

HERE'S my STORY

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GOOD NEWS, GUARANTEED

VICTOR AND DEBBIE SACKS

In 1987, we moved from South Africa to the United States, where we had the good fortune to meet the Chabad emissary in Tarzana, California — Rabbi Mordy Einbinder — and join his synagogue.

After we had been living there for about a year, we noticed that Ryan, our two-and-a-half-year-old son was acting oddly, constantly bruising himself, and then we saw blisters on his tongue. Something was seriously wrong, so we took him to a see a pediatrician who immediately ordered blood tests and x-rays. Within hours, the diagnosis was in. Ryan had leukemia, and he was rushed to Children's Hospital.

As soon as we had the chance, we informed Rabbi Mordy of what was going on, and he helped us draft a letter to the Rebbe, requesting a blessing for speedy recovery.

Very quickly thereafter, a letter came from the Rebbe saying he would pray for Ryan at the resting place of the Previous Rebbe, and that we should inform him of Ryan's recovery. His exact words were: "You will report good news," as if it was a given that we would have good news to report.

At that point, Ryan was the sickest child on the hospital floor — among all the children there with cancer, he was in the worst shape and he was not eating anything. But, after the Rebbe gave his blessing, Ryan sat up and drank a whole bottle.

After the doctors commenced treatment, Ryan was isolated in a kind of a plastic room designed to filter out all germs, as he was highly susceptible to infection. We had to don special spacesuits, gloves and masks to even come near him.



Ryan Sacks

Meanwhile, with Rabbi Mordy's help, we started sending weekly progress reports to the Rebbe, and thank G-d, we were able to say that Ryan was beginning to recover. Indeed, the leukemia went into remission very fast, though he was still extremely ill.

At that juncture the question arose whether we should hope that the remission will hold or try a more proactive treatment, which involved a bone marrow transplant.

We were not sure what to do, and many people were telling us: "He is already in remission, so why take the chance with such a risky procedure?" It is true that a bone marrow transplant is exceptionally dangerous because it involves wiping out the child's own bone marrow and then waiting for the transplanted bone marrow to grow. During this period, the child is susceptible to all kinds of diseases and his body may reject the transplant, making matters even worse.

But the Rebbe gave us strong advice to proceed, along with a strongly-worded blessing that we should have good news to report.

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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. While we have done our utmost to authenticate these stories, they reflect the listener's recollection and interpretation of the Rebbe's words. Please share any corrections, comments and suggestions. mystory@jmedia.org

continued from reverse

Because of his advice, we went forward with the transplant. As it turned out, our daughter Carli, who was about a year-and-a-half older than Ryan, proved a perfect match for him.

She was so happy about it. When she heard that, from among all the family members who were tested, she was the best match for Ryan and would be able to save his life, she ran around shouting, "I won! I won! I won!" She was so excited to go into the hospital where she was the center of attention and everyone came to visit her and bring her gifts. She was not frightened at all.

Before the transplant, we were very anxious and uncertain if this was the right course of action, but once we got the Rebbe's answer to go ahead, we calmed down completely. We felt one-hundred-percent sure we were doing the right thing.

The bone marrow transplant was successful, although there were some complications and Ryan was confined to the house for a year afterwards.

Interestingly, when we first contacted the Rebbe about Ryan's illness, he told us to check all the *mezuzah* scrolls in our house. When we checked, we found that one of them was not kosher — a couple of the letters were blurry or joined together — and the problem was in the Torah verse which states "... that your days, and the days of your children, may be prolonged upon the land ...". We were stunned to actually find that something was wrong with the passage referring to children living a long life — that was quite something. And, of course, we quickly corrected this problem.

While Ryan was recovering at home, the Rebbe constantly followed his progress and even had his secretary, Rabbi Leibel Groner, call us to keep updated.

We just couldn't get over that he cared so much. He was busy with so many global issues, yet he remembered us and was thinking about our son. It's one thing to send a letter and receive a response, but it's another for the Rebbe's office to call you at home

just to say "The Rebbe wants to know how your son is doing." We just couldn't believe it, and we felt so honored by his constant involvement.

The Rebbe's care and involvement also influenced other members of our family. When Ryan was sick in the hospital, many friends and relatives took on Torah observance in the merit of his recovery. And, today, there are about thirty or maybe even forty families who keep kosher, who keep Shabbat as a result of Ryan's illness and recovery. They saw that, through the intercession of the Rebbe, their prayers were answered and so they were moved to trust in G-d and continue to keep His Torah.

Unfortunately, we never had a chance to meet the Rebbe, but when we did come out to New York, we went to the *Ohel*, where he is buried next to the Previous Rebbe, and also we went into his office just to feel his presence. We were so incredibly grateful for everything that he had done for us and for Ryan, who today is twenty-six years old and happy and healthy.

The Sacks family lives in Tarzana, California. Victor Sacks is an attorney specializing in legal compliance; Debbie is an x-ray technician and their son Ryan is a law student planning to specialize in medical malpractice. They were interviewed in September of 2011.

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

This week in...

> **5745-1985**, the Rebbe held a *farbrengen* honoring the *yahrzeit* of Maimonides. At the *farbrengen*, the Rebbe discussed the daily study program of Mishneh Torah, the Rambam's *magnum opus*, which the Rebbe had initiated nine months earlier. He also spoke of Maimonides' Guide to the Perplexed and how the perplexed people of today can find direction in Torah.¹
20 Tevet

1. *Torat Menachem* 5745 vol. 2 page 1019

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Central Mass Chabad, Worcester, MA

By **Reus Chaya Hersch**

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