move forward from one square to the next, one step at a time. But that foot soldier has one characteristic which makes him superior to an officer — while the officer will always remain as he is, the foot soldier can advance. When he reaches the other side, he is elevated; once there, he can become a queen!

“What can we learn from this about the service of G-d?” Ramash asked. And then he answered as follows: “In the spiritual realm, we have angels and we have Jewish souls. Like the officers, the angels can jump from one world to another, up and down, here and there, but they can never change. Jewish souls, on the other hand, can only go forward one step after another. But when they fulfill their mission, they become elevated — they can even become the queen.” (Of course, they cannot become the king since G-d is the only true King.)

At another time — this happened in 1950 after the passing of the Previous Rebbe, but before Ramash formally accepted the leadership role of the Rebbe — I came to see him for advice.

I had come into contact with a certain person who was very well educated — in fact, I'd say he was a genius — whom I wanted to bring closer to *Yiddishkeit*. But after a certain point, I was not succeeding.

So, I went to ask the future Rebbe what to do. I explained who this person was, and he asked me how I had approached the subject of Judaism with him. He heard me out, and then said, “That is not the correct approach,” and he explained why:

“You have to understand that, in times past, one of the difficulties for a person to become religious and to believe in G-d was that such belief seemed to go against reason. Something which the mind cannot understand is difficult to accept. But science has changed that.”

Yes, this is what he said — science has made it easier to believe in G-d.

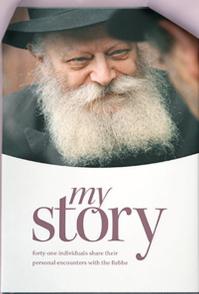
He went on to explain: “Since the advent of the atomic era, we have learned that an atom is not one solid piece. On the contrary, it is mostly empty space with just a few solid particles.”

“Take this piece of wood, for example,” he said, pointing at his desk. “It looks like one solid piece, but it's not.” And then he used the English word “continuity” though he was speaking Yiddish. He said, “*Dos iz nisht continuity* — it's not continuity.” Although the eye sees one solid piece of wood, it is just a bunch of atoms next to one another.

“We accept this as true, because science has demonstrated that it's true,” he concluded. “While, normally, the mind cannot conceive of something which is not apparent to the eye, atomic theory has taught us that there is no continuity — that solids are not really solid but, rather, are energy. So, we see one thing and our mind tells us there is something else there. Previously, we would not accept that, but now we can. And this is how science has made it easier to believe in G-d.”

These are just a few small examples of the Rebbe's teachings — even before he became the Rebbe — which exemplify his amazing wisdom and insight into human nature and into the ways of the world.

Rabbi Leibel Posner was one of the first students of the yeshiva in 770 and was involved in Jewish education for many decades. He currently lives in Brooklyn, New York where he was interviewed in November of 2006.



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This week in...

> **5719-1958**, the Rebbe spoke at length about the concept of “Ufaratzta - you shall spread forth,” later naming it the year's slogan. This became the rallying call of the Rebbe's global mission to bring Torah and *mitzvot* to every Jew across the globe.¹ 27 Tishrei

1. Likutei Sichos vol. 1 page 169

In loving memory of
Moshe Mordechai Leuchter
29 Tishrei

By his children **Menachem Leuchter**, Sydney and
Bluma Shoshana Loebenstein,
Melbourne Australia

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