

HERE'S my STORY

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THE TASMANIAN ANGEL

RABBI YOSSI GORDON



I was born in Newark, New Jersey, where my parents were sent by the Previous Rebbe as his emissaries. Their mission was their whole life, and I was raised in an atmosphere of service and of connection to the Rebbe.

Growing up, I was keenly aware how much the Rebbe — his blessings, his advice, his influence — permeated our lives.

I recall that, when I was a kid, a teenager from our synagogue named Stephen Lutz was honored by President John F. Kennedy as the "Boy of the Year" in recognition of "superlative services to his home, school, synagogue, community and boy's club." During the ceremony, President Kennedy asked him, "Who inspired you to become what you are today?" And he answered, "It was Rabbi Sholom Ber Gordon, who is an emissary of the Rebbe."

This story appeared in *The New York Times* and other papers, featuring a photo of the boy with the President and, of course, the Rebbe saw it. But he admonished my father because he was not in the photograph. "If your picture had appeared in the paper," the Rebbe told him, "it could have caused one more Jewish girl to marry a Torah observant boy with a beard."

On another occasion, the Rebbe gave my father a blessing that had the most amazing results.

This was at a time when our Newark neighborhood was changing and the Jewish people were moving out to the suburbs. As the rabbi of the local synagogue, my father had

to follow, and he moved our family to Maplewood, New Jersey. But he was unable to sell our Newark home and was stuck with two mortgages. This distressed him very much, and he asked the Rebbe for a blessing to get out of the situation quickly.

The Rebbe gave the blessing, and he also told my father that he should ask a member of his synagogue, a Mr. Chaim Dansker, to sell the house for him. But when my father asked this person, he responded, "I am a lawyer. I can do the legal work for free, but I don't know anything about real estate sales."

"The Rebbe said you should do it," my father insisted, and hearing that, Mr. Dansker agreed to put an ad in the newspaper on his behalf — this was the only thing he knew to do.

The ad appeared, but it came out garbled — something must have gone wrong in the typesetting. My father called Mr. Dansker and told him, "You should get your money back because they messed up the ad." But Mr. Dansker responded, "They messed up the ad, but you have a fellow coming to see your house in the next half hour." And that fellow bought the house!

I, myself, saw the Rebbe many times and received many blessings and much advice from him. Here I would like to relate just a few of those encounters which proved especially impactful on my life.

When I was fifteen years old, I wrote to the Rebbe reporting that I was participating in his *tefillin* campaign — that every day I would go to an old age home to help about half a dozen men put on *tefillin*. In response, the Rebbe gave me a blessing to be successful in this endeavor. I feel that this blessing has followed me throughout the years because I have had a very high success rate in this *mitzvah*.

Later, when I turned nineteen, I was sent by the Rebbe to the newly opened *yeshivah* in Miami. And during a private audience, I got an unforgettable piece of advice from the Rebbe. He told me, "The success of your mission depends upon you being a living example to others." This is something I have quoted over and over, because it taught me how to be the best emissary I could possibly be.

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 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@jemedi.org

continued from reverse

After receiving my rabbinic ordination, I taught at the Yeshiva Tiferes Bachurim in Morristown, New Jersey, and then, in 1978, I got engaged. But my fiancée wanted us to live in New York after the wedding, while I was reluctant because I was worried about making a living if I gave up my Morristown job. So, I wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking what to do. I have treasured his answer ever since then. I have shared it with many people, and I had it printed to give out at my son's wedding. His answer not just answered this particular question, but every single question I've had since then — it was a blueprint for dealing with every dilemma in life.

This is what the Rebbe wrote to me in Hebrew:

“A foundation of the Torah and *mitzvot* is the idea of Divine Providence over every *single* person, (and especially as explained well in *chasidic teachings*). So how can there be room for worries?! According to the Torah, a person must take action (without worrying at all, as mentioned above) and, if it is unclear what action to take, one should consult friends (his father, spiritual advisor, etc.) and, if they have differences of opinion, follow the majority.”

Because of this answer, my father became the first person I always went to for advice and, when he couldn't help me, he'd direct me to others who could.

Another time, in a private audience, I asked the Rebbe how I might correct something that I had done that was not up to standard. The Rebbe told me (and I am paraphrasing his words): “As an emissary, when you fulfill your mission well, you fix any blemish that you may have, including the issue that you wrote about.” From this I understood that, for me, there's one solution for every mistake, which is dedicating my life to fulfilling my mission properly.

More than anything else, this advice sustained me when, in 1984, I went to Tasmania, Australia, to be the Rebbe's emissary there. I knew that whenever I messed up — because I was a human being and fallible — there was this solution, as the Rebbe taught me.

When we first shipped off to Australia, the Rebbe gave my wife forty Australian dollars earmarked as a contribution toward us getting settled in Australia. And, ever since then, I have felt that, with this money, the Rebbe made an investment in our mission. To this day, when I invite people for Shabbat meals or for classes which I give in our house, I feel like the Rebbe is my partner in every endeavor. And I know that I will succeed because he is there with me.

For nearly thirty-five years, Rabbi Yossi Gordon and his wife, Mina, have served as the Chabad emissaries in Tasmania, Australia. He was interviewed in July, 2016.

לעילוי נשמת

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This week in...

- > **5719-1959**, in a letter to the administration of the Beth Rivkah girl's school of France, the Rebbe commented that the school's daily schedule always should begin with Torah study, even on busy days such as Fridays. He also advised that they study topics of Torah which are related to upcoming holidays or the weekly Torah portion. He urged them to take extra care when selecting textbooks because what enters a child's mind has a strong effect on their future.¹ 6 Av
- > **5749-1989**, during a public address, the Rebbe pointed out that the upcoming *yahrzeit* of the Arizal, a prominent Kabbalist, is a special opportunity to publicize the inner dimension of Torah.² 4 Av

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 18 page 483 2. Sefer Hasichot 5749 vol. 2 page 619

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