

HERE'S my STORY

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TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

MRS. CHAYA HECHT



My parents were Gerer *chasidim* from Poland who immigrated to Williamsburg, Brooklyn. That is where my father, Rabbi Chanoch Henech Rosenfeld, befriended a neighbor of ours, Rabbi Mordechai Groner, who was a Lubavitcher. And this eventually led to our entire family becoming Lubavitcher *chasidim*.

There came a time in the late 1940s when I was working for the Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education, which was headed by Rabbi J.J. Hecht, a prominent Chabad rabbi. And he decided that I would make a good wife for his brother Peretz.

We got married in 1949, and shortly before the wedding we came to get a blessing from the Rebbe — this was the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, who was wheelchair bound due to the injuries he suffered in a Soviet prison. I remember that he said to me in Yiddish, "A bride can ask for all good things under the wedding canopy, so G-d should give you the wisdom to know what to ask for, and whatever you ask for should be fulfilled." I remember that, because of his condition, he could barely speak. He had to struggle to express himself and that just broke my heart, so I stood

there crying and crying and crying.

That was my encounter with the Previous Rebbe, who passed away a year later, and in 1951, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, his son-in-law, took over the leadership of Chabad as the Rebbe.

After being married for four years, we still had no children, and I came to ask for the Rebbe's blessing. He said to me, "Did my father-in-law know about this situation?" I said that he did. "Then do what he advised."

The Previous Rebbe had recommended that I go into a hospital and undergo various tests to find out why I couldn't conceive. I never did that, but now I did. And I became pregnant — news which my husband joyfully reported to the Rebbe.

"How is she doing?" the Rebbe wanted to know. "She is doing fine," my husband replied. "She is shopping, she's traveling on buses, she's washing the kitchen floor, she's doing all the things a good housewife has to do."

The Rebbe listened carefully to my husband and then had his secretary call me to say, "The Rebbe doesn't want you traveling on buses right now. And he doesn't want you to wash the floor anymore." He was so concerned for me, for my health, now that I was pregnant at last. In fact, he had the secretary call several times to make sure I was taking care of myself.

This just goes to show you how much the Rebbe cared about every little incident in the lives of his *chasidim*, and that how he was like a father to all of us.

Later, when I was pregnant another time, the doctors told me that I was past due and the birth would have to be induced. I wasn't sure if this was the right course, so I asked the Rebbe. He said, "What's the problem? G-d is still waiting!"

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 1,400 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. Please share any corrections, comments and suggestions. mystory@jemedi.org

The baby was born normally a month past the due date, and I understood that sometimes it's better not to listen to the doctors but to listen to the Rebbe. So what if the baby was taking its time — that only meant that G-d was waiting, so we had to wait too.

After I was already a mother of several young children, I recall him asking me, "Do you pray every day?" I answered that I say the *Shema* every day and also the Morning Blessings, but I do not recite the entire prayer service because I am busy caring for my children. "I need to be in tune with them so I don't have any time when I can concentrate properly on prayers."

He said, "If you would ask me if you should pray, then I would tell you that yes, you should pray every day, from beginning to end. The best way is to do it a little bit at a time, and to add more each day until you are able to finish all the prayers. Do that every day. Don't be concerned with the children when you are praying — find somebody to watch them for that amount of time."

Hearing his words, I said to myself, "This is going to be my new life and my new outlook." And, from then on, I made sure I prayed every day. And this had a strong impact on my life.

The Rebbe also had a very strong impact on my husband's life.

You have to understand that my husband was a loyal *chasid* — he was close to the Rebbe in a spiritual way — but he never wanted to bother the Rebbe with mundane matters. He always said "The Rebbe is too busy; he's got big things to think about. You don't go to him with minor details about this or that."

He worked part-time as a teacher in the Tomchei Temimim *yeshivah*, but we needed more income and so, finally, he asked the Rebbe if it was okay for him to learn how to be a printer.

The Rebbe approved and my husband went to learn all the aspects of printing. He was good at it and was offered a partnership in a printing shop. Again, the Rebbe approved. But then the partnership broke up. My husband asked the Rebbe, "So what do I do now?" The Rebbe said, "You buy out the other partner. Now you be the one to own the partnership."

That was a big thing for my husband — to be the owner and to run everything — but he succeeded at it. And in all the years that he was in business, he would say, "I can feel the Rebbe with me every single day that I am on the job. I can see him sending me customers. I can feel him working along with me."

Even after he retired, he would never cease to be amazed. "Where did it come from that I should become a printer? What did I know about it? And yet I was good at it and I loved it. I got an account with one of the biggest organizations and they were impressed with my work. But I felt that it was the Rebbe's blessing that kept me going throughout all the years I was in business."

I could say the same thing. I felt that the Rebbe always had me in mind. He made sure I was taking care of myself physically and then also spiritually, when he urged me to pray every day and be connected to Hashem. He set my life in front of me. And that kept me going through all the years that I've been on this earth. I will never forget the times that I had the privilege of speaking with him. None of that has left me. Not to this day.

Mrs. Chaya Hecht (1931-2017) lived in Brooklyn, New York and worked as a preschool teacher for over fifty years. She was interviewed in February of 2015.

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

This week in....

> **5720-1960**, in a letter to an Israeli officer, the Rebbe complimented the looks of the pocket size Tanachs that the army gave to their soldiers and mentioned that often people judge the contents of a book by its external appearance. He also observed that the books were of poor quality and, if used frequently, would tear. The Rebbe urged him to print them with stronger binding in the future. ¹ 25 Tevet

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 19 page 157

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