

**HERE'S
my
STORY**

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FROM ROLLING STONES TO WRAPPING TEFILLIN

MR. ELLIOT LASKY

Several months after I returned from a concert tour with the Rolling Stones, I met the Rebbe and — because of him and despite of me — I experienced an unexpected spiritual awakening.

My parents were both Holocaust survivors from Belorussia, and I had been born in a DP camp right after the war. I was raised Torah observant with Yiddish as my first language. After we came to the United States in 1950, I kept Shabbat, I went to *yeshivah*, and I put on *tefillin*.

But, after being exposed to a lot of inconsistency and some hypocrisy, I started to question it all, and by the mid-1960s, I stopped keeping Torah. After a time of experimenting with acting, I found myself at the State University of New York (SUNY) in Buffalo, studying law and dabbling in music promotion.

In my early twenties, I found myself hanging out with some very famous people in the music and entertainment business — like Carly Simon and Chip Monck. Through Chip's efforts, I was invited to travel with the Rolling Stones on their 1972 summer tour, and I got to see more depraved human behaviour than most people will ever see in a lifetime.

Several months after that tour, I had a talk with a Zen Buddhist friend who was not Jewish. The way he spoke about Zen Buddhism sounded very interesting, and I found myself asking, "How can Judaism be right and the whole world wrong?" That was the question that kept percolating in my mind.

Because of my time at SUNY in Buffalo, I had a close relationship with Rabbi Noson Gurary, who was the Rebbe's emissary there. So I called him and started asking him my questions. His answer to me was, "There's only one person who can help you — the Rebbe."

The concept of a Rebbe, who somehow understood your soul, was very alien to me, and yet, that very day, I



went to the address that Rabbi Gurary gave me — 770 Eastern Parkway. I recall that it was a bitter cold day in January of 1973.

I was told that I'd be able to approach the Rebbe and speak with him briefly as he arrived from visiting the gravesite of the Previous Rebbe and walked into 770 before the afternoon *Minchah* prayers. And so I waited in the cold, wearing my snakeskin boots, tight jeans and a leather jacket; I suppose I was a sight with my shoulder-length hair and unconventional dress.

As I was waiting, an old limousine pulled up and the Rebbe emerged. Since Yiddish was my first language, I felt this was the appropriate way to address him, so I said, "*Anshuldig, binste der Lubavitcher Rebbe?* — Excuse me, are you the Lubavitcher Rebbe?"

Our eyes locked. In my whole life I had never seen eyes like his. And suddenly, it felt to me like I had been transported to another dimension, like there was nothing around us and it was just the two of us in the whole world. This was an incredible spiritual experience for me.

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 1,500 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.



continued from reverse

He didn't respond, "Yes, I am the Rebbe" or "No, I am not." He just said, "What is your name and where are you from?" I gave him my name, told him where I was from and where my parents were from.

"I have a question," I said. "Ask," he responded.

"Ah vu iz G-t? — Where is G-d?"

"Umetum — Everywhere," he answered me. But I persisted, "Ich vays, ubber ah vu? — I know, but where?"

"Umetum, in alts; in ah boim, in a shtayn, — Everywhere, in everything; in every tree, in every stone."

But I still wasn't satisfied with this answer so he said, "in dayn hartz, oib dos iz vi du fregst — He is in your heart, if this is how you're asking."

That answer completely stunned me. In all the years I spent in yeshiva in my youth, I never grasped that G-d was in my heart.

At that point, I asked him if we could speak in English, because I could not ask in Yiddish all that I needed to know. He agreed. I said, "When we say the Shema — 'Listen Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one' — do we mean that there is one G-d for all people be they black, or Indian or Jew?"

He answered, "The essence of the black man is to be what he is as a black man, and the essence of the Indian is to be what he is as an Indian, and the essence of the Jew is tied to G-d through the Torah and its commandments."

These were very, very powerful words to me.

Altogether, we spoke for approximately fifteen minutes on the steps of 770 on a very bitter cold day in January and, at the end, he gave me two things to do. One was to learn the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (the Abbreviated Code of Jewish Law) in English, and the other was to put on *tefillin* every day.

I objected. I said that, given my lifestyle, I didn't think I could put on *tefillin* consistently. But he said, "You can and you will."

He then explained to me that if I keep the Torah, it will be a source of blessing for me, but if I don't, it will go the other way — "it will lead to being downtrodden" is how he put it.

All this time, he was looking into my eyes directly — our eyes were locked — and I was the one who broke the eye contact first. That's when I realized that dozens of young *chasidim* were standing around us

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with questioning expressions, as if asking, "Who is the Rebbe speaking to for so long?"

At that point, I started crying, as the Rebbe went in for the afternoon prayer service. It was a very emotional moment for me.

I walked away understanding one thing — that I had just met a man of total truth, of total sincerity. But it took some time for his words to sink in. I'd say about three months. That's when I started putting on *tefillin*, something which I had not done for many years. From that day till today I have never missed and, as they say, "one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah."

Bit by bit, I started adding to my prayers. Then one day I asked myself, "How can the lips that utter prayers, the praises of the L-rd, eat foods that are forbidden?" So, bit by bit, I started keeping kosher.

Then I started learning the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* just as the Rebbe instructed me to. And over the years I grew and developed.

Today, I have four beautiful children, all of whom are Torah observant. And I do believe that everything has turned out like this because of that fateful meeting with the Rebbe on a cold winter morning in 1973. Because of him, my life was forever changed and so were many other lives which I affected. All for good. All for blessing.

Mr. Elliot Lasky is a real estate developer who resides in Monsey, New York. He was interviewed in May, 2013.

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

This week in...

> **5749 — 1988**, in an address to children, the Rebbe explained that if a commander-in-chief issues an order for soldiers to perform over a long period of time, it is an indication that this project is especially important. Similarly, during a leap year, G-d grants us another month to study Torah and perform *mitzvot* because there is so much important work to be done.¹
18 Tishrei

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