

HERE'S my STORY

Generously
sponsored
by the



Crain-Maling
Foundation

ENOUGH WITH THE PIZZA!

MR. MEIR SHLOMO JUNIK

I had the great privilege of growing up around the Rebbe. My father escaped Russia together with the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana, and as a result he became close with the Rebbe's family and even worked for them after coming to America.

When I was born, my parents wanted to name me after the Rebbe's maternal grandfather, Rabbi Meir Shlomo Yanovsky, since Rebbetzin Chana didn't have any descendants named after him. So my father asked the Rebbetzin for permission, and she said she would ask her son, the Rebbe, about it. The next day, she came back with the okay, which is how I got the name Meir Shlomo.

The first time I met Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, the Rebbe's wife, was some time after my Bar Mitzvah in 1977, when my parents took our whole family for a visit. As little kids, we were all nervous. The table was set with these beautiful glasses and the Rebbetzin served us Boston cream pie cake, which she always gave to guests, and something to drink. She asked each of us children what we were doing or learning in school and made us all feel very comfortable. This was something that always impressed me about the Rebbetzin: Whenever you walked in there, she was totally focused on you. There might be a phone ringing, but she would give her full attention to the person before her.

Later, my brothers and I would help around the Rebbe's home, as well as that of his brother-in-law, Rabbi Shmaryahu Gurary. As a result, I ended up having many more conversations with the Rebbetzin and spent hours with her on the phone. She would ask about my



Meir Shlomo on the day of his engagement.

family and speak about current affairs in America, Russia or Israel. I remember telling her when President Reagan was shot; in another conversation, she expressed concern about rising anti-Semitism.

She was very knowledgeable and read a lot, so she was really up to date on everything. She was a very strong, bright woman, and when you asked her a question she was always a step ahead. You had to measure your words when you spoke to her, especially since you knew she might repeat things to the Rebbe. But I liked to talk, and maybe ended up speaking too much sometimes.

As a young man, I had a hard time with my studies. Eventually I decided to leave *yeshivah* and start working at an office supply business. At a certain point, I wrote to the Rebbe with some of the concerns I had about making a living. It was 1986, shortly before the 23rd of Elul, which is the *yahrzeit* of my namesake, the Rebbe's grandfather. So, in the note I gave to the Rebbe along with a donation, as is customary when writing petitionary notes, I asked for a blessing in honor of the person I am named after.

The Rebbe had never before spoken publicly about his grandfather, but that Shabbat, which was the day of the *yahrzeit*, he did. He noted that it was a "personal matter," but went on to speak about how his grandfather had the distinction of being a "*yoshev*" in the court of the fourth Rebbe of Chabad, the Rebbe Maharash. The Rebbe explained what this meant: After his marriage, Rabbi Meir Shlomo had settled in Lubavitch for an extended period of time, to sit and study Torah all day, together with a select few exceptional scholars.

continued on reverse

MY ENCOUNTER
with the REBBE

An oral history project dedicated to documenting the life of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. The story is one of thousands recorded in over 1,700 videotaped interviews conducted to date. While we have done our utmost to authenticate these stories, they reflect the listener's recollection and interpretation of the Rebbe's words.



"This isn't just a story from the past," continued the Rebbe, "but a lesson in our days" for young unmarried men, who do not yet need to provide for a family, to devote their entire day to Torah study. Certainly, such a young man should not be struggling to choose between "learning more Torah, or... running to the pizzeria."

I knew that the Rebbe words were addressed to me. On more than one occasion, when speaking with the Rebbetzin, I had mentioned that I was going out to the pizza shop to get something to eat. She had obviously mentioned it to the Rebbe, and he took the opportunity at this *farbrengen* to lovingly set me straight.

The next year, I got engaged, and the Rebbetzin invited me to come by one evening with my future wife. I felt a little uncomfortable, because I knew the Rebbe might come home at that time, so I rushed over and tried to keep the visit short. I mentioned this to her, confessing that I had rushed my fiancé so much that she had forgotten to put on her jewelry. "Well, she's already a gem herself!" the Rebbetzin commented.

When my father notified the Rebbe about my engagement party, the Rebbe remarked that I would "surely recite a *chasidic* discourse" at the celebration. Committing a discourse to memory and publicly reciting it is traditional for Chabad engagement parties. However, since I had already left *yeshivah* by then, I thought it didn't apply to me. Clearly, the Rebbe thought it did.

The next time I spoke to the Rebbetzin on the phone, I brought it up. "I'm busy with work and the wedding preparations," I complained. "But the Rebbe gave me another job. When am I going to have time to do all this?"

She encouraged me, and told me that I could do it, and in the end I pulled it off. The next Sunday, my parents went to see the Rebbe, and he asked how it had gone. After hearing that I had indeed recited the entire discourse, he gave his blessing that it should be "a good beginning."

It was clear how important it was to the Rebbe that *chasidus* should be shared at such celebrations, no matter who you are, and whether or not you are a *yeshivah* student. But the Rebbe had said that this was only the beginning; that meant I had the ability to do even more. I felt compelled to study and memorize more discourses, and I went on to recite another one every day at the week-long wedding celebrations.

On more than one occasion, the Rebbe encouraged me to study Torah on a regular basis, and he always focused on not wasting time. He knew my weak points, as well as where I needed improvements, and with the discourse, he gave me the strength to follow through.

In loving memory of
Rabbi **Moshe Chaim Sapochkinsky** obm

Elul 20, 5774

The night before the wedding, I was standing in the hallway of 770. As the Rebbe walked out of his office to go home, he stopped to wish me *Mazel Tov*. I said that later that night my family and I would be heading out to Montreal, which is where the wedding was going to take place, and he gave his blessings, wishing us a safe trip. The Rebbe turned, went down the stairs and out the door leading to his car in the driveway, with his secretary Rabbi Groner behind him. Then, as he was walking, he suddenly stopped and turned back.

"Meir Shlomo! Meir Shlomo!" Rabbi Groner called out to me. I ran down the stairs, and stood on the last step where the Rebbe was facing me with a big smile. "You probably know," he said while pointing in my direction, "that you're named after my grandfather."

Mr. Meir Shlomo Junik resides in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where he works as a counselor for children with special needs. He was interviewed in November of 2007 and June of 2021.

This week in....

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

> **5729-1969**, following an act of arson committed by an insane Australian Christian in the Al-aqsa mosque — sparking international uproar against Israel — the Rebbe wrote to the Israeli writer and activist Uri Zvi Greenberg. He pointed to an ironic fact: After the liberation of the Kotel, some had advocated for the Kotel and Temple Mount to be designated, not as the sacred remnant of the Holy Temple, but a "historic site," paving the way to an eventual ban on Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount. Yet now, the very individuals who had declared the area "unreligious" were loudly decrying the recent crime as an affront to a Muslim holy site.¹
25 Elul

> **5749-1989**, the Rebbe spoke about his grandfather Rabbi Meir Shlomo Yanovsky in honor of his *yahrzeit*. Over the course of the talk, the Rebbe related that his grandfather had studied in the city of Lubavitch under the Rebbe Maharash before being appointed rabbi of the city of Nikolaev, where he served until his passing in 1933.²
23 Elul

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 26 page 200 2. Torat Menachem 5749 vol. 4 page 354

Supported by members of

THE
JEM FOUNDATION

ואתה תצווה... להעלות נר תמיד