

HERE'S  
my  
STORYGenerously  
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WITH THE CHASIDIM

MR. ARIEL RUND

I arrived in the United States with my family, in 1975, as a representative of Israel's Ministry of Aliyah and Integration. Together with my colleague Chaim Edelstein, I would be running the large *aliyah* office in Brooklyn, assessing candidates for compatibility and providing them with assistance wherever possible, particularly with economic and material matters. My job also involved giving talks about the *aliyah* process throughout the state of New York.

With the approach of Simchat Torah that year, I was invited to join the *hakafot* dancing in 770. We arrived to find the place so packed that not even a sardine could squeeze inside. With no other choice, I was put on my back and then passed over the heads of the crowd, until I reached the dais at the front of the synagogue.

Standing on the dais was the Rebbe, and next to him was a delegation from the Israeli consulate. The Rebbe shook everyone's hand, and asked for our names and positions. It was a unique experience for me; I had never seen so many people dancing and singing together as one.

That Chanukah, the Rebbe's secretary Rabbi Binyomin Klein called our office to inform me of a decision to send a group of Chabad families and *yeshivah* students to Israel. They would be traveling right after the 10th of Shevat, which as I later found out, was the day the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe passed and was succeeded by the Rebbe.

This was about a month away — a far shorter timetable than we were accustomed to. We asked whether they could postpone the trip to give us more time for the usual arrangements, but the secretaries explained that the Rebbe had already decided on this date.

Shortly after, I was asked to meet with the Rebbe at Chabad headquarters. I arrived at 2:00 PM and was escorted to the Rebbe's office following the afternoon prayers.

When I entered, the first thing I noticed was his bright eyes and his penetrating gaze. He invited me to sit across



from him and inquired about my background, what had brought me to the US, and whether I was satisfied with my job. I told him about some difficult experiences I had undergone in the recent Yom Kippur War and as the Rebbe listened intently, I saw that he understood well what I was saying.

The Rebbe went on to speak about his decision to send this group of *shluchim* to Israel — he didn't use the term "*aliyah*" — and I came to understand that he was sending emissaries to make an impact there.

He asked about our procedures for processing immigrants, and was interested in the practical side of things; what could be arranged in the US, and what had to be done in Israel. Part of the process depended on whether the immigrant was single or with a family, but I told him that, in general, we ask applicants to fill out forms, interview them, field any questions they have, and then try to solve any issues that arise. We also advise new immigrants on what to bring from abroad and relevant customs issues, as well as try to help them find suitable housing and employment that matches their professional training.

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.



continued from reverse

Again I asked whether the date of departure for the group, or even part of it, could be pushed off, but it wasn't an option; they had to come right after the 10th of Shevat.

As it happens, this date is also important to me personally, as it is the *yahrzeit* of my father, who passed away when I was around bar mitzvah age. And so, my work took on a special personal significance. This group was also very important to our office, both from a public relations standpoint, as well as because of how much it meant to Chabad. At the end of our meeting, the Rebbe told me that his secretaries would stay in touch.

Our absorption options were fairly limited — it had been decided that all of the families would settle in Safed, and the single men in Jerusalem — but we still had to meet them. After receiving a list of names, we held individual interviews with each candidate, and then to speed things up, we held group meetings in our Brooklyn office, in order to discuss some of the practical preparation.

It was the women who attended these meetings, as they were in charge of the technical aspects of the move. I advised them to bring electrical appliances from America, as well as which appliances would work on Israel's power grid. As for their furniture, I reminded them to take into account the smaller size of Israeli homes.

We sat together for hours, and I saw that despite how happy they were to undertake this mission, it was not easy for them to make the necessary adjustments. I won't forget how one of the women burst into tears, explaining that she had just ordered new furniture, and didn't know what to do with it now.

The next day, Rabbi Klein called, and I shared all of this with him. He got back to me a few days later to say that the Rebbe suggested selling the furniture to an American family, and then using the money to buy furniture in Israel.

Despite the hardship, I was deeply impressed by the determination of these young couples to follow the Rebbe's instructions. They never had any doubts; a sense of mission burned in their bones, and they felt the greatest joy at having been chosen to be the Rebbe's emissaries to Israel.

For the day of their journey, my partner and I split up. He accompanied the group as they took part in a gathering in 770 before leaving, while I went ahead to the airport. A television station would also be sending a crew to the airport for a live broadcast of the send-off.

As we waited for the group to arrive at the airport — and then kept on waiting — the television producer explained to me that she had only a small window of time for the

broadcast. I tried calming her, but the appointed hour came and went, and the group still wasn't even on the horizon and we had no way of reaching them. Just as she told her team to start packing up their equipment, we heard singing from outside.

One of the producers ran to tell them to come directly to the cameras, and so they did, singing and dancing live on the air. After that, they checked in, we made our farewells, and they were on their way. The producer later told me that she could not believe that the group had managed to arrive and assemble for filming in time.

A year later, we learned of another group traveling to Israel. This time, I had a shorter meeting with the Rebbe, in which he asked whether I had been in touch with the group from last year. Typically, I explained, there was only contact when something went wrong, and as far as I knew, the absorption process had been successful.

All throughout, I was impressed with the attention that the Rebbe gave towards this project and how he saw to it that his *shluchim* would settle in the best possible way so that they could be successful in their mission to strengthen the people of Israel. When I returned to Israel and saw what they were achieving, I understood just why it was so important to him.

Mr. Ariel Rund worked for many years in Israel's Office of Transportation. Between 1975-78, he also served as a representative of the Jewish Agency in the United States, providing assistance to people making aliyah. He was interviewed in his Jerusalem home in April of 2018 and passed away later that year.

## This week in....

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

> **5744-1984**, at the beginning of a *farbrengen* commemorating the *yahrzeit* of the Previous Rebbe, the Rebbe took out a Tanya, which was printed in honor of the occasion, turned to Epistle 27, on the topic of the passing of a *tzaddik*, and expounded on it at length. The Rebbe also derived a lesson from the name of the neighborhood of the Previous Rebbe's residence, "Crown Heights," as that is where the Tanya was printed.<sup>1</sup>  
10 Shvat

> **5750-1990**, marking the Previous Rebbe's *yahrzeit* and forty years of the Rebbe's leadership, the Rebbe handed out special-edition *Tanyas* for over five hours.  
10 Shvat

1. *Torat Menachem* 5744 vol. 2 page 853

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