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70

HERE'S *my* STORY

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THE PARATROOPER'S BIRTHDAY

MR. EFRAIM KARASIK

Efraim during his tour in Lebanon

I was raised in Kfar Chabad, Israel, in a family of dedicated Lubavitchers. After completing my *yeshivah* studies, I served as a paratrooper in the IDF. This was in 1989, and I was stationed deep in Lebanon, in a place that was swarming with terrorists.

Imagine my astonishment when — just before going out on a dangerous military mission — I called home and heard my father tell me that he had received a telephone call about me from the Rebbe's office in New York. Apparently the Rebbe had wanted to ensure that I would properly celebrate my birthday (which falls on Chanukah) and fulfill all the customary birthday observances.

I knew that two years prior, after the passing of his wife, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, the Rebbe announced the "Birthday Campaign," calling on everyone to use his or her birthday — which is like a personal Rosh Hashanah — as a day of introspection, of taking on good resolutions, and of having a *farbrengen* with friends.

But how did the Rebbe know that my birthday was coming up? It had been nearly two months since I started serving in Lebanon, during which time I hadn't visited home and hadn't written to the Rebbe.

The next day I called home again to discuss what to do regarding my birthday, only to hear my father give me even more astonishing news: The Rebbe's office had called again to say that the Rebbe decided to give me a set of *tefillin* as a present.

Now I was totally shocked. Two phone calls from the Rebbe's office in two days' time! A present from the Rebbe! But why *tefillin*? I already had *tefillin* which my father bought for me at the time of my Bar Mitzvah.

I managed to get a leave close to Chanukah and was able to celebrate my birthday with my family. I also learned that the Rebbe's office had already contacted Rabbi Avraham Krishevsky in Jerusalem and asked him to prepare a set of leather *tefillin* boxes. The Rebbe's office also arranged for a scribe to pen the parchment scrolls which Rabbi Krishevsky then was to place inside the boxes. Once the *tefillin* were complete and ready for use, Rabbi Krishevsky intended to bring them to New York, where he was planning to be for the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the Rebbe's leadership. He assumed that the Rebbe would want to see the gift and forward it to me from his own hand.

When my father found out about all this, he ordered a special velvet bag embroidered with the words, "A gift from the Rebbe to Efraim Karasik, Tevet 5750," and he gave it to Rabbi Krishevsky, so that he could place the *tefillin* inside.

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70 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.
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On the 9th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, 1990, as the Rebbe was distributing dollars for charity, Rabbi Krishevsky presented the *tefillin* to him. After verifying with his secretary, Rabbi Leibel Groner, that Rabbi Krishevsky was in the process of being paid for his work, the Rebbe handed the *tefillin* back to him so they could be forwarded on to me in Israel.

The *tefillin* that Efraim received from the Rebbe

Shortly thereafter, I received the *tefillin*, and I have been putting them on daily ever since.

About a year later, I was in a car accident and injured my left hand. I underwent surgery and it seemed like everything was fine. But after a few months, when I returned for a checkup, it turned out that the bone hadn't healed properly, and another operation was needed. Of course, I wrote to the Rebbe and requested his blessing. The Rebbe's answer was to check my *tefillin*.

When I had them checked, the scribe found a problem with the *tefillin* that I put on my left hand — the very hand that I had injured! There was a small crack in the Hebrew letter *chaf* in the word *yadchah* which means "your hand," and which comes from the verse that reads, "You shall bind them for a sign upon your hand." Obviously, I immediately had that corrected.

When the day for the surgery arrived, I was examined by the head of the department. He wanted to look at my medical records before operating and decided to send me for another x-ray. After looking at the x-ray results, he told me: "No surgery is necessary. Everything is fine. You are free to go!"

Every morning when I put on the Rebbe's *tefillin*, I look at the words that my father had embroidered on the bag, and I ask myself, "What made me so special? What did I do to merit such a gift from the Rebbe?" And I have no idea. As much as I've tried to research this, I haven't yet found a similar case of the Rebbe sending a set of *tefillin* to someone else.

I asked my father if perhaps he had written something unusual to the Rebbe that could have caused this. He denied that he wrote anything unusual — he had merely asked the Rebbe to bless the whole family and mentioned that I was serving in Lebanon. The Rebbe certainly knew how dangerous the situation was over there and had urged all IDF soldiers to put on *tefillin* as a life-saving measure. It's possible that the Rebbe wished to strengthen me spiritually and to give me additional protection.

This thought was in the back of my head for a long time, and a few years ago I discovered something very interesting: At a reunion of all of the soldiers who served in Lebanon with me thirty years ago, I heard mentioned repeatedly that throughout our company's stay in Lebanon — despite all that we went through over there — not one of us was harmed, and we all returned healthy and whole in body and mind.

I don't have an explanation for this, but I do believe there is a connection to the blessing of the Rebbe who, far away in New York, cared about us deeply and prayed for us, ensuring that we leave the war zone unharmed.

Mr. Efraim Karasik currently resides in Bnei Brak, Israel, where he was interviewed in June of 2020.

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By **Reus Chaya Hersh**

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This week in....

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

> **5711 - 1951 ,** in a letter to Rabbi Nissan Nemenov, the Rebbe reiterated his suggestion that each *chasid* commit to memory several of the *chasidic* discourses delivered by the Previous Rebbe, especially Basi L'Gani, the discourse that was published on the day of his passing.[1] *5 Teves*

1. Igrot Kodesh vol. 4 page 104

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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