

HERE'S *my* STORY

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MR. SHIMSHON HALPERN

After the Six Day War, in 1967, my wife and I decided to move from the United States to Israel with our young family. Before the move, I came over on a pilot trip and was granted a job interview at the Israeli Ministry of Defense. After they conducted a lengthy investigation, to my great joy, I was hired. I went to work for the Ministry of Defense using my skills as a Harvard-educated lawyer to negotiate contracts for the purchase of defense equipment including submarines.

After three years of doing this, I got a better offer, and I went to my boss, the general counsel of the Ministry of Defense, Joseph Ciechanover, and told him about my plan. His response to me was, "Did you ask the Rebbe about this?"

I almost fell off my chair. Here was a man who was not religious, sitting in front of me without a *yarmulke*, and he was telling me to ask the Rebbe! He went on to explain, "There are a number of us who have worked for the Ministry of the Defense for a long time and we also want to leave, but the Rebbe won't let us."

I didn't know what to make of his statement at first, and only later on did I figure it out. This was in April of 1973, six months before the devastating Yom Kippur War. The Rebbe obviously anticipated that something ominous was on the horizon. A departure of key personnel in the Ministry of Defense at such a time would have been disastrous. They consulted the Rebbe — as apparently was the practice of certain Israeli government officials — and they followed his advice. As for myself, since I was not yet a *chasid*, I didn't ask the Rebbe; I simply left and took the better paying job, as general counsel at Etz Lavud, a big Israeli company then selling mostly wood and plywood.

While at Etz Lavud, I came across a difficult personal issue, involving Yosef Kremerman. He was the company's CEO as well as one of the principal shareholders, and my boss. Being a former member of the Irgun (the forerunner of the Israel Defense Forces), he had signed guarantees for monies paid out to the widows of Irgun fighters, and



that put a tremendous amount of financial pressure on him. I saw that this situation was affecting the company, and I was actually considering leaving. I really didn't know what to do, so I consulted my uncle, Rabbi Leibel Kramer, who said, "This kind of question you ask the Rebbe."

He asked on my behalf and quickly came back with an unbelievable response. The Rebbe had said, "Since this is something which is dependent on the situation in Israel — when you will need to make this decision, you should consult with a friend who understands the matter. I will pray for you at the resting place of my father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe."

The Rebbe's response influenced me to stay. I understood him to be telling me that quitting was something far in the future, and that when I must eventually leave, it should be done with the advice of a friend.

As it turned out, a year or so later, in 1977, Menachem Begin became prime minister and took over the obligation of supporting the widows of Irgun fighters; this relieved Kremerman of his financial burden and the pressure on the company.

Then there came a time, some years later, when I had to

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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 1,500 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.



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decide if I should stay at Etz Lavud or join Laser Industries, a start-up subsidiary working on developing a medical laser. And that is when I remembered the Rebbe's advice and consulted "a friend who understands the matter." The advice I got was that the future was with Laser Industries, and I followed this advice, which proved to be completely correct. The company became highly successful. It is now known as Lumenis Ltd. and is a recognized leader in the hi-tech medical field. From the stock options, I was able to marry off most of my children.

After seven years, I changed jobs again. This was in 1987, when I met Professor Herman Branover, the scientist and famed refusnik, who told me that the Rebbe was predicting a huge influx of Russian immigrants into Israel. At the time, Russian Jews were virtual prisoners of the Soviet Union and nobody could imagine such a thing. But Professor Branover believed the Rebbe, who knew better.

The Rebbe also apparently knew that, when the exodus of Russian Jews would begin, there would be many highly-educated, scientifically-oriented immigrants who would need a place to incubate their ideas, inventions and innovations. And so, on the Rebbe's advice, Professor Branover set up SATEC (Shamir Advanced Technology Engineering Company), one of the first science-based incubator companies in Israel, for Russian Jewish scientists who would soon be coming out.

People still don't realize how much new technology in Israel and worldwide is the result of the Russian *aliyah*. But in my opinion, the Rebbe understood that it would happen before it happened.

SATEC, which I assisted Professor Branovor in founding, was developing products such as heating elements and power meters. I went to see the Rebbe while he was giving out dollars for charity to ask him for a blessing for SATEC to succeed. He responded, "*Minoga Hatzlachah!*" — Great Success!" using the Russian word for "great" and the Hebrew word for "success." And, indeed, SATEC has become a success.

In 1978, my wife and I were fortunate to have a personal audience with the Rebbe, which I remember vividly. The audience lasted five minutes but it was life-changing. I recall that his office was a simple, small room, but at the time it seemed to me enormous, and I was keenly aware of the Rebbe's dominating presence.

During that audience the Rebbe said to me, "You are a lawyer and lawyers are used to making compromises. But you should always show the world that Torah is truth and that Torah is life." He used the words *Torat emet* and *Torat chaim*. This was a message that I have carried with me ever since.

לזכות
לוֹיִצְחָק בֶּן זִיסֶּל
לשנת הצלחה בג'ו"ד
ולנהת חסידותי מכל י"ח

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It was clear to me that the Rebbe did his best to infuse people like me who were involved in hi-tech industries with the desire to bring Torah into their workplaces, because he understood that hi-tech would be the future of Israel. The country wouldn't be exporting oranges as much as start-ups. And we have all seen that. Israel is the leading hi-tech innovator in the world (except for the United States). There's no other country that does anything like it with a population of only 8.5 million people. So it's obvious to me that Israel has been especially blessed in this regard, and I do believe that the Rebbe has had a hand in that blessing.

Israel has no significant natural resources — except for gas, but that is in a relatively early stage of development — and so all it has besides agriculture is Jewish brains. What do Jewish brains do best in the modern world? Hi-tech. There is no question in my mind that the Rebbe anticipated that.

While the Rebbe did not live in Israel physically, he lived in Israel spiritually. And he understood everything that was going on and what was best for the country.

These are the reasons why I became a *chasid* of the Rebbe. And I consider myself such to this day.

Mr. Shimshon Halpern is a Harvard-educated attorney who presently resides in Karnei Shomron, Israel, where he was interviewed in March, 2010.

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

This week in....

> **5721 — 1960**, the Rebbe sent a letter to the author Dr. Chaim Shashkes, wishing him success in his forthcoming journey, and reminding him to utilize the opportunity to speak about Torah life. As Dr. Shashkes had recently been to the Soviet Union, the Rebbe mentioned that by relaying how the Jews living behind the Iron Curtain manage to keep Torah despite the harshest obstacles, surely people living with freedom of religion would be inspired follow suit.¹ 20 Cheshvan

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 20 page 34

