



# GETTING JUDAISM THROUGH AIRPORT SECURITY

**MR. PINCHAS PERRY**

In 1972, I began to serve as El Al's chief security officer at JFK airport in New York. Later that year, I was approached by Chabad representatives who asked for permission to set up a counter in the corner of our terminal. Their leader, Rabbi Kutty Rapp, explained that they wanted to be of service to Jewish travelers on their way to Israel.

I consulted with the manager of El Al's New York operations, Danny Kasten, who agreed, and permission was granted. Thereafter, Rabbi Kutty and his contingent would arrive every day to help travelers don *tefillin*, distribute Shabbat candles, and give out reading material. They did all this with such kindness and warmth that most non-religious travelers reacted positively to them and enjoyed the experience.

As Passover of 1973 approached, Rabbi Kutty asked me if there was a way to send *matzot* from the Rebbe to Chabad *chasidim* in Israel. I again consulted with Danny Kasten, and we decided to send the *matzot* in a first class container, because first class luggage gets unloaded first at the airport. When the *matzot* landed in Israel, the *chasidim* came to pick them up from the ground personnel. And, from that time on, it became a regular event, with a shipment of the Rebbe's *matzot* flown before every Passover to Israel.

Rabbi Kutty reported to the Rebbe what we had done, and the Rebbe requested to meet with us to thank us for our assistance. We eagerly accepted the offer of an audience with the Rebbe which took place in the Hebrew month of Tammuz, 1974.

Danny and I were admitted into the Rebbe's office at around 2 a.m. and were greeted warmly. The Rebbe shook our hands and invited us to sit down; the conversation then proceeded in Hebrew.

After thanking us for our assistance with Chabad activities at the airport, the Rebbe began to ask us about our jobs. I spoke about the serious challenges those of us working in security face, dealing with the constant threat of hijackers and bombs, and I explained our security protocols and inspections procedures. The Rebbe listened with great



curiosity and asked me pointed questions which showed that he was familiar with the details of our work.

Danny informed the Rebbe that a second synagogue would soon be opening at the El Al terminal at JFK, so each floor of the terminal would have its own place for people to pray. This news seemed to please the Rebbe who said that when two similar shops open close to each, they are in competition, but this is not the case with synagogues - the more the better.

Danny also asked the Rebbe if he thought it was important for Jews to fly with El Al because he wanted to secure more business from the Rebbe's followers. The Rebbe answered that Jews should always support other Jews. Beyond that, he expressed the opinion that our airline was very careful with matters of security and kosher food.

In this context, I couldn't help but ask the Rebbe why he never visited Israel. He responded that, as far as visiting, he could not do so and then return to the United States because leaving the Land of Israel is prohibited by Jewish law in many situations. As far as settling there permanently, it would be impossible for him to run

*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

Chabad's extensive global network from Israel.

Our meeting with the Rebbe took place less than a year after the Yom Kippur War, and the conversation turned to this subject. We asked the Rebbe his opinion of the war and what he thought the State of Israel should do now.

In his answer, the Rebbe demonstrated great knowledge of the military details of the war. He knew exactly what occurred, where it occurred, and when. I remember being surprised by the degree of his familiarity. He expressed the opinion that the IDF stopped fighting too early and should have gone on to take control of more land from the enemy countries — at least for a few hours — to create a deterrent for the future. He also mentioned General Ariel Sharon by name and spoke favorably about his command of the forces, mentioning that it had been a mistake not to allow Sharon to proceed as he wanted.

As the conversation continued, Rabbi Binyomin Klein, the Rebbe's secretary, opened the door and pointed at the clock, signaling to us that it was very late. I said to the Rebbe, "It is time for us to leave."

The Rebbe looked at me. "Pinchas, what are we speaking about right now?" he asked.

"The Yom Kippur War," I answered.

"Can you leave in the middle of a war?"

"No, you can't leave in the middle of a war."

"Right. So don't worry, he will wait."

And so we continued our discussion until the secretary came in again and urged us to finish. As we thanked the Rebbe for his time and were heading for the door, he said, "One minute, don't you need a blessing?"

"Of course I want a blessing," I responded, "I would be very happy if the Rebbe would bless me." At that time my wife and I had been married for five years but were childless, so I asked the Rebbe for a blessing for children, mentioning that we'd love to have a girl. The Rebbe asked for my wife's name and her mother's name and wrote it all down.

I do not come from a religious background and I did not really believe in blessings, but just a month after my visit, we found that my wife was pregnant! Of course, I told Rabbi Kutty about it, and he conveyed the good news to the Rebbe. Subsequently a letter came from the Rebbe with more blessings, and another after the birth of our daughter Gali.

As a result of these events, my relationship with Rabbi Kutty became even stronger, and I was privileged to visit the Chabad Headquarters many more times during the four-and-a-half years that I was stationed in New York. I would come every time I heard that an event was

taking place, and I always enjoyed watching the special connection between the Rebbe and his *chasidim* — the awe, respect and admiration that they had for him.

In my eyes, the Rebbe was a model of Jewish leadership. He didn't live in a bubble apart from the world, but made a point of keeping up with current events, technological advances, cultural trends and social issues. He was a practical man, but also a spiritual man gifted with amazing powers. When meeting him, I had a sense of being embraced by his inner peace. I can only say that I miss him very much.

*Mr. Pinchas Perry has worked for the security department of El Al and as a film producer. He was interviewed in his home in Ramat Poleg, Netanya, in March of 2013.*

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This week in...

> **5718 — 1958**, during a special Shabbat at the *yeshiva* in 770 — several students were celebrating their *oifrufs* before their weddings — the Rebbe explained that the time before one's wedding, and certainly the day of the wedding, should be utilized by the groom and bride for holy pursuits. As one's marriage is the foundation of their future life, it is worth every effort to ensure that the foundation is deeply rooted.<sup>1</sup> 3  
*Tammuz*

1. Torat Menachem vol. 23 page 111



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