

# HERE'S my STORY

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## FIGHTING THE GULF WAR IN MINNESOTA

**MRS. RIVKA FELDMAN**



In the early 1950s, my mother, Mrs. Miriam Popack, joined the National Council of Agudas N'shei U'bnos Chabad, better known simply as N'shei Chabad — the Lubavitch Women's Organization. Early on, they began holding yearly conventions in Crown Heights, to study, to connect to one another, and to be addressed by the Rebbe. Then, in the early 1960s, Mrs. Leah Kahan had the revolutionary idea of creating another type of convention, hosted annually in different cities across the US and Canada. This could help expose many more women to Judaism and to Chabad, and would be a way to meet new people and invite them in. The conventions would include exciting programs, entertainment, and elegant cuisine, all geared towards Jewish women of all ages and walks of life.

The committee wrote to the Rebbe for approval, and he swiftly gave his blessing. The first convention was held in Boston, and from the very beginning, my mom was the coordinator of these events. It became the passion of her life, as she saw the effect that these conventions had on entire communities and so many individuals.

There were memorable conventions in Chicago, Miami Beach, Toronto, Washington DC, Los Angeles and many more cities. But after twenty-five years, my mother decided that it was time to step aside from her post. The Rebbe, however, did not allow her to retire, and instead recommended that she find somebody to assist her. That somebody ended up being me.

Although I always kept my mother's name on every report we submitted to the Rebbe, since he told her not to retire, slowly but surely, I assumed more and more of her responsibilities, until I became involved in every aspect of the events.

Many women eagerly looked forward to the out-of-town conventions. We would spend Shabbat together in beautiful venues, absorbing knowledge from excellent speakers and attending workshops on relevant topics. Singing and dancing added to the joy and camaraderie, but the highlight was the personal stories and experiences that were shared.

Fast forward to 1991, just a few nights before a group of women were set to travel to a convention in Minnesota. We were in my neighbor's house, packing N'shei Chabad newsletters and some pamphlets — about *mikveh*, Shabbat candles, kosher, Jewish education, and so on — into the kits we would be giving to the attendees.

The Gulf War had just erupted that evening, so we had the radio playing as we worked. Just then, we heard the news that the first Iraqi Scud missile had hit Israel. It was frightening! There wasn't any communication with Israel, and nobody knew whether those missiles were in fact chemical weapons.

Our thoughts quickly turned to the matter at hand: *How is the convention going to happen now? Should we cancel it?*

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

We had booked Ruti Navon, a famous Israeli singer, to perform at the convention and she was supposed to travel from Florida. But, once this news broke, she immediately called the Rebbe's office.

"Please let the Rebbe know that I'm canceling," she told the secretary. "I'm very worried about my family, and I can't go and sing now. I'm going to stay home and say *Tehillim*."

The Rebbe, however, didn't accept her cancellation and sent a message back: "The way you can help the situation in Israel is not by staying at home, but by going to the convention and making it joyful." Quoting the Hebrew expression, the Rebbe explained that "since 'happiness breaks all barriers,' making other people happy will bring salvation to the Jewish people. The way you can help is by going to the convention and bringing joy with your singing."

Wow! When we heard that, it was clear: *We're going ahead with the convention*. We didn't know who would attend, but there was going to be some kind of convention.

That Friday, N'shei Chabad received a communication from the Rebbe. Referring to the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, the Rebbe wrote: "If he ... is doing the things that he is doing as a result of his beliefs ... certainly Jewish people who believe in G-d must do everything to show their faith — and not do anything that projects a lack of faith, Heaven forbid. So see to it that everyone who was supposed to attend does attend, and you should even make sure that more people join."

Immediately, a group of women that had not been scheduled to attend, decided to join the convention. But by then, it was impossible to fly to Minnesota before Shabbat, which was when the program began. You can't make that trip on a Friday afternoon during the winter. The earliest they could depart was after Shabbat, which meant arriving after most of the event was over. Still, the Rebbe said he wanted a list of all the women who were joining the convention at this point, put on his desk before Shabbat. He even sent dollar bills for them to give to charity when they arrived at their destination.

Since the tickets were expensive, N'shei Chabad decided to sponsor or subsidize the trip, and eventually managed to get nine additional people on board.

I had just given birth to my son seven weeks earlier, and I had no plans to take my newborn to Minnesota in January. This was one convention, I thought, that I was definitely going to miss. But now, after the Rebbe's

request, I told my husband, "I really want to go. I'll take the baby with me."

"If you want to, then go ahead," he replied. So when I received a call from N'shei Chabad asking whether I would join, I said yes. And so my name, Chaya Rivka bas Miriam, and my baby's, Avraham ben Chaya Rivka, were added to the bottom of the list that was sent to the Rebbe.

We set out after Shabbat was over, and by the time we walked into the hall, it was nearly midnight. But what a joyful sight met our eyes! Ruti Navon was still singing, and the women were singing and dancing along with her. The whole room was shaking with our energy, our joy, and our *bitachon* — our trust in G-d. There wasn't an enormous crowd in the room that night — just a hundred women or so — but it was amazing!

The Rebbe said that by being joyful, we would have a positive effect, and by the time the convention was over, there was a lot of very good news coming out of Israel. Communications had resumed, and we learned that there hadn't been any direct fatalities from the Scud missiles, and that some of them had been intercepted.

I'd never been so cold in my life as I was in Minnesota that night. And yet, that same night, I experienced such incredible warmth. And with that warmth and that joy, we knew that we were making a difference — to Israel and to the entire world.

*Mrs. Rivka Feldman is involved in Jewish outreach and gives Torah classes in New York and New Jersey. She resides in Crown Heights and was interviewed in the My Encounter studio in June of 2020.*

## This week in....

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

> **5747-1987**, The Rebbe invited children of all ages to bring their own charity boxes to 770. He stood for three hours handing a nickel to each child and watching as they each inserted the coin into their charity box. This was part of an ongoing effort to encourage children to create a "miniature sanctuary" out of their own bedroom, complete with a personal charity box.  
1 Adar

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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יום הולדת כ"ד שבט

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