

Introduction

My Story 2: Lives Changed

On a Shabbat afternoon in the spring of 1986,¹ the Rebbe spoke to thousands who had gathered at a *farbrengen*. His talk concerned the story of Ezekiel, whom G-d had instructed: “Son of man, prophesy over the valley: ‘Dry bones, hear the word of G-d!’”² Ezekiel was charged with informing the bones of G-d’s message of hope: “I will endow you with the spirit of life; you will come alive.”

In his signature style, the Rebbe declared that this charge was given not to Ezekiel alone, but to every Jew. “If you know the *Alef-Bet* of Judaism you must share it with someone else. If you are a ‘son of man’ — a human being with a compassionate heart — share the life of *Yiddishkeit* with someone who knows less than you. Call out to the dry bones, ‘Hear the word of Hashem!’”

FROM THE DAY IT WAS PUBLISHED in 2017, *My Story* became an instant classic. It has since been reprinted several times and translated into Hebrew and Russian, with additional languages in the works. The first-person testimonies have stirred something in readers well beyond what we could have imagined. The stories resonate; they grab people and engage them.

Much like the revival of the Jewish people anticipated in Ezekiel’s vision, it is not only the Rebbe’s wisdom and loving guidance that lies at the heart of every story; it is also each person’s living, distinct voice and unique circumstances — the “flesh, sinews and bones” — that enable the story to come to life and to breathe life into others.

THE REBBE PATIENTLY LED a generation that believed, “Our bones have dried up, our hope is lost, we have been cut off,” helping this generation find confidence in a living, optimistic future. The first-person narratives in *My Story 2: Lives Changed* are each a thread in a tapestry that spreads across the globe, retelling the Rebbe’s role in the revival of these individuals, while influencing the revival of Jewry as a whole — not unlike the sight described by Ezekiel: “The spirit came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet: a very great army — exceedingly so.”

THE MY ENCOUNTER WITH THE REBBE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, from which these stories are culled, has become a vibrant, international, collaborative project. To those who sent in leads for interviews; to the families who lent their living rooms to be invaded by cinematographers, sound recorders, interviewers and interviewees; and especially to the interviewees, who share their most personal experiences with the rest of us: Thank you for taking part in this global initiative. No doubt, these stories will continue to play a role in amplifying the Rebbe’s teaching, inspiration and vision for a world perfected and redeemed.

And to those who haven’t yet shared your experiences, we implore you, from the bottom of our hearts, to please do so. To those who know someone who should be interviewed, please email us at interviews@jemia.org. The Rebbe was talking to *you* that Shabbat afternoon. We each have a role to play in endowing others with life and spirit.

May we merit speedily in our days the time when the sadness of exile transforms into the joy of redemption, when “I will open your graves and cause you to come out, My people, and bring you home to the Land of Israel.”

Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin

Executive Director, JEM

Rabbi Yechiel Cagen

Director, My Encounter with the Rebbe

1. *Torat Menachem*, 5746, pp. 200 – 202.

2. Ezekiel 37:1–14.

Contents

SECTION ONE

NURTURING MIND, BODY AND SOUL

DR. JAN JACOBSON SOKOLOVSKY / 3

The Smile from Ear to Ear

A story about a few good listeners

MR. GORDON ZACKS / 11

Amazing Is Not Enough

When you truly want to change the world, it's best to start with yourself

PROFESSOR MORDECHAI SHANI / 27

House of Healing

*Human doctors, spirited patients, and other
building blocks of proper healthcare*

MR. YOSEF LAUTENBERG / 37

The Exceptional Name Change

Wheelchairs, crutches and a synagogue full of heroes

DR. REUVEN FEUERSTEIN / 51

Minding the Mind

The adventures of a modern-day mental health hero

RABBI YAAKOV YITZCHAK BIDERMAN / 59

Ignore the Ridicule

A remarkable turning point in man's search for meaning

SECTION TWO

**NO PERSON TOO SMALL,
NO PROBLEM TOO BIG**

MRS. ESTHER MENTZ / 71

Shopper's Assistance

A Brooklyn girl finds a loving father after all

RABBI NOCHUM STILERMAN / 85

A Delivery Boy's Life

A wealth of wisdom from a most unlikely source

MRS. DIANE ABRAMS / 95

Grandma Rachel's Legacy

Reflections on the courageous Jewish woman of yesterday, today and tomorrow

RABBI HERBERT WEINER / 105

The Tenth Mystic

The relentlessly searching mind meets the endlessly caring heart

RABBI SHMARYA KATZEN / 121

To Reach the Littlest Sparks

Reflections of a beloved kindergarten teacher

RABBI AVRAHAM CHAPUTA / 129

See, Care, Act

A casual conversation in New York leads to astonishing results in Israel

SECTION THREE

THINK BIGGERRABBI DAVID LAPIN / **139****A Nuclear Reaction***A surprisingly scientific solution to the limits of human endurance*MRS. SARA RIVKA SASONKIN / **147****Personal Treasure***How to transform a life, simply by taking interest*PROFESSOR AARON CIECHANOVER / **159****Marching to the Nobel***An Israeli biologist makes an astonishing discovery outside the lab*MRS. DEVORAH KLAR / **169****Lost and Found***An ageless educator and her dramatic journey to the classroom*MR. MOTI EDEN / **183****Making Waves in the Holy Land***The radio personality with a hidden tape recorder*RABBI AND MRS. CHAIM AND MIRIAM BROVENDER / **197****The 2 AM Debate***The couple that came hoping for a present and left with a future*

SECTION FOUR

**ENDURING ADVERSITY,
DISCOVERING SERENITY**

RABBI EPHRAIM STURM / 211

Dining Clubs against Assimilation

The best solutions are always the doable ones

MRS. RHODA FRIEDLAND / 221

Would You Do Me a Favor?

Sometimes the greatest miracles happen when you do nothing

DR. YITZCHAK BLOCK / 229

The Reluctant Philosopher

Revelations from the great thinker who was too humble

RABBI DAVID H. HILL / 243

The Unforgettable Chickens

*The heroism of Russian Jews and the Americans
who joined the fight to help them*

MRS. HENY KARNIEL / 253

Currency Exchange

A lifetime of caring for children and a marvelous moment with one of her own

MR. MAYER ZEILER / 267

The Fabric of a *Chasid*

Too proud to take charity, too humble to take credit

SECTION FIVE

THE POWER OF A MITZVAH

MR. MENACHEM BEN MASHIAH / **281**

The Longest Layover

A mother rescues her son from enemy territory

DR. JOEL SINSKY / **289**

Penny Power

The best, cheapest solution to electromagnetic interference

MR. MICHOEL MUCHNIK / **299**

Getting to the Heart of Art

An artist's tips for achieving maximum impact

MAJOR GENERAL RABBI MORDECHAI PIRON / **309**

Defending the Defenders

What the chief rabbi and rebbetzin of the IDF gave to those who give the most

MR. EFRAIM STEINMETZ / **323**

Don't Burn Your Bridges

*Find out who needs a mikveh, who needs a Tanya,
and who just needs a bowl of fruit*

DR. DONNA HALPER / **339**

A New Optimism

Noble confusion cured with one letter

MR. CHARLES S. RAMAT / **351**

The Wild Teenager

The man who does what he feels meets the man who says what he means