

**HERE'S  
my  
STORY**

Generously sponsored by the  **Crain-Maling Foundation**

# WHAT ABOUT THE CHINESE?

**MR. YOSEF SHANDLING**

I was born and raised in Brooklyn where I was educated in the public school system and attended City College, receiving a degree in civil engineering in 1965. After graduating, I served for two years in the U.S. Public Health Service, which allowed me to fulfill my military obligation and left me free to do anything I wanted.

I then traveled to Israel, where I worked on kibbutzim and also learned in a yeshivah in Kfar Chabad. When I returned home to Brooklyn, I continued my studies at Hadar Hatorah, a Chabad yeshivah for Jews returning to Judaism.

During this time, I had an audience with the Rebbe — in December of 1970, on the occasion of my 28th birthday. In advance of that audience, I wrote the Rebbe a long letter, expressing my ambivalence about committing to the life of an Orthodox Jew. In my letter I also stated that I didn't feel ready to marry as that would obviously commit me to a particular lifestyle.

The Rebbe welcomed me warmly and began the conversation by asking me about myself. After answering a number of his questions, I mentioned that I had written about these things in my letter. In the letter, I had questioned whether Judaism represented the truth. In response, the Rebbe told me that the Jewish people were the only people in the world who have survived from antiquity until now. I had heard this explanation previously and, as he Rebbe was talking, I thought, "What about the Chinese?" I really wanted to ask him about this but I didn't have the chutzpah to interrupt him.

I didn't have to. As if reading my mind, he said, "As far as the Chinese are concerned, they have had their own country throughout their existence, they never



had to experience repeated exiles and expulsions." He also said that they made a radical change in their worldview at the time of Confucius. In contrast, the Jewish people held onto their faith in a consistent way for thousands of years, despite being repeatedly exiled from their homeland.

As far as my ambivalence about committing to an Orthodox lifestyle which I was then leading, the Rebbe suggested that I should make no drastic changes. If I continued with Torah observance, I would not be doing any damage to myself from the secular perspective, but if I were to abandon observance while still unsure which way I wanted to go, then I could inflict serious harm on myself. So, the best thing would be to stay the course for now. He also said that getting married was key to making things fall into place because, as a single man, I was not living a normal life.

I followed the Rebbe's advice and continued in yeshivah. But then, at the end of the summer, my mother suffered a heart attack. While she was in intensive care in the

*continued on reverse*



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

hospital, I thought to myself, "What can I do to make my mother feel better about life and about me in particular?" She had not been happy with my learning in *yeshivah* as she had a different world view. I decided that she would feel much better if I were to enroll in graduate school. So I enrolled in one graduate course at City College while remaining in the Hadar Hatorah dormitory and studying there part-time.

After years in *yeshivah*, going back into a secular world was a culture shock for me, and I was not doing well in the one course I had enrolled in. I did very poorly on the first exam. So, when I went to see the Rebbe again, I asked him whether I should withdraw from that course, and also, if I should continue in graduate school. The Rebbe responded that I should put in extra effort to get not just a passing grade but a good grade. He also advised me to continue my studies, get a Master's degree, and then look for a job.

In graduate school, a good grade means an A. Anything less is mediocre. With the Rebbe's blessing, I was prepared to do whatever I had to do to get an A in the course, remote as that possibility seemed. But, when the midterm results were returned, I was nowhere near to meeting that standard. Yet, just when I thought I stood no chance, the professor announced that the top half of the midterm grades would be considered an A and somehow I squeaked in over the line despite my poor midterm showing, earning an A after all, which I can only attribute to the Rebbe's blessing.

I graduated in January of 1973 and, after some time, moved to San Francisco. That is where I met the woman who would be my wife. Before deciding to get married, I asked the Rebbe for his blessing, and he responded that he would bless our union if we committed to a life of Torah observance.

We started our family in Berkeley, California, staying close to Chabad there and living the lives of Orthodox Jews. While in Berkeley, an opportunity came up to make *aliyah* to Israel and join a program on a religious kibbutz. My wife, Dina Leah, wrote to the Rebbe asking his advice.

He responded that, "you have an opportunity to be a positive factor in spreading and strengthening *Yiddishkeit* in your surroundings, by showing a living

example as well as by participating in activities of promoting *Yiddishkeit*, whereas relocating in another place would, for a time at least, take up most of your attention and efforts in getting acclimatized and adjusted."

He blessed us that, "G-d, whose benevolent Providence extends to each and everyone individually, lead you in the way that is truly good for you materially and spiritually, and you should make the proper decision."

We took his advice and stayed put for a number of years, later moving to San Diego in order to enroll our children in the Chabad day school there, and eventually to Monsey, New York, all with the Rebbe's blessing. During this time, we have all gone from strength to strength in our Torah observance.

*Mr. Yosef Shandling, a member of the Chabad community of Monsey, New York, retired in February, 2010, from a career in environmental engineering. He was interviewed in July, 2018.*

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

## This week in...

> **5729 — 1968**, the day after the safe return of NASA's Apollo 8, the first manned mission to orbit the moon, the Rebbe held a special *farbrengen* to discuss the historic accomplishment. After explaining the Torah approach to scientific advances, he expounded on four lessons to be learned from the various techniques used in the operation. For example, one of the difficulties of the expedition was ensuring that no potentially harmful bacteria were on board the spacecraft, since even bacteria which are normally ineffectual may react differently under the unknown conditions of outer space. Similarly, the Rebbe explained, as every person's circumstances constantly evolve, it is necessary to make sure that one's spirituality is also developing and growing.<sup>1</sup>  
*7 Tevet*

1. Torat Menachem vol. 55 page 117



Download the app today at [Tefillinwrapp.com](http://Tefillinwrapp.com)  
**Let's get Am Yisroel Wrapping!**



In honor of Rabbi and Mrs. **Moshe Herson**

You can help us record more testimonies by dedicating future editions of *Here's My Story*

Supported by members of

THE **JEM FOUNDATION**

ואתה תצווה... להעלות נר תמיד