

HERE'S my STORY

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THEY'RE ALL OUR CHILDREN

DR. ALAN NEWMARK

When I opened a podiatry practice in Crown Heights in 1983, I began to learn about my religion. I was raised in a secular home, so initially I felt a little shell-shocked as I learned that Jewish holidays didn't consist of just Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Passover, and as my patients began offering to help me put on *tefillin*. (I did it, although it took me some years to learn to recite the *Shema* with comprehension of what I was saying.)

After I became a bit more known, I got a phone call asking me to make a home visit to a Mrs. Schneerson. I set an appointment, but then I got busy and forgot to go. It was around 8:30 p.m. when the phone rang and the caller asked what had happened. That's when I remembered the appointment and I apologized profusely, offering to come immediately, which is what I did.

When I arrived at the address she gave — 1304 President Street — I was met by a big dog guarding the yard, so I figured that this lady must be quite affluent. But when I went inside the house, I found it quite plainly appointed — considering the guard dog outside, I had been expecting a mansion.

I met the nice elderly lady who had called me — this Mrs. Schneerson — took down her medical history and treated her. She was about 85 years old, but she still had very regal bearing. At the same time, she was very warm and kind and approachable. I recall that she also served me cake and tea, and then I left.

The next morning in the office, I got a number of phone calls. Some of my other religious patients had somehow gotten wind of my visit — perhaps I was spotted as I was pulling up to the house — and were very excited that I had treated Mrs. Schneerson. I didn't exactly get what the fuss was about until my secretary explained to me that I had treated *Rebbetzin* Schneerson, the wife of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

When that didn't impress me, she explained to me who the Rebbe was, and she suggested that I go see him on a Sunday when he was handing out dollars for charity. I said, "I don't need his dollar; I make a living." And she laughed and said, "It has nothing to do with money. To get a dollar from the Rebbe is an uplifting, spiritual thing. You should think about doing it."

"Okay, I'll think about it," I told her, but really, I just forgot about it.

Two months went by before I got a call to visit Mrs. Schneerson again, and I apologized to her for not knowing that she was the *Rebbetzin*. "If I knew who you were, I'd have put on a *yarmulke* for you," I said.



"It's okay," she replied, "You should wear a *yarmulke* for you, not for me."

I said, "Okay ... maybe someday."

She again served me cake and tea after I treated her, and we had a very pleasant chat.

After that, I saw her every two months, and we became quite friendly - in fact, so much so that some of our conversations over cake and tea began to broach personal topics.

Once she inquired if I was married. I said that I was not but I wanted to be and was actively dating.

"You are dating nice Jewish girls?" she asked.

"No," I answered, "I can't stand them." And I really meant that because the Jewish women I encountered were very materialistic and not to my liking. I preferred dating non-Jewish women.

The expression in her eyes said that she was disappointed by my answer, but she smiled and said, "I see. Of course, you should get married someday, but take your time, take your time..." And then she paused and added, "Promise me that when you do, you'll marry a nice Jewish girl."

"If it's meant to be, it will be," I replied noncommittally.

"Not to worry," she said, "all will be well; all will be well."

And from what people tell me that must have been a

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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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blessing concerning my future.

On another occasion, I made a faux pas. I found out that she never had any children and that shocked me because, as far as I could tell, every family in Crown Heights had ten kids. And I blurted out, "Mrs. Schneerson, I hear that you have no children, and that makes me feel terrible. You are a very warm person, a very good person, you would have been an excellent mother, and I am sorry that you weren't blessed to have a family."

She looked at me as if she was surprised by my statement, but she answered, "All the people in this community are our children. We are responsible for a lot of people."



I said, "You are probably right — as busy as you and your husband are with community work, this is probably what was meant to be. But I still feel bad because you would have been a wonderful mother."

"Thank you," she said, and we left it at that.

Whenever I think back to that exchange my eyes tear up — she would have made an amazing mother. But I guess, in some way, she really was an amazing mother to so many.

Over time, I began to feel that she truly cared about me. Once she said to me, "Whenever you need help, doctor, I will help you." And she did.

There came a time when the father of a friend of mine was gravely ill, and I was asked to see what I could do to obtain the Rebbe's blessing for recovery. Naturally, I called the Rebbetzin and she promised to speak with the Rebbe, assuring me, "Everything will be fine." And it was — the father recovered.

When I called to report this to the Rebbetzin and to thank her and the Rebbe, she said, "I told you all would be well."

It was a very special moment because I sensed that she had gone out of her way to help me. That was the only time I asked her for help while she was alive.

Then, ten years after she'd passed away, she helped me again. This was after I went to Israel and decided to become more religious. When I arrived at Ben Gurion Airport, I kissed the ground and pledged never to work on Saturday again. And then, when I returned home, I committed to finally getting married. I was forty-two, and it was time.

I had gone to the Rebbe's gravesite and prayed there to find

the right woman, but even though I met a lot of women, they were not right for me. I wasn't getting any younger and I started to feel very frustrated. But one day in January of 1999, it hit me that I needed the help of my good friend who promised she would be there for me if I ever needed help. So I went out to the cemetery again, this time to her resting place, and said, "Mrs. Schneerson, I need to get married — I want to finally settle down."

And two months later it happened. It didn't come easy as, after I met a young lady named Leah, I needed divine intervention to get her phone number and go out on a date with her. But once we sat down and talked, it was clear she was the one. After a couple months, I said, "I think we get along pretty well; we should get married." And she said, "Yes, we should."

And then I told her that this had to have been orchestrated by only one person — a person whom I felt close to. And I looked up and said, "Thank you again, Mrs. Schneerson."

Dr. Alan Newmark lives with his family in Bays Water, New York, and maintains a private practice in podiatry in Crown Heights, where he was interviewed January of 2016.

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

This week in...

> **5715 — 1955**, in a letter to Dr. Ulman, who was doing cancer research, the Rebbe drew a lesson from the disease. A single cancer cell can begin to spread aggressively, and without interference it can invade nearby tissue and cause terrible harm. As matters of good are always in greater measure, one can only imagine the tremendous ripple effect that can be had by expanding one positive "cell" in a person's life, and by every seemingly insignificant action. ¹ 21 Shvat

> **5715 — 1955**, in a letter to Rabbi Dovid Chanzin, the director of the Reshet Oholei Yosef Yitzchak school system in Israel, the Rebbe noted that institutions in the United States were having great success with model *seders* and recommended that Reshet schools follow suit. This would help children remember what to do at the actual *seder*. The Rebbe noted that as Reshet students come from diverse backgrounds, the administration must be careful not to undermine any of the children's family customs. ² 26 Shvat

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 10 page 332 2. Igrot Kodesh vol. 10 page 350

לעילוי נשמת

ר' שלמה בן הרב ניסן יצחק ופרומא שרה טעלושקין ע"ה

יארצייט, ג' טבת

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