

HERE'S my STORY

Generously
sponsored
by the



Crain-Maling
Foundation

AUNT NECHAMA AND HER 1,500 CHILDREN

RABBI MOSHIACH CHUDAITOV

I was born in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in 1939. We lived in a courtyard with our extended family and several Lubavitcher families, including those of Reb Moshe Nisselevitch and, for a while, Reb Berel Zaltzman. It was Reb Berel, with his warmth, who inspired me to become a Chabad *chasid* myself. He introduced me to his family and to the other young *chasidim* who made up the local community, and who in turn became my life-long friends. Samarkand was fortunate to have these people living there, as well as several other venerable figures a generation or two older than us.

Our house was located in the newer part of the city, near the train station. My father, Refoel, was a successful businessman and a major community activist. During the war years, hundreds of Jewish refugees, among them Russian Lubavitchers, stayed in our home. They had come to Samarkand to escape Hitler, and my father helped them find work and a place to live.

Living in the Soviet Union, Judaism had to be practiced underground. But even in those bitter times, my father made sure to have a *melamed*, a private teacher, who taught Torah to my older brothers and me.

Reb Moshe Nisselevich was the life force of Samarkand. Along with a group of young men, he founded the Chamah organization in 1954, and went on to set up a network of informal, underground schools in basements and other hidden places, so that Jewish children would grow up to be Torah *yidden* even in the Soviet spiritual desert.

Chamah's work wasn't only spiritual: In the winter, the organization distributed coal to the poor, and before every holiday, I remember going with my father to the market to buy sacks of rice and potatoes to distribute. As a young man, I was very inspired by all of this, and eventually became a member of Chamah myself.

We all knew of people who had spent ten, even twenty years in Soviet prisons for doing the kind of work Chamah did. We knew exactly how risky it was. So Reb Moshe thoroughly interviewed people before they could be trusted to join in this dangerous work.



Moshiach Chudaitov (front, center) with his fellow young activists in Samarkand in the 1960s.

Among other things, I would teach Jewish children in several different houses. We had close to one hundred teachers in the city and surrounding villages, and at one point we had 1,500 students. Each teacher only knew the details that pertained to his own class. The policy was to not know what you don't have to know. The authorities would torture a person to extract information, but what one doesn't know, one can't tell.

The Rebbe paid close attention to all of this, and was always asking about the work of Chamah, but in code: He referred to us as "*Mumme Nechama* — Aunt Nechama" as if it were a woman's name. He gave us guidance and blessings, through various channels. He might send a message with someone visiting Moscow, and we would reply through the same route.

When we finally were able to leave the Soviet Union in 1971 and arrived in Israel, the Rebbe encouraged us to carry on the work of Chamah, helping Russian Jews in Israel and those that were left in the Soviet Union. As always, Reb Moshe Nisselevich had big plans, and over the years he arranged to bring thousands of Russian youths to *yeshivot*. The Rebbe said that if the Lubavitch *yeshivot* couldn't accept

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

all of them, the priority was for them to go to a religious educational institution of any kind.

But we weren't in Israel for long. We had just gotten an apartment in Nachlat Har Chabad and bought a few appliances, when my wife told me, "We must go to the Rebbe."

Back in Russia, we had been dreaming all our lives of seeing the Rebbe in person. So when we finally arrived for Pesach of 1972, and saw the Rebbe warmly smiling at us, the feeling was indescribable. The Rebbe showed great affection to Jews who came from Russia, and for us, after so many years of life in the underground, being in the Rebbe's presence was overwhelming.

The main reason for our visit, however, was that we had already been married for six years, and hadn't been blessed with children yet. While in Russia, we had consulted several prominent doctors in Moscow, Leningrad and Tashkent to see if they could help us. One doctor told my wife, "Hair will grow on the palm of my hand before you have children."

But at our private audience, the Rebbe gave us his blessing for children, and told us that his secretary Rabbi Hodakov will give us a recommendation for a doctor. The Rebbe also asked about my parents. When they eventually came to New York that Shavuot, the Rebbe paid extra attention to my father at the public *farbrengens*. He invited my father to say *l'chaim*, and asked him to sing the traditional Bukharian song, *Atem Shalom*.

My father then asked the Rebbe for a blessing that his son — referring to me — should have children.

"What's his name?" asked the Rebbe.

"Moshiach."

In the middle of the *farbrengen*, the Rebbe called out, "Where is Moshiach?"

The people who heard this, assumed the Rebbe was referring to Moshiach, the long-awaited redeemer of the Jewish people. But then the Rebbe gave a big smile, and said, "I was referring to Mashiach son of Refoel — although it's about time Mashiach son of David arrived!"

So the Rebbe had given us his blessing, and then he added an additional blessing to my father. Thank G-d, we didn't have to wait: Before long, my wife, Bassi, was expecting our first child.

Her due date — which was just about nine months after the *farbrengen* when my father had asked for a blessing — came and went, and we began to get concerned. One day, Rabbi Hodakov saw me in 770 and told me that the Rebbe was asking about us. He knew that my wife was expecting but he hadn't heard any news from us. The Rebbe wanted to know what was going on. Just imagine: The Rebbe had the whole world on his shoulders, and here he was sending Rabbi Hodakov to ask us about our unborn child!

The very next day my wife gave birth to our daughter, Breindi, who now has a family of her own, may they be well. Eventually, we had four sons and another daughter, thank G-d.

In loving memory of
Leah Feiga bas Meyer

7th *yahrzeit*, 15 Iyar

By **Simcha Pollard**

You can help us record more testimonies by dedicating future editions of *Here's My Story*

On that trip to New York, Ezras Achim, an organization that had provided significant financial support for Chamah and its underground activities, as part of its broader mission of supporting Jews in the Soviet Union, approached me with an offer to join their fundraising work. The Rebbe advised me to accept the job and gave me his blessing. Not long after, the Ezras Achim leadership helped me and my close friends from Samarkand, Rabbi Hillel Zaltzman and Rabbi Binyomin Malachovski, establish the Chamah office in New York.

Despite being new immigrants who didn't speak English, with much hard work, and with G-d's help, we succeeded in building Chamah into an international organization, helping Jews in Israel, Russia and the United States. I think of it as yet another one of the Rebbe's miracles.

Rabbi Moshiach Chudaitov is the executive vice president of Chamah. He resides in New York, where he was interviewed in July of 2013.

This week in....

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

> **5713-1953**, the Rebbe addressed 500 children — students of Chabad's network of schools — who had come from nearby cities to the courtyard of 770. In his talk, the Rebbe spoke about the lessons of Lag B'omer and encouraged the youngsters to study Torah with passion and a spirit of friendship. Later in the day, the Rebbe addressed the *yeshiva* students, beginning by saying that when he was talking to young children, he had to communicate on a level that they would understand, "but now I will explain a deeper dimension of those concepts ..." ¹
13 Iyar

> **5731-1971**, at a *farbrengen* held on the *yahrzeit* of his brother, Reb Yisroel Aryeh Leib Schneerson, the Rebbe described the heavenly ascent experienced by a soul on the anniversary of its passing. This was the first time the Rebbe publicly referenced his brother's *yahrzeit*, and he spoke of the customs held on a *yahrzeit*, such as saying *l'chaim*, studying Torah and giving charity in memory of the departed. ²
13 Iyar

1. *Torat Menachem* vol. 8 page 148 2. *Torat Menachem* vol 64 page 173

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.

Supported by members of
THE JEM FOUNDATION

ואתה תצוה... להעלות נר תמיד