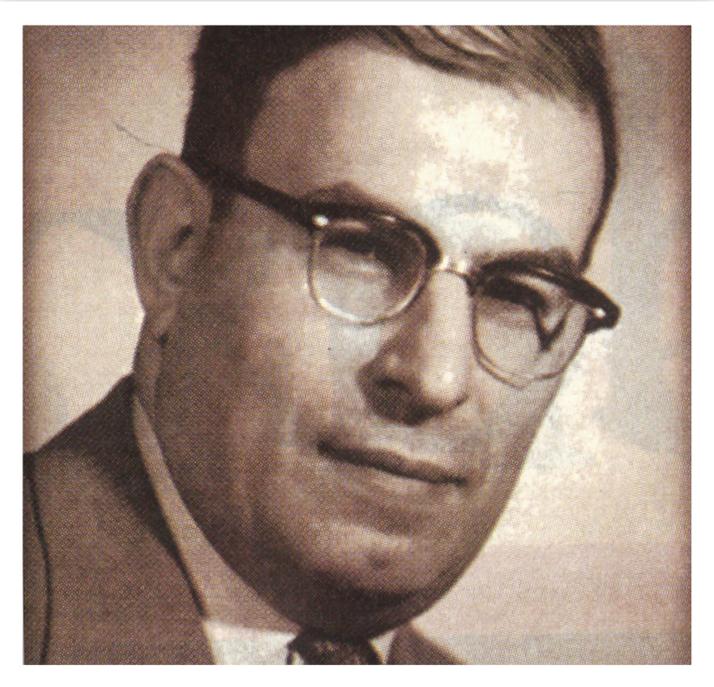


HERE'S my STORY

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THE RABBI AND HIS GUIDE

MRS. MIRIAM HALPERN



Rabbi Yehoshua Mordechai (Charles) Batt

I've heard that the Rebbe had many operatives outside of card-carrying Lubavitchers and his official emissaries. In fact, I now know that my father was one of them.

My father, Rabbi Charles Batt, grew up in the early 1900s in Connecticut, where he was educated at the New Haven Yeshivah. Subsequently, he received rabbinic ordination in Cleveland from Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, who later became the *rosh yeshivah* of the Ner Yisrael Yeshivah in Baltimore.

In 1933, my father married my mother and they settled in Hartford, CT where he opened a paper and printing equipment business and where he also began to spread Judaism as a volunteer.

My father's dedication led to the beginnings of a Jewish day school, called the Yeshiva of Hartford, of which he became president, and which I attended as a child. He

also became the unofficial rabbi of the local synagogue — Young Israel of Hartford — and he learned one-on-one with people on Shabbat mornings or free weekday evenings. He also learned with groups of local teenagers on Shabbat afternoons. As a result, he had a tremendous influence on hundreds of young people who are Torah-observant today and whose children and grandchildren now lead Torah lifestyles.

Starting in the 1950s, when I was a teenager, he used to occasionally go to New York to meet with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He needed advice with what he was trying to accomplish in Hartford and, although I don't think that my father became a *chasid* of the Rebbe in the strict sense, the Rebbe was the person that he'd turn to for guidance. I thought that was the extent of the relationship.

However, after his passing in 1978, I found out that they corresponded very often and that the Rebbe would constantly urge my father to increase his efforts. From the many letters that he left behind — from him to the Rebbe, and from the Rebbe to him — I now have some understanding of what had been going on between them. In fact, he enjoyed a very close relationship with the Rebbe for many years, and much of what my father did to spread Torah was inspired by the Rebbe.

In one letter that I found, my father asked the Rebbe about the *Mishnah Yomis* project. This project involved individuals following a daily schedule of completing two units of *Mishnah* every day. By keeping up this schedule, they would finish the entire six orders of the *Mishnah* in six years. The Rebbe wholeheartedly supported this.

At the time, he was involved with Torah U'Mesorah, the National Council of Hebrew Day Schools, as well as with the National Council of Young Israel. He wanted to use his influence with these organizations to launch another, even more ambitious project to divide the Talmud, called *Chalukat HaShas*. And he wrote to the Rebbe asking him whether he was worthy to do so. The Rebbe answered him, "Of course, you are. What kind of a question is that?" So, relying on the Rebbe's encouragement, my

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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 1,400 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

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father went forward.

I found it interesting that, in his letters, the Rebbe always addressed my father by his Hebrew name, Yehoshua Mordechai, rather than by Charles, the name he used. And in one letter, the Rebbe had written the verse from Proverbs, "B'chol drachecha da'ehu — In all your ways know Him [G-d]," a phrase which, as my father figured out, has the same numerical value as Yehoshua. "B'chol drachecha da'ehu," was my father's life motto, and he was so impressed that the Rebbe connected his Hebrew name with his life's mission.

From the Rebbe's letters, I can see a closeness — the Rebbe constantly encouraging my father. "You know," the Rebbe would write, "if you accomplished this much, you can do even more." And I think that drove my father onwards.

My father had a relationship with many of the Torah greats of his time — Rav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik, Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Gifter, and Rav Kotler. With them, he corresponded about Torah matters. With the Rebbe, he poured out his heart.

Indeed, he shared everything — informing the Rebbe of family events, such as when I got married and when I moved to Israel along with my brother. He let the Rebbe know about everything, which was a surprise to me.

Besides this, my father would write to the Rebbe about his business which, at one point, became too hard for him to manage. There came a time when he wanted to sell it. And the Rebbe wrote him a letter advising not to sell the entire business because his influence in spreading Torah was enhanced by his being a respected businessman. My father followed the Rebbe's advice and sold only a part of the business.

In another letter, the Rebbe praised the rabbinic work my father was doing on a volunteer basis. Indeed, my father worked day and night without getting paid for any of it. He was a businessman, and that was the source of his income, while his rabbinic work was voluntary. The Rebbe said that sometimes you can have more influence when you are not an official rabbi than when you are.

All this I found out only after he passed away. The one thing that I was aware of during his lifetime was the correspondence going back and forth when he was sick in his last few years. First, he had a heart attack and then he got cancer, and all of this was very hard on him and the family, especially my mother. I remember that, at one point, the doctor said there was nothing

to be done anymore and that he should stop taking all the medicines: "This way he will go faster." That was the medical decree. But then, while he was still in the hospital, my mother got a phone call from the Rebbe's secretary saying that the Rebbe had given a blessing and that he would still have a few good years. And, indeed, he did have a few good years after that, and he went on to spread Torah on a personal and national level — through the various study programs which he promoted.

When I got married, my husband and I got a letter from the Rebbe giving us a blessing. Neither I nor my husband were connected to Chabad at the time. But then my husband Shimshon became interested, through his uncle Rabbi Leibel Kramer, who was the Rebbe's emissary in Montreal, and — in 1975 — he decided to request a private audience for us with the Rebbe.

We went to the audience together. I remember that we wrote out our requests on a piece of paper and handed this in before we came into the Rebbe's office. We had written that we live in Israel, that we had three girls, and we requested blessings.

I will never forget the intensity of the Rebbe's presence and his warmth, as well as his smiling eyes which were so very magnetic. They pierced straight through us as he gave us a blessing to have more children. And that is what happened — the following year we had a son born to us, and then another daughter.

Mrs. Miriam Halpern is the daughter of Rabbi Yehoshua Mordechai (Charles) Batt. She presently resides in Israel and was interviewed in August 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...

> **5747-1986**, The Rebbe spoke about the importance of constructing and expanding the buildings of Chabad Houses worldwide. He said that everyone should participate in these projects because when many people work together, it will be more successful than when performed by individuals.¹ 6 Cheshvan

1. Sefer Hasichot 5747 vol. 1 page 54

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