

HERE'S *my* STORY

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DOING GOOD, ONE BASE AT A TIME

RABBI SIMAN-TOV MAGURI-COHEN

While serving as a religious officer in the IDF in the early 1970s, I was privileged to meet Rabbi Yisroel Glitzenstein, one of the Chabad emissaries in Israel. Among his many functions, Rabbi Glitzenstein was tasked with arranging religious services for soldiers and he offered to bring Chabad *chasidim* to IDF bases which were under my responsibility. Of course, I happily accepted his offer.

And so it came to pass that every two or three weeks Rabbi Glitzenstein would send over groups of students from Chabad's Toras Emes *yeshivah* in Jerusalem, to conduct Shabbat services at IDF bases where I would put them up. They would teach Torah and enthusiastically sing and dance with the soldiers.

We especially enjoyed their visits in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, when the army wouldn't let the soldiers go home very often because of security concerns, and the Chabad students made Shabbat very special for everyone.

At a certain point, Rabbi Glitzenstein asked me to submit a report to the Rebbe, so shortly before Purim of 1975, I wrote a letter describing these activities and noting that they left an indelible impression on the soldiers. I also expressed, on behalf of all the officers, our gratitude to the Chabad *chasidim* who took the trouble to regularly visit us and our deep appreciation for their dedication.

Two weeks later I received the Rebbe's reply:

Since this concerns military personnel ... who appreciate the power of action, as our sages said, "Action is the main thing," I am certain that the impressions and feelings described in your letter



will be translated into action and will inspire ... the love of G-d, the love of Torah, and the love of fellow Jews in daily life, in practical actions, in *mitzvot*, and in good deeds.

The Rebbe continued:

In a time of danger ... we must have an organized and swift defense forces with weapons in their hands, and they should be taught war strategies etc., but the foundation of foundations is ... steadfast faith in G-d, for "salvation belongs to the L-rd," as the Torah states: "For the L-rd your G-d goes along in the midst of your camp, to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you."

The Rebbe ended his letter with wishes for a joyous Purim, and thanked me in advance for my "help and assistance" in finding the proper words to convey this message to my friends in the army.

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.



In later years, when I served in the reserves and was stationed in the Sinai, I again worked with Rabbi Glitzenstein to bring Chabad *chasidim* to the soldiers on the front lines. We arranged for a group to fly in before Shabbat, and from the military airstrip we drove them by truck to the various IDF posts, all the way to the Mitla Pass near the Suez Canal. These young men had to weather the desert sands and sleep in tents, yet they vied for the assignment.

After I was discharged from the army at the age of twenty-two, Rabbi Glitzenstein invited me to come to New York to visit with the Rebbe during Tishrei, the month of the High Holidays and Sukkot.

During my stay, I was privileged to receive a dollar from the Rebbe as well as wine from his cup during the *kos shel brachah* ceremony at the close of Simchat Torah. But the highlight came towards the end of my visit, when I was granted a private audience.

I was very excited, and I thought a great deal of what gift I might present to the Rebbe. Since I am a descendant of Yemenite Jewry, I decided to give the Rebbe a copy of *Diwan*, a compilation of songs and liturgical poems by Rabbi Shalom Shabazi, the great 17th century Yemenite scholar and poet.

The Rebbe thanked me for the gift, and after he leafed through it, he asked which of the songs was reportedly sang by the Levites in the Holy Temple. I didn't know the answer but I promised to try to find out. Afterwards I learned that, according to the late Rabbi Amram Korach, a prominent 20th century Yemenite rabbi, there indeed is such a song in the *Diwan*, but I wasn't able to determine exactly which one.

The Rebbe also asked me to send him Rabbi Shalom Shabazi's biography, and I promised to take care of it upon my return to Israel. When I got home, I asked around and was directed to one of the editions of the *Diwan* that included in its preface a review of the author's life. As well, right around the same time, a biography of Rabbi Shalom Shabazi was published, and I made sure to send both of these books to the Rebbe.

During my audience, the Rebbe asked me what I planned to do after returning to Israel, and I told him that I had enrolled in Bar-Ilan University to study law. But the Rebbe had another idea, "It would be better for you to

study in a *yeshivah* and become 'a minister of Torah.'" Those were the words he used.

I was a bit surprised by this turn of events because immediately before my audience a friend of mine had seen the Rebbe, who gave him his blessing to study agriculture in university. However, I had decided beforehand that I would do whatever the Rebbe told me to do, so I accepted his advice and asked him which *yeshivah* he would recommend, but he didn't have a specific one in mind for me. I then told him that my brother-in-law had studied at the Yeshivat HaNegav in Netivot before he was killed in the Yom Kippur War. I thought maybe this *yeshivah* would suit me, and the Rebbe approved.

Upon my return to Israel, I visited Yeshivat HaNegev, and when I told the Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yissachar Meir, that I wanted to enroll on the advice of the Rebbe, he welcomed me with open arms.

That single audience with the Rebbe completely changed the trajectory of my life. Instead of becoming a lawyer, I became a teacher; as a result, I was privileged to instill Torah teachings in the minds of young children. And I feel that the Rebbe gave me all the energy necessary to devote myself to this holy work.

For nearly forty years, Rabbi Siman-Tov Maguri-Cohen taught in schools in Netivot and Jerusalem. He was interviewed in September of 2018.

This week in....

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

> **5720 - 1959**, the Rebbe wrote a letter to someone who had moved to Israel, and at the same time, began to suffer from health and family difficulties. He explained that whenever someone immigrates to a new country, they must acclimate to the new way of life. Thus, after moving to the Holy Land, one must increase their observance of Torah and *mitzvot*.¹ *18 Cheshvan*

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 19 page 49

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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לע"נ
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