

ISSUE | ערב שבת פרשת דברים, ג' אב, תשפ"ג  
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# HERE'S my STORY

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## DREAMING OF AN ANSWER

**MRS. DEBORAH ALTER GOLDENBERG**



**Deborah and her family at her brother's Bar Mitzvah  
in December 1971.**

**M**y parents, Judith and Howard Alter, met in Israel; my mother a survivor of the Holocaust from Czechoslovakia and my father an American. They had three children in America but then my father was diagnosed with malignant melanoma. He had surgery in the summer of 1971, and they thought he was cured, but the next summer it came back and didn't go away. He died on December 15th, which was the 10th of Tevet, 1972, at the age of forty-seven. My mother was thirty-six, and I, the oldest of three, was sixteen.

We lived in Far Rockaway, and I attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush. Though my family had no significant connection with Lubavitch, before my father died, he had gotten it into his head that he wanted to meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe to get a blessing from him. It was really important to him, and so they tried calling the Rebbe's office and using some other channels of people they knew to make the connection. But, the message

came back that the Rebbe was not able to have a private audience with my father, and he would send someone over to our house instead.

This dismayed my mother very much, and it still bothers her to this day. Nevertheless, whatever the reason, my dad did not end up meeting the Rebbe.

The man sent by the Rebbe came over to check the *mezuzahs* of our house, and he also asked my mother whether she would keep the laws of family purity. She had not been keeping them, and she began to at that point.

The timing of this story worked out well because I must have learned something about *mikveh* at school at around that time and I came home one day and asked my mother whether she went to *mikveh*.

"Yes, I do," she was able to honestly answer.

My mother is an optimistic and determined woman, and with her unshakable faith, she managed to sustain our entire family through thick and thin. Nevertheless, my father's passing was particularly devastating for her. She had survived the Holocaust as a child, got married, moved to the United States with him, created a life here, and was then widowed at thirty-six. She didn't even have family living nearby because her siblings who had survived the war lived all over the world.

But then, another message came back from the Rebbe. After we had finished sitting *shiva*, and after *shloshim* — the first thirty days of mourning — he would meet with our family.

So, on a dark, wintry night in January, there we were: Sitting on a hard, wooden bench outside an office,

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



continued from reverse

waiting for our turn. It was late at night and we were tired. My youngest brother was just eleven, and we were all falling asleep.

Finally, it was our turn. We were ushered into a room with a big desk, a few chairs in front of it, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe sitting behind.

He invited us to sit down facing him. I remember looking at this man and thinking that his face was old, but his eyes were young; they were the clearest, bluest, most beautiful eyes I had ever seen in my life. He was looking at me, and I felt his gaze penetrating through me, seeing my essence. *What does he see?* I wondered.

I don't recall a lot of the dialogue, but he did ask us to share what we were dreaming about at the time. We had all been dreaming about my father, myself included. There was one recurring dream I had, not every night, but consistently enough that it remains very clear to me, all these years later:

My father is in his bed, and I come in, with a head full of questions. Then I'm sitting on the edge of the bed, asking all of those unanswered questions I must have had at the time. "I'm looking for the answer," I say to my dad, but when I turn around to him, he has disappeared.

When my father was sick, no one talked about the fact that he was going to die, and in those days, no one talked about cancer; my parents had books about it, but they hid them from us. When he passed away, it was a Friday, and the last time I saw him was for a few minutes on the Wednesday before. So I never felt a sense of closure with him. But when I described my dream to the Rebbe, he explained to me: "Really," he said, "you do know the answers your father would have given you."

I was only sixteen, and my father worked long hours, so I never had that much time with him. Still, I had a strong sense of who he was, and I did know the message he would have conveyed to me. What the Rebbe told me rang true. "You'll always carry your father with you," he added. "He is the weight you feel resting on your shoulder." To this day, I can feel this message from the Rebbe with me, that I would always know what my father would have wanted for me and my brothers.

My younger brothers also related their dreams to the Rebbe, and he explained everything to them. He spoke softly and beautifully, and we felt that it would be okay. Then we three children walked out of the room, and the Rebbe sat with my mother for a while. My mother told me that he spoke about raising the children, about living her life, and what to do with the business my

father had left behind; he gave her guidance for how to carry on. She remembers it as being a very special time.

During my father's illness, I used to keep a journal, where I would write the kinds of questions a teenager whose parent was dying would ask: *What did my father do wrong? How can G-d do this to young children? What is the purpose of this?* I told myself that if I had to sit *shiva*, then I wouldn't believe in G-d anymore.

But the truth is that while we were grieving my father's passing, I felt at peace with myself. Instead of being rebellious, I became more of a believer. I don't know if it was meeting the Rebbe, or some other experiences I had at the time, but they all seemed to come together to help me form a powerful spiritual belief system.

When I came out of meeting the Rebbe, I didn't have an explanation for *why* things like this happen, but I felt that there is a purpose in G-d's plan, even if it wasn't intended for me to ever completely understand.

After that, I had a feeling of closure and I didn't have those dreams anymore — and I still feel my father's presence "on my shoulder."

*Mrs. Deborah Alter Goldenberg is a mother and grandmother, as well as a certified CPA, who lives in Beverly Hills, California, together with her husband Mark. She was interviewed in Los Angeles in March 2011.*

## This week in....

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

> **5736-1976**, after speaking about giving extra charity and studying extra Torah during the nine days of mourning for the destruction of the Holy Temple, the Rebbe encouraged rabbis to urge their congregants to participate. Although many people are away for summer vacation, the Rebbe suggested that they be contacted via long-distance phone calls, which would make a strong impression about the importance of the matter.<sup>1</sup>  
4 Av

> **5748-1988**, on the *yahrzeit* the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, a leading 16th-century Kabbalist), the Rebbe visited the resting place of the Previous Rebbe. On his return, he spoke publicly about the teachings of the Arizal, describing how they can be properly understood by studying Chabad *chasidut*.<sup>2</sup>  
2 Av

1. *Sichot Kodesh* vol. 2 page 569 2. *Torat Menachem* 5748 vol. 4, p. 103

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