

HERE'S my STORY

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DON'T REPEAT AFTER ME

RABBI TUVIA BLAU

As someone who came to Chabad from the zealous Jerusalemite sector of religious Orthodoxy, and who stayed in close contact with the general *haredi* community in Israel, I felt there was a lack of literature presenting the school of Chabad philosophy in a manner that those communities could appreciate. For a time, there was *Bitaon Chabad*, a quarterly journal that the Chabad Youth Organization in Israel began publishing in 1952, but it ceased publication after nineteen issues.

So, when I traveled to New York in 1962 for my first visit to the Rebbe, I raised the subject during my private audience with him. In providing some background for the journal's demise, the Rebbe mentioned the Hebrew translated version of his Yiddish talks that were published in *Bitaon Chabad*. "The drafts of some of the translations that came here had to be completely reworked," he said, "and there wasn't any time for that. If you accept responsibility for the translation, you can start editing *Bitaon Chabad*." He instructed me to include several others in the work of writing and editing the journal, mentioning Rabbi Chanoch Glitzenstein and Rabbi Adin Even-Yisrael Steinsaltz by name.

And so *Bitaon Chabad* once again saw the light of day, and for our first issue, I published an overview of my visit to the Rebbe's court. The entire publication, my travel diary included, was reviewed by the Rebbe, who made a number of corrections and substantive edits.

Actually, I already started my work translating the Rebbe's teachings while I was still in New York. Twice every year — before the High Holidays and Passover — the Rebbe used to send an open letter addressed to "the sons and daughters of Israel, wherever they may be." These letters, originally penned in Yiddish, were translated into English and Hebrew, and distributed all over, including in the pages of the Israeli and American newspapers.

Rabbi Uriel Zimmer, who for years had been in charge of the Hebrew translation of these letters, passed away in 1961. So, after my audience with the Rebbe, his secretary



Rabbi Leibel Groner approached me with the latest letter. "The Rebbe has asked that you translate this into Hebrew," he said. I would go on to translate nearly all of those open letters, which were eventually compiled into the two volumes of *Igrot Melech*.

Before the age of the fax — never mind email — the process for preparing these letters was quite complicated. A single copy of the original Yiddish letter would be mailed to Israel, and then someone traveling back to the US would bring my translation back to the Rebbe. Once the Rebbe had edited it, a secretary would dictate his corrections over the phone to us. Then the draft would be typeset and prepared for publication.

The Rebbe's corrections and glosses were insightful and interesting, and extremely meticulous. His attention to detail can be seen in the extensive footnotes and sources accompanying the letters, which would at times refer to even minor points like the date at the top of the page, or the blessing with which the Rebbe signed off.

Additionally, after that first trip in 1962, I started translating the Rebbe's talks for a weekly publication. After a year's worth of talks, we asked the Rebbe about proceeding with

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.



a second cycle, and he gave his approval, but with a caveat: "as long as it isn't a word-for-word translation."

This is a very important instruction. When dealing with holy Torah teachings, there is a tendency to try to remain faithful to each and every word of the original, even as they are translated to a new language. But the Rebbe did not believe this was the appropriate approach. When translating, one must take into account the style of the new language, as well as the target audience for whom the translation is intended. When one remains attached to the original words at all costs, the presentation of the message is bound to be compromised. The main thing is preserving the content and presenting it faithfully, but without being too particular with the wording.

In 1964, after the passing of his mother, Rebbetzin Chana, the Rebbe began a series of discussions on the glosses of Rashi, the famous biblical commentator. With time, we learned that the Rebbe was charting a new and revolutionary approach to understanding Rashi's commentary, at the heart of which was a principle expressed in several places by Rashi himself: "I come only to explain Scripture's basic meaning." As he delivered evermore talks and analyses, it became apparent that he was identifying and developing a number of rules, or interpretive principles, that guided Rashi's commentary on the Torah. I began summarizing and formulating these rules for myself over the years, and once I had compiled some seven basic rules, I wrote an essay entitled *The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Approach to Rashi's Commentary*, and had it published in the Torah journal *Shma'atin*.

Of course, I also sent the published essay to the Rebbe. Sometime later, I received a directive from the Rebbe's head secretary, Rabbi Hodakov: "Since Divine Providence has led you to this field, and since you have been successful, you should make a pamphlet on the subject of Rashi's Principles."

I began working on this, but as I got deeper into the subject, it became apparent that the Rebbe had developed a truly large number of these rules. The work of compilation and formulation began to drag on for years, not least because I was also busy with other things. I began to get various messages from the Rebbe spurring me on.

One time, I received a message from Rabbi Hodakov, the Rebbe's secretary, referring to Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the Code of Jewish Law. Tradition has it that in his generation, there were three rabbis who were able to write the code. Ultimately, however, it was Rabbi Yosef Karo who was selected, from On High, with the honor of compiling it, instead of the others.

I got the hint: If I didn't hurry up and release the book, the project would be given to someone else. After making a

special effort, the first edition of *Rashi's Principles* was published in time for the Rebbe's birthday in 1980. After sending a copy to the Rebbe, I was fortunate to receive a letter from him containing some wonderfully encouraging language — "there is wisdom (and considerable work) here," he complimented me. And he expressed his wish that I go on to release a second and third edition.

Indeed, eleven years later, over the course of which the Rebbe continued to expound regularly on the commentary of Rashi, a second edition appeared. And then, in 2018, a third, expanded edition of *Rashi's Principles* appeared, enumerating no less than 620 interpretative rules!

Over the past sixty years, Rabbi Tuvia Blau has held many senior positions in Chabad organizations in Israel as an educator, author and community leader. He was interviewed in August of 2011 and in May of 2017.

This week in....

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

> **5720-1960**, Rabbi Yisroel Leibov, the chairman of the Chabad Youth Organization in Israel, wrote to the Rebbe about his concern of missing the opportunity to lead the communal prayers and recite *kaddish* after his mother's passing, as his responsibilities require him to travel. The Rebbe responded: "Obviously the [departed] soul will not derive pleasure if it comes with the cost of decreasing Jewish education.... You should not reduce your holy work." Instead, the Rebbe suggested that he hire someone to say *kaddish* on his behalf whenever he was not able to recite it himself. ¹
9 Iyar

> **5724-1964**, when a school that was sponsored by the Rebbe, in his brother's memory, was about to be opened in Kiryat Ono, Israel, the Rebbe appointed Rabbi Shmuel Chefer to be his representative at the event. "May it be G-d's will," the Rebbe wrote to the head of the city council, "that the laying of the cornerstone be in a good and auspicious time ... and that in this building, Jewish children will be educated according to the instruction of our eternal and holy Torah." ²
9 Iyar

1. *Igrot Kodesh* vol. 19 page 290

2. *Here's My Story* issue 331; *Igrot Kodesh* vol. 23 page 272

In loving memory of our *zayda*

Reb **BenZion Rader**

ר' בן ציון בן יהודה לייב ריידער ע"ה

Who passed away on the 10th Iyar 5777.

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