

ISSUE | ערב שבת פרשת קרח, ד' תמוז, תשפ"ג  
545 | Erev Shabbat Parshat Korach, June 23, 2023

# HERE'S my STORY

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## D. NONE OF THE ABOVE

**RABBI AVRAHAM ELIYAHU NEIMARK**

My parents fled to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, during WWII, along with many other Chabad families. Despite the harsh material and spiritual conditions of the USSR, the *chasidim* there managed to maintain a Jewish way of life, while imparting an authentic Jewish education to the next generation. In fact, our own home became host to an underground *yeshiva* headed by my grandfather, Reb Zalman Pevzner, who would teach Torah throughout the day — to children in the mornings, and to older boys in the afternoons.

In 1971, about a year after my Bar Mitzvah, my family left the USSR for Israel. I carried on studying in Israeli Chabad *yeshivot* and my family settled in Nachlat Har Chabad, a neighborhood of Kiryat Malachi that had been established by Chabad emigres from the Soviet Union some two years before.

By the end of that first year, we received word that the Rebbe had invited us newly emigrated *chasidim* to spend the festive month of Tishrei in his court; in fact, he even wanted to cover most of our travel expenses to come see him.

Three days before Rosh Hashanah, I arrived in New York and I saw the Rebbe for the very first time that evening at prayers. The Rebbe looked out at our group, nodding his head in greeting, and we felt him gaze intently at each and every one of us. The very next day, I enrolled in Oholei Torah, a local *yeshiva*, and quickly settled in.

After Yom Kippur, my family had a private audience with the Rebbe, during which the Rebbe spoke primarily about me. He inquired into where I was learning, who my teacher was, the tractate and chapter of Talmud we were studying. He quizzed me on my studies. He seemed to appreciate the first answer I gave, and so he kept going,



with a question on a gloss of *Tosfot* a few pages into the chapter, and another one after that.

"I haven't learned that yet," I told the Rebbe. He smiled, and showered blessings on me, the traditional wish for "Torah, marriage, and good deeds;" and on my parents, that they settle successfully into their new lives.

I was keen to stay on and continue my studies near the Rebbe's court, a prospect that worried my mother. We had no family in New York, and I was only fifteen. At the end of the audience, she asked the Rebbe about it. The Rebbe raised himself up in his chair and declared: "Certainly. That would be a fine thing!" My mother later told me that she had been very concerned, but after hearing that decisive statement from the Rebbe, she felt as though a weight had been lifted off her heart. I would end up spending the next seven years at *yeshivot* near the Rebbe.

During that audience, the Rebbe asked my father about the hardships facing the new immigrants in our town.

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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 person's recollection and interpretation of the Rebbe's words.



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"We lack for nothing!" my father exclaimed. "Thank G-d, there is a synagogue with three daily prayers, a *mikveh*, and Torah classes every morning and night."

I remember the Rebbe's broad smile. Although they didn't have much, my parents knew how to appreciate all those things that we could never take for granted back in Tashkent.

In 1976, my mother came back for a visit, and had another audience. She asked for a blessing for her two daughters-in-law who were due to give birth soon. The Rebbe, however, began with a blessing for my father's health, followed by his blessings for easy and healthy births for her two grandchildren. My mother was mystified; my father had been feeling fine. Actually, he never needed to go to the doctor at all.

Maybe it was because international phone calls were prohibitively expensive, or perhaps because my father didn't want to worry her, but only when my mother returned home a few weeks later did she find out what had happened. On the day she met the Rebbe, my father had come home from work feeling unwell, and so he went to the local clinic for a check-up. "I don't see anything out of the ordinary," the doctor told him. "But if you want, go to the emergency room."

My father walked half-an-hour to the bus stop, rode the bus for another half-hour, and then walked twenty more minutes to the regional hospital in Rechovet. "How did you get here on your own?!" the baffled triage doctor asked after examining him. It turned out that he had sustained a serious heart attack. When my mother finally heard the whole story, she understood the Rebbe's words to her: *May your husband be well.*

In those days, the Rebbe spoke on numerous occasions about the need for every *yeshivah* student to receive rabbinic ordination before completing the standard curriculum. But, while my friends were all studying for their first examination in the *Basar be'Chalav* laws of Kashrut, I found that I wasn't adjusting to this new study track, which was quite different from my regular study of Talmud. So while they moved on to the next unit, *Ta'aruvot*, I decided to write to the Rebbe to ask how I should proceed.

It was the winter of 1979, and as I saw it, I had three options before me: (1) Return to studying Talmud as I had been doing before; (2) since I used to arrange a Passover Seder every year for a Russian community in Florida, travel there for similar, year-round activities; or (3) as I was already of marriageable age, I could return to Israel and start dating.

The Rebbe underlined the part of my question where I noted that I had started studying for the ordination but hadn't seen adequate results. Then he wrote: "But we have

been promised [by the Mishnah], 'If you work hard, you will succeed.'" Once I had been ordained, he concluded, I should pick one of the three options.

After receiving such a clear answer, I focused all my energy on these studies. I joined my friends studying *Ta'aruvot* and, over the next two months, I spent between eight and ten hours a day on the subject. When the test came around, I passed. By then, it was getting close to Passover so I went to Florida to conduct a public Seder. But even there, I used every spare moment I had, on planes and trains, to study for the test on the unit that I had missed.

Eventually I managed to catch up, and I began learning the next unit together with the rest of my class. Even before I took that test, I went ahead and started studying for the final unit. That way I was able to take the fourth test only several weeks after the third. Rabbi Yisroel Yitzchok Piekarski, our examiner, was surprised to see me back so soon, and suspected that I may not have prepared adequately. So he spent extra time asking me a long line of questions, and when he saw how proficient I was with the material, he remarked: "When you learn — you know!"

*Isn't that exactly what the Rebbe told me? I thought to myself. If you work hard, you will succeed!*

*Rabbi Avraham Eliyahu Neimark is one of the founders of Chabad of Shaarei Aliyah in Lod, Israel. He has done considerable community work among emigres of the Former Soviet Union, while also teaching at a local school. He was interviewed in 2015.*

## This week in....

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

> **5714-1954**, in a letter to a student who didn't pass the test for rabbinic certification, the Rebbe wrote that fear of G-d is a prerequisite to Torah study, especially for a rabbi. Thus, the young man should follow the methods of *chasidut* to bring about fear of G-d and then retake the test.<sup>1</sup>  
6 Tammuz

> **5716-1956**, the Rebbe received the graduating class of Yeshivat Ohel Moshe for an audience. After answering the questions that the students presented to him on various Torah topics, the Rebbe explained that as recipients of a Torah education, they must continue to study even after graduation. Otherwise, it would be a great loss to them, as well as their communities.<sup>2</sup>  
5 Tammuz

1. *Igrot kodesh* vol. 9, p. 165 2. *Torat Menachem* vol. 17, p. 29

In honor of the *shluchim* of the Rebbe  
in Efrat, Roosevelt Island,  
Helsinki and Pasadena

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