

HERE'S my STORY

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SEPARATION ANXIETY

RABBI YAAKOV LIEDER



Although I grew up in a religious family in Jerusalem, I did not have any real connection to Chabad until my sister married a Lubavitcher. This led me, in 1974, to the Chabad yeshivah in Kfar Chabad and eighteen months later to meeting the Rebbe in Brooklyn, New York.

When that happened, I felt I had discovered a treasure, and I decided to stay in New York for the rest of my life. I took a job as a teacher with the elementary school, Oholei Torah, and I felt I had the best of all worlds — I was close to the Rebbe, and since I was teaching in a Chabad school, I felt that I was working as his emissary.

When it came time to get married, my future wife, Toby, told me on our first date that she intended to go out into the world with her husband, who would serve as a Chabad emissary. "Wait a minute," I said, "I am an emissary already — right here in Brooklyn." But that's not how she saw it.

This created a dilemma. In fact, her father asked the Rebbe if we should continue seeing each other, but the Rebbe just responded, "It's up to the two of them."

That is when I hit on an idea to win her over, because I already knew that I wanted to marry Toby. I told her, "You know what — when the time comes, let's ask the Rebbe and whatever he tells us to do, we will do." She agreed. "That's good enough for me," she said and, after meeting a few more times, we were engaged.

A week after we got married in March of 1977, we wrote to the Rebbe with this question, but as I sent off the letter, I was begging the Rebbe in my heart to let me stay where I was — in my teaching post at Oholei Torah, where I loved working with the kids, and where I was close to him.

The Rebbe agreed. I was so happy! My wife was less so, but of course she accepted the Rebbe's decision.

A year later, she proposed that we should write again, but I objected. "The Rebbe already answered us," I insisted. But because this was so important to her, I agreed to write, and we got the same answer as before.

So far so good, I thought.

But, in the third year, while all of my friends got the Rebbe's blessings to buy homes in Crown Heights, I did not, and I realized that I was likely to be sent somewhere soon. I hoped it would be just another neighborhood in Brooklyn — like Flatbush or Borough Park — so that I would not go far, but my wife felt that truly serving as an emissary involved self-sacrifice.

Shortly thereafter, I met one of the emissaries to Sydney, Australia, and he asked if I knew somebody who could take over as the principal of the Chabad school there. Without thinking, I said, "Maybe me."

Even though I had proposed this, I really did not want to go. But once I made the suggestion, he passed on my name to Sydney, and now I had to decide. Trying to squirm out of it, I said that I had to consult with the

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.



Rebbe. I was really not prepared to go that far away, so I wrote to the Rebbe merely asking if I should "look into" this offer, assuming that he would tell me to remain in Brooklyn as he did before. But this time, the Rebbe responded, "Yes, look into it."

I got a shock from that answer, but my wife said, "A deal is a deal — if that's what the Rebbe said, that's what we need to do."

So I did look into it, and then wrote the Rebbe that I had come up with five different possible places where I might serve, ending — with no small amount of self-effacing obeisance — "Do with me as you wish."

But I got no answer. Meanwhile, my school in Crown Heights was pressuring me to sign a contract for the next year, and Rabbi Pinchus Feldman, who led Chabad in Sydney, was pressuring me to make up my mind because they needed a principal. So after four weeks of waiting, I asked Rabbi Leibel Groner, the Rebbe's secretary, to check on it, and what I learned was that when Rabbi Groner put my letter on top of the mail pile, the Rebbe promptly moved it to the bottom.

Meanwhile, when Rabbi Feldman inquired whether he should look for somebody else, all the Rebbe answered was, "I have their letter."

Not knowing what to make of all this, I asked my spiritual mentor for advice, and he rebuked me: "Are you playing games? You asked the Rebbe if you should look into Australia, and the Rebbe answered that you should. But instead of reporting on what you found out, you sent the Rebbe a letter with five places. You want to Rebbe to choose for you? You have to make a decision. The Rebbe is not going to tell you exactly what to do. He will guide you, he will advise you, but you have to take the lead."

The next morning, my wife and I sat down and wrote the Rebbe that we were prepared to accept the Sydney offer, and we were asking for his blessing. Within ten minutes, we had his answer and his blessing along with two Australian dollars for us to give to charity once we reached our destination.

For me, this entire experience proved a tremendous lesson for life. The Rebbe wanted me to be a leader – to make the right choices and the right decisions and not expect him to tell me what to do at every step. This

lesson has guided me for all the time that I have been serving as an emissary.

When we were ready to ship out, we came to see the Rebbe with our children, and I told him how painful it was for me to leave. In response, the Rebbe showered us with so many blessings that my attitude changed completely.

When I left, I was firing on all cylinders — I was flying. And I did not stop; I did not turn back.

As we prepared to go, people asked me, "Have to ever been to Australia?"

I answered, "No."

"Do have any idea what it's like?"

"No."

"But you are taking your wife and three children and going to the other side of the world?"

"Yeah."

I had the self-confidence to do this because I knew I could count on the Rebbe to make sure it would be alright. Once I made my decision, once I took a stand, the Rebbe would have my back all the way.

Since 1981, Rabbi Yaakov Lieder and his wife Toby have served as Chabad emissaries in Sydney, Australia. The author of 14 Kids, No Theories, he presently directs the Jewish Family Centre for families struggling with relationship and child-rearing issues. He was interviewed in July of 2016.

This week in....

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

> **5727 - 1967**, Rabbi Hodakov summoned a few students to his office and informed them that the Rebbe wanted them to go to Melbourne, Australia, to join and reinforce the local Chabad *yeshiva* for a period of two years. The students were asked to confirm whether they willingly accept the task, have their parents' permission, and have been seen by a doctor who found them to be in good health. After they submitted their answers to these questions, the Rebbe sent out word that he would be holding a *farbrengen* in their honor.¹ 7 Adar I

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 24 page 11

MY ENCOUNTER
with the **REBBE**

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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בת רייכל
וחי' מושקא בת מנוחה ראשא וברוך שלמה שלום בן
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