

# HERE'S my STORY

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**RABBI AVREMEL SILVER**

After getting married in 1975, I first tried pursuing a certain opportunity to be a Chabad *shliach*, but it didn't work out. So I got back on the bus, went back to Crown Heights, and started looking for ways to make a living.

There were a few other young men my age who were going to work in the diamond industry on Manhattan's 47th street, so I wrote to the Rebbe about the opportunity. His response came back about two hours after I had sent in my question, and it was clear: "Take the offer."

In general, whenever I wrote to the Rebbe, the answers I received were very clear and direct. Often, I had peers who wrote similar questions to the Rebbe at the same time I did, but the Rebbe would simply advise them to "consult with knowledgeable friends."

So, in January 1979, I began working in the diamond industry as a broker; finding people who wanted to sell diamonds, others who wanted to buy them, and earning a commission of about \$300 a week.

That year, on the first day of Sukkot, a close friend of mine had a son, and then during the second part of the holiday, on the night of Shemini Atzeret, my wife gave birth to a boy as well. The next morning, I waited on the steps of 770, and as the Rebbe was walking into the building, I told him the good news.

"Mazal Tov," he told me, and then added that I should make sure to be called up to the Torah that day.

On Simchat Torah, my friend made a brit for his son, which was followed by a celebratory *farbrengen*. Of course, I attended, and being in a festive mood, I said a few *l'chaims*. The next thing I knew, I woke up and it was dark outside, which meant that the holiday was already over. So I got up, dusted myself off, and went to see my wife and son in the hospital.



When I returned to Crown Heights, I stopped in 770, where the Rebbe had been holding the usual *farbrengen* at the end of the holiday. By then, I had missed the *farbrengen* itself, and now when I returned from the hospital, the Rebbe was in middle of distributing *kos shel bracha* — pouring a little wine from his cup to each individual following *Havdalah*. At the same time, there was some kind of a commotion going on in 770. Soon, I learned what had happened during the *farbrengen*.

"We are standing in a moment that is higher than any limitation," the Rebbe had declared. On Simchat Torah, we celebrate by dancing. Rather than opening up the Torah scrolls, studying from them, or asking anybody how much Torah they know, we keep the scrolls closed and dance with them as they are. On Simchat Torah, said the Rebbe, the most learned rabbi and the simplest Jew are equal; it is a time beyond reason and measurement. Therefore, if we take it upon ourselves to do something beyond our limits, beyond reason, then G-d will respond in kind and will give back to us without limits.

*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

The Rebbe was saying all of this in the context of a talk about charity. Whoever committed himself, he said, to give a sum of money to charity without making any considerations whether he can afford it or not — and this money could go to any charitable organization, not necessarily to the Rebbe's own causes — would receive five times that amount in return. In this, he made a reference to the biblical story of how, following the famine in Egypt, farmers would give one portion of their crops to Pharaoh, and then "four portions shall be yours." This calculation, said the Rebbe, was meant literally: "You'll be able to count it with your finger!"

By the next morning I decided I wanted to give all of our money to the Rebbe. I went to speak to my personal *chasidic* mentor, a sagacious man named Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Raichik of Los Angeles, about the idea. Rabbi Raichik thought that it would be appropriate, sensing that the Rebbe had presented all the young men of Lubavitch who, like me, had gone into business, with a special opportunity for giving charity.

I had five thousand dollars saved up at that point, and so I made out a check to the Rebbe for the entire sum. To put it into perspective, I was paying \$250 in rent at the time, and that was my biggest expense.

In the meantime, I told the bank that if a check came in for a few thousand dollars, it wasn't fraud.

The next Shabbat, the Rebbe brought up what he had said during the *farbrengen* on Simchat Torah. He clarified that it was not his intention to make a charity appeal. Rather, he was challenging his *chasidim* to go beyond their limitations in a practical way, thereby testing themselves as to how much they were impacted by Simchat Torah. If someone donated the money with that mindset, it is a certainty that G-d would pay them back five-fold. However, one who only decided to make their donation later on, or not in the Simchat Torah spirit that he had described, ought not make it at all and should come by the office to take their donation back.

Now, I had only decided to make the donation once I heard what the Rebbe had said after Simchat Torah was over. Nevertheless, I decided that I wasn't going to come to pick up my check; let the Rebbe decide whether to cash it, I figured.

A week went by, and then a month. Eight or nine weeks later, on a Thursday, I got a call from the bank: The check had arrived.

Now, by this time, it was almost 1980 and the Iranian hostage crisis was going on. As a result, the price of precious metals had taken off, and a certain financial

consultant I knew, named Bob Schwartz, had advised to invest in gold and silver. There were a few dollars left over from my kids' birthday money, and so I went and bought some silver dollars for them, at the price of \$24 dollars each.

We spent that Shabbat with my in-laws in New Jersey. At *shul* on Friday night, this Bob Schwartz was there, and he mentioned to me that he had also bought silver dollars — but for \$26. As soon as he told me that, I realized there was money to be made.

"Bob," I told him. "I paid \$24, that's a two-dollar spread. Let me buy them for you, and we'll split the dollar."

"Why not," replied Bob. "Go out and buy \$50,000 worth of silver coins for me."

To me, \$50,000 was more money than the world, and I didn't have a dollar left to my name at that point. "But I have no money," I told Bob.

He was unperturbed. "I trust you — you're Mottel Simon's son-in-law. Come by my office on Monday morning, and I'll give you the money."

Sure enough, he handed me \$50,000 in cash. Now I was in the precious metals business, which enabled me to start buying and selling for others as well. That very week, I earned \$5,000 — making back all of the money I had donated. The following week, I made \$10,000, then \$15,000 in the third week, and I kept on going throughout the year. I managed to pay off all of my debt, and then give a few dollars to charity as well.

*Rabbi Avremel Silver is a businessman living in Crown Heights. He was interviewed in January 2024.*

## This week in....

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

> **5739-1979**, following evening prayers, the Rebbe told his secretary that he would like to hold a *farbrengen*. This was quite extraordinary as just two days earlier the Rebbe had also held an unexpected *farbrengen*. But within fifteen minutes, 770 was full of *chasidim* who had quickly gathered to hear the Rebbe's address which was focused on children. At the end, he handed prayer books to all the kids who were present and asked the parents to write the names of their children in the books.<sup>1</sup>  
4 Sivan

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In honor of the bat mitzvah of our granddaughters

**Nava Ruth Fishman** (Toronto) and  
**Dina Gittel Lesches** (Los Angeles)

By **Miriam** ע"ה and **Moshe** ע"ה **Fishman**

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