

HERE'S my STORY

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STARTING AGAIN AT 44

RABBI MICHA PELED

I was born in Fez, Morocco, to the Turgeman clan, a deeply religious family. After the founding of the State of Israel, our family immigrated there and settled in Tiberias.

The '50s were years of severe austerity in Israel, a time of poverty and famine. This allowed the kibbutz movement to recruit new immigrant children with promises of food, education and economic stability, which is what happened with my family. Times were tough, my parents were naive about kibbutz life, and had several children to care for. So when a couple of young men came from a nearby kibbutz and spoke with them, they were persuaded, and reluctantly gave their permission for me to go to a kibbutz. When we separated, my father gave me a prayer book, a *Chumash*, and his blessings.

In the kibbutz, I was the only one leading a religious lifestyle. Gradually, I gave up wearing *tzitzit*, and then my weekday prayers, but I still tried to keep kosher and Shabbat to the best of my ability. When I reached my Bar Mitzvah, and my parents came to the kibbutz for the celebration, my father was shocked to find nary a trace of Jewish practice — there was no synagogue and I had no *tefillin*. He took me straight back to Tiberias with him and for the next two months, from morning till night, he had me shadow our community rabbi, who gave me all the Bar Mitzvah classes I had missed.

Still, after I'd spent two years becoming socially integrated into kibbutz life, my older brother told my parents that it would be unhealthy to tear me away from it now, so they let me return. Back at the kibbutz, my name changed from Machluf to Micha. Then, instead of Turgeman, I adopted the last name "Peled," which was the name of the pre-military civil service youth group I was very involved in.

After the army, I was sent by the Jewish Agency to Vancouver, Canada, which is where I met and married my



Rabbi Micha Peled (seated to the right) with the yeshiva of Miami.

wife, Bracha. Later, we were asked once again to serve as emissaries to western Canada, this time in Calgary, for the JNF (Jewish National Fund). One evening during our mission there, two young men knocked on our door.

"*Shalom Aleichem!*" they announced. "We heard that you are emissaries from Israel."

They introduced themselves as Chabad *chasidim* who had come to Calgary that summer on a mission of their own, looking for fellow Jews, and we ended up whiling away the afternoon in conversation. It was the first time I had seen a Chabad *chasid* up close.

Not long after returning to Israel, I was diagnosed with a severe and malignant melanoma that had spread to my lymph nodes. I was advised to travel to the United States, since the treatment I needed wasn't available in Israel. Already then, we had some devoted friends who wrote to the Rebbe for a blessing.

Since we still had Canadian health insurance, we preferred to first seek treatment back in Vancouver. We spent a few months with Rabbi Yitzchok and Henia Wineberg, 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.



continued from reverse

Chabad emissaries to the city. That is how I got to know his father, Rabbi Yosef Wineberg, a well-known lecturer and fundraiser. From time to time, he would come to visit and I would go back to New York with him to receive a dollar and a blessing from the Rebbe.

In 1989, my doctor in Vancouver recommended that I go to the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, which specialized in treating my illness. When I met Rabbi Avrohom Korf, the director of Chabad in Florida, he offered to hire me to work at the local *yeshivah*. In addition to providing me a job, this meant that I would be medically insured. "Please G-d," he said, "once you're feeling better, I'm sure you will help the *yeshivah* where you can."

And so, between treatments, I began visiting the *yeshivah*, where I was received with warmth and affection. The head of the *yeshivah*, Rabbi Leibel Schapiro, introduced me to the students, had me learn with them, and made sure that I truly became a part of the environment.

Having settled in Miami, I made a trip to New York with my wife, so that I could again pass by the Rebbe as he gave out dollars for charity and to receive his blessings ahead of my next course of treatment. As my condition had become increasingly complicated, this was expected to take five years.

When I told the Rebbe about my association with the Miami *yeshivah*, he remarked, "Do you think you came to Miami only for medical reasons? Know that the real reason you came is to strengthen the *yeshivah*, to have a good influence on the young students, and to strengthen them with your love for life, your passion, your positive spirit, and your optimism."

The Rebbe then gave me a blessing that I would come out of my life-threatening condition in good health.

My meeting with the Rebbe only lasted a few moments. But, despite the long line of people waiting behind me and the pressure from the organizers to keep moving along, as I stood before this *tzaddik* whose eyes penetrated straight into my heart, time seemed to stand still. I felt as though the Rebbe had spoken to me for an hour.

The Rebbe also told me that my treatment wouldn't take the full five years, as a result of my being "busy with the spiritual affairs of the *yeshivah*." Indeed, my treatment finished a little earlier than expected. In the discharge letter my doctor wrote four and a half years later, he noted that my positive attitude had saved my life.

In honor of the birthdays of
Tzipah & Shoshi Wertheimer
28 & 27 Sivan

May Hashem bless you with a year of great
success, materially & spiritually!

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Over the years I spent in the *yeshivah*, I made tremendous progress in my Torah studies. A few years later, with Rabbi Schapiro's encouragement, I even traveled to Israel to be tested for, and then to receive, rabbinical ordination. At one stage, once I had already begun to regain my strength, the Moroccan Jewish community of North Miami Beach asked if I would come to take the place of their rabbi, who had recently left. I was no great Torah scholar, but they wanted my energy and attitude, so I accepted the responsibility and stepped into the role.

After that, and through my contact with Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Israel's Chief Sephardi Rabbi at the time, I took up a position in the Israeli rabbinate. I spent six years as the rabbi of Netiv Hashayara, a coastal agricultural village of Mizrahi Jews, before moving to the hills of Mateh Binyamin, where I have served as the rabbi of Beit Horon ever since.

It was the Rebbe who set me on the path toward the rabbinate when he encouraged me to go back to *yeshivah* at the age of forty-four. On account of my visits to the Rebbe, I came to feel a very close, profound bond with him, and the impact he had on me is indescribable.

Rabbi Micha Peled is the rabbi of Beit Horon in Israel. He was interviewed in his home in April of 2018.

This week in....

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

> **5733-1973**, the Rebbe approved a plan to establish a school in Kfar Chabad for Bukharin students who had emigrated to Israel.¹
26 Sivan

> **5746-1986**, the Rebbe spoke about the newly elected three-member rabbinical court of Crown Heights, describing the unique role that rabbis have "to illuminate their city or neighborhood with the light of Torah ... which brings peace to the world." In conclusion, the Rebbe suggested that a *farbrengen* be held in honor of the new rabbis.²
5 Sivan

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 28 page 245 2. Likkutei Sichot vol. 28 page 255

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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