

# HERE'S my STORY

Generously sponsored by the  Crain-Maling Foundation

## DISCUSS IT WITH YOUR ANCESTORS

**MR. KASRIEL OLIVER**

I grew up in Melbourne, Australia, in a home that was traditional but not observant. However, my parents, of blessed memory, sent me to a Lubavitch school from the age of eleven where I was greatly inspired by one of my teachers, Reb Shmuel Yelen, and I began to observe more of the *mitzvot*. By the time I was a teenager, this was causing tension at home as my father and mother were concerned that I would not be able to support myself if I opted to learn in a *yeshivah* instead of attending university.

I was respectful of them — as is the Torah way — but I also knew my path. So I told them that I planned to defer enrolling in university and would, instead, enroll in the Chabad Yeshivah Gedolah in Melbourne. I did this in 1972 against their wishes. While in *yeshivah* I won the Australian "Bible Quiz" for which the prize was a trip to Israel to represent Australia in the international Bible Quiz in Jerusalem. At that stage, my parents were proud of me.

After a year in the *yeshivah*, I entered the University of Melbourne, as my parents wanted me to, while continuing to be involved with Chabad and its outreach activities on campus. I took a break in the Australian summer (which corresponded to the New York winter of 1974-75) and came to Brooklyn, to study for a few months at the Chabad *yeshivah* there and to meet the Rebbe.

The *chasidim* did not make such a great impression on me, but the Rebbe was just amazing — he had a regal demeanor yet, at the same time, a great humility emanated from him, and I felt strongly that I was in the presence of a true spiritual leader.



**Kasriel with President Zalman Shazar at the International Bible Quiz**

In January of 1975, I merited to have a private audience with the Rebbe. As I was waiting for my appointment, I could feel the emotion building inside me — I was going before a *tzaddik* to discuss lifelong questions and dilemmas that would affect me and my family, and maybe even future generations. It was definitely a monumental moment for me.

In advance of the meeting, I wrote a long letter explaining my background and listing my questions. One of them concerned my growing a beard, which my parents were totally opposed to. They thought that this was unbecoming and would disadvantage me and make me unemployable. I knew that my parents meant the best for me. And yet, the Torah requires that a man not cut "the corners" of his beard, which is why Jews wear sidelocks, and many don't cut any part of their beard at all. So I did not know what to do.

*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

The Rebbe's answer puzzled me somewhat. He said that, since I would be returning to Australia via Israel, I should stop at four holy places and pray about my dilemma. He did not tell me whether or not to grow a beard — he just told me to pray at these four holy places about this matter and then to reach a decision there on my own.

The four places the Rebbe named were: the Western Wall, the retaining wall of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, where Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their wives, Sarah, Rebecca and Leah are buried; Rachel's Tomb near Bethlehem, the final resting place of Jacob's beloved second wife; and the Tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the author of the primary text of the Kabbalah, in Meron.



"After praying at these places, you should return to Australia and tell your parents that you made a decision," the Rebbe said, predicting that, when I did so, they would go along with whatever decision I made.

However, the Rebbe must have been concerned that I would be discouraged by people insulting or putting down my religious way of life because he pointed out that at the very beginning of the first chapter of the first section of the Code of Jewish Law, it states, "do not be embarrassed when people mock you."

"Do not be discouraged," the Rebbe said. "And do not be embarrassed because you are loyal to Torah and its *mitzvot*. You must be strong and not be concerned at all."

His advice helped me a great deal. I went on to study at the university with a full beard — which my parents accepted, as the Rebbe said they would — and I graduated with a degree in applied

chemistry. Later, I became the chief chemist for Kosher Australia, a position which I have held for the past thirty-six years.

My job entails auditing and assessing all aspects of food production and ingredients to determine possible kosher certification. This requires extensive and detailed knowledge of raw materials and the latest food technology. I am not the rabbi who gives the kashrut certificate, but I am the chemist who provides the technical details of the ingredients and the manufacturing process.

It is an important job, and I think I have made my parents proud, and I hope the Rebbe as well.

*Mr. Kasriel Oliver has served as the chief chemist for Kosher Australia for over thirty-six years. He was interviewed in Melbourne in July of 2016.*

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

## This week in...

> **5719 — 1959**, in a detailed letter, the Rebbe explained what the artwork on the cover of the Talks and Tales series represents. He demonstrated why it contains the tablets, the globe, pillars and clouds and how their specific location within the image conveys the desired message.<sup>1</sup> 4 Nissan

> **5744 — 1984**, while promoting a fundraiser for Hatzalah of Crown Heights, the Rebbe commented that not only do the Hatzalah ambulances help deal with medical emergencies, they also can prevent emergencies from happening in the first place because the ambulances serve as a reminder for people to care for their health. The Rebbe concluded that very soon when *Mashiach* will take us out of exile, the Hatzalah ambulances will certainly be brought along because they were instrumental in saving lives.<sup>2</sup> 29 Adar

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 18 page 303 2. Torat Menachem 5744 vol. Page 1143



Download the app today at [Tefillinwrapp.com](http://Tefillinwrapp.com)

Let's get Am Yisroel Wrapping!



In honor of our dear friends

Rabbi and Mrs. **Yehoshua** and **Sarah Balkany**  
of Brooklyn, New York

by **Jeremy, Shayna, Ethan, Hannah,**  
**Lisa** and **Brandon Swartz**

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

Generously printed by PRINTHOUSE