

HERE'S my STORY

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A LETTER FOR YOU

RABBI SHMUEL GREISMAN

On April 5, 1981 — the 11th day of the Hebrew month of Nissan — the Rebbe celebrated his 79th birthday with a *farbrengen* at which he spoke about *Tzivos Hashem* ("Army of G-d"), a children's organization he had founded six months prior. The mission of this organization, the Rebbe said, was to motivate children to do good deeds in order to hasten the coming of the Mashiach. But since this "Army of G-d" was spread all over the world, the best way to bring all the children together — to achieve true unity — was through Torah.

Therefore, the Rebbe suggested that a special Torah scroll be written in which only children would have the privilege of buying a letter. They would be united through this Torah scroll — the Children's Torah Scroll.

Not only would this project unite the children, it would bring about a special blessing for the Jewish people as a whole, at a time when they needed it most.

The Rebbe specified that the writing of this Torah scroll should begin immediately and that it should be done in *Eretz Yisrael* — the land which is constantly watched over by G-d — and particularly in Jerusalem, the city of unity which, unlike the rest of the Holy Land, was never divided among the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Furthermore, it should be written in the historic Chabad synagogue, which is located in the oldest part of Jerusalem and named after the third Chabad Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek.

Immediately thereafter, I was appointed to lead this campaign and received specific instructions from the Rebbe.

All Jewish children under Bar/Bat Mitzvah age would be eligible to buy a letter for the token price of one dollar (or the equivalent in their country's currency). Adults could sign up very young children, but if they were old enough to fill out the registration form, the Rebbe wanted them to do it themselves.



Rabbi Greisman holding the fifth children's Torah scroll after it was completed in 2012

The Rebbe even described a child as he fills out the form, rolling up his sleeves, sticking his tongue out between his teeth as he labors with his pencil to write his name.

It was important for each child's donation to be properly acknowledged, the Rebbe said, but he didn't want a standard receipt to go out. He wanted the children to receive a beautiful certificate, which featured in its four corners drawings of holy sites in Israel — specifically the Western Wall, Rachel's tomb, the Cave of the Patriarchs, and the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

Also, the Rebbe was very sensitive to the feelings of children. "The custom in the writing of a Torah scroll is that a person is told which letter he purchased in which particular verse... even so, let us not do that," he directed. "Just tell the children which Torah portion their letter is in."

His explained that, although all the letters in a Torah scroll are equally holy — and if even one letter is missing, no matter which one, whether a letter in G-d's name or in a word with a negative connotation, the Torah cannot be

continued on reverse



**EVENTS. IDEAS.
 PERSONALITIES.**

Marking 70 years from the anniversary of the Rebbe's leadership, each week, JEM will be focusing on one event, idea or personality in the Rebbe's life.



continued from reverse

used — we do not want any child to feel that his or her letter is somehow less valuable than someone else's.

The Rebbe also instructed that each child's letter should not be chosen by anyone in the office, but by lottery. So that there would be random connection between the child and the letter. That letter is important, the Rebbe said, because it becomes a vehicle to bring down G-d's blessings for that child.

The importance of this Children's Torah Scroll was made even more clear when the Rebbe spoke at a *farbrengen* following Lag B'Omer:

"We now live in a world rent with confusion and turmoil, confronted by unpredicted situations and unprecedented turmoil," he said. "Nowadays a lone, deranged or frustrated individual who has access to a destructive button or trigger can upset an entire country and even catapult an entire world into an upheaval such as never witnessed before in the history of mankind."

The Rebbe went on to say that to avert a catastrophe, "we must do something." That something is to take action to ensure that there is peace and unity among Jews: "Which *mitzvah* can unite all Jews in an ongoing way?" the Rebbe asked, answering, "The *mitzvah* to write a Torah scroll ... especially a Torah scroll written on behalf of innocent children."

The Rebbe urged that all *chasidim* get to work informing Jewish children the world over of this project and signing them up for a letter in the Children's Torah Scroll. Subsequently, the Rebbe explained that there were two days on the Hebrew calendar which were specifically connected to children — Lag B'Omer and Shavuot. Therefore, it was especially important to sign up as many children as possible during this time period.

From the very beginning the Rebbe kept careful count of how many letters had been purchased. Every week, I received a call from Rabbi Binyomin Klein, the Rebbe's secretary asking how many new registration forms had come in. I recall that, initially, the Rebbe was not pleased. When I turned in the first tally, the Rebbe wanted to know why we hadn't accomplished more. "*Dos iz mit dem gantz'n shturem?! — This is all you have accomplished after all the commotion?! —*"

Two days before the holiday of Shavuot, the Rebbe spoke at a *farbrengen* on Shabbat and repeated that there is a threat in the world that could bring chaos and destruction. Something had to be done quickly, he stressed, and he again pointed to the Children's Torah Scroll as the means to avert the danger. "Not even one child should be overlooked," he directed.

On the eve of Shavuot — Sunday, June 7, 1981 — what the Rebbe was talking about became clear. That day the Israelis bombed the nuclear reactor in Iraq. Although the

mission was fraught with tremendous danger, miraculously it succeeded in disabling the ability of Saddam Hussein — the Iraqi dictator — to wage a nuclear war.

When the news came out about the Israeli operation, everyone understood that the Rebbe's campaign for the Children's Torah Scroll was connected to this threat to the Jewish people and now that threat had been thwarted.

The Children's Torah Scroll was set to be completed for the *yahrzeit* of the Rebbe's father on the 20th day of the Hebrew month of Av. The Rebbe appointed Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dworkin of Crown Heights as his personal representative to write the final letter in the Torah on his behalf. And since a second Torah scroll would be needed for more children to buy letters, Rabbi Dworkin was also directed to write the first letter in that scroll as well.

People from all over came to Jerusalem for the completion ceremony which took place at the Tzemach Tzedek synagogue. From there everyone went down to the Western Wall, where a huge crowd filled the plaza to capacity. Afterwards, we went back to the synagogue for the celebration with singing and dancing.

And then the campaign for the second Torah scroll began.

Thus far, six Children's Torah Scrolls have been written. These six scrolls are housed in the Tzemach Tzedek synagogue where the seventh is now being written. In total, they represent the participation of more than two million children.

Rabbi Shmuel Greisman, who serves as a Chabad emissary in Jerusalem, Israel, has led the campaign of Children's Torah Scrolls (www.kidstorah.org) since 1981. He was interviewed in February of 2015.

This week in....

לע"נ ר' ישראל יעקב וזוגתו מרת קריינא ע"ה לאקשין

> **5740 - 1980**, Rabbi Nochum Dov Brayer, grandson of the late Boyaner Rebbe, approached the Rebbe and introduced himself. The Rebbe invited the twenty-one year old man into his office for a meeting, after which the Rebbe escorted him out — something which was reserved for important dignitaries. The Rebbe attempted to persuade him to succeed his grandfather who had passed away in 1971, explaining that it is his responsibility to assure the Boyaner dynasty not be lost. Ultimately he accepted the position in 1985. 22 Iyar

MY ENCOUNTER
with the **REBBE**

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