

HERE'S my STORY

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WHY MIRACLES HAPPEN

MOSHE MENDEL FEINER

As a young man growing up in Ukraine during the 1920s, I got to know the Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Aharon Rokeach, whom I came to revere. When the war broke out and I was drafted into the Russian Army, he assured me that I would survive and return safe and sound, which I did. In 1942, I was in the terrible Battle of Stalingrad, where I saw thousands of soldiers dying around me, but time and again, I survived due to incidents I can only describe as miracles.

After the war, when I made it out of the Pocking DP camp in Germany and together with my wife and two children came to America, I made a point of going to visit all the chasidic rebbes who had immigrated to New York to get blessings from them. I went to the rebbes of Klausenberg, Skver, and Satmar. Imagine my surprise therefore, when I came to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Unlike the others who were old men with long white beards, wearing big fur hats, he was a plainly-dressed young man — tall, dark and handsome, with piercing blue eyes. And unlike them, he declined to bless me. He merely promised to pray for me at the gravesite of his father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe.

I refused to accept this. I tried to trick him into blessing me by blessing him, so that he would have to return the favor, but he wouldn't give in. He told me that my problem was I didn't believe in G-d; I believed in the blessings of rebbes, but not in G-d. As he patiently explained to me, "I have just listened to you tell me the story of your life — how you survived during the war through many miracles — but not once have I heard you say, 'Thank G-d'." He acknowledged the fact that, when I was in the Russian Army, it may have been dangerous to mention G-d, but now this had become



a habit with me. I needed to change that, he said.

He continued, "You need to strengthen your faith, and I recommend that you begin by studying *Chovos HaLevavos*." (He was referring to the 11th century classic, *Duties of the Heart*, by Rabbeinu Bachya.)

Then, the Rebbe explained to me the purpose of miracles. It is possible for a person to get so caught up in the physical world that he forgets about the Creator of it all. A miracle is G-d's way of reminding that person that He has been there all along.

Finally, he asked me, "What else do you need?" And I told him that I had terrible eczema on my hands. "Right now, I cannot help you with this," he replied. But then he instructed me to come back three days before the holiday of Shavuot when we celebrate receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai.

When I came back, he said, "As you know before the Torah was given, all the sick people of Israel were healed. Go home and wash your hands well." I did as he said, and the eczema stopped being a problem.

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

From that point on, I became a follower of the Rebbe, and he took care of me and my family in remarkable ways.

Early on, I confided in the Rebbe that my wife, Yetta, was diagnosed with cancer and was told that she would need a hysterectomy to save her life, but this meant that she would not be able to ever get pregnant again.

"Don't have this operation," the Rebbe told her, "you will have more children."

Afterwards, we had a confrontation with her doctor who was not happy that the Rebbe was telling us to do something counter to medical advice. He even predicted that my wife would die if we followed the Rebbe's advice. But we followed it anyway.

Not only did my wife live, she became pregnant. At first her doctor didn't believe it, and then he tried to convince her to have an abortion, but again we followed the Rebbe's advice and all went well. Afterwards, the doctor was so stunned he asked to meet the Rebbe, but I don't remember if it ever happened. We went on to have two more wonderful children thanks to the Rebbe's advice.

Then, there was an incident in 1956 or 1957 when my daughter, Tzivia, lost her vision. I was devastated. We took her to the doctor, who had no solution, and I came home bereft. All my traumas from the war years came back to me, and I started to cry, muffling my sobs in my pillow so that my wife wouldn't hear.

Suddenly the phone rang. It was late at night, and at the other end of the line was the Rebbe's secretary, who sounded exasperated. He had been calling all the Feiners in the phone book in order to track me down, because the Rebbe told him to call Feiner who is in trouble. He said, "The Rebbe wants to know what is the matter?"

I explained that my daughter had lost her vision, and I asked, "Please tell the Rebbe and ask him what I should do."

The answer came back, "The Rebbe says, 'Take your

daughter to King County Hospital in Brooklyn.'" He also gave me the name of the doctor to see. This doctor gave my daughter drops and, gradually, her vision was restored.

I had often wondered how it was that the Rebbe knew that I was in trouble and sobbing my heart out. And then somebody explained it to me like this: "You have a lot of hair on your head, but when you tug on even one hair, your brain feels the pain. It's like that with the Rebbe. When a *chasid* is in trouble, the Rebbe feels it." And that made a lot of sense to me.

The Rebbe guided my life in every respect. Just how wise was his advice became evident when he suggested that I acquire a certain property that was for sale. Shortly thereafter this property was bought by the government at a high price — they wanted to build a highway through the land it stood on. But they never did build the highway and, after a time, I got to buy it back for pennies on the dollar.

Eventually, that building became the home of Yeshiva Ohr Elchonon Chabad. To help the yeshiva was the least I could do to try to repay the Rebbe. Who knows — perhaps the Rebbe always foresaw it would work out this way.

Moshe Mendel Feiner (1917 - 2012) was interviewed in May, 2011 together with his wife Yetta and son Yisrael, who contributed to his recollection of this story.

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

This week in....

> **5716-1956**, the Rebbe sent a letter to Mr. Yankel Katz, who was going to be *chazan* for the High Holidays, reminding him of the Previous Rebbe's directive that a *chazan* should study the meaning of the High Holiday prayers.¹ *1 Elul*

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 13 page 417

לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ח ר' משה בן הרה"ח ר' מיכאל ע"ה קצנלנבוגן
יארצייט - ח' אלול
ומרת זלדה בת הרה"ח ר' נחום הלל ע"ה קצנלנבוגן
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mystory@jemedial.org | myencounterblog.com | 718-774-6000
784 Eastern Parkway | Suite 403 | Brooklyn, NY 11213

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