

The Jewish Weekly

Better Than the Original

by Raphael Nouril

I was born in 1940 in Tabriz, Iran, where I was educated as an artist in the classical style by Reza Samimi, the royal portraitist of Persia, in 1954. At a time when modern art was dominating Europe and America, you could still find artists in Iran from the old school, teaching in the classical manner.

I traveled to France for a time and visited the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris to show them my work. They responded very positively but didn't specialize in my area. Despite their inability to help me, they suggested that I check out the museums of Classical Art, to better train myself in the works of the old masters.

I immigrated to London, where I continued to practice my art but did not practice any Judaism. I considered myself secular until 1983 when everything changed for me.

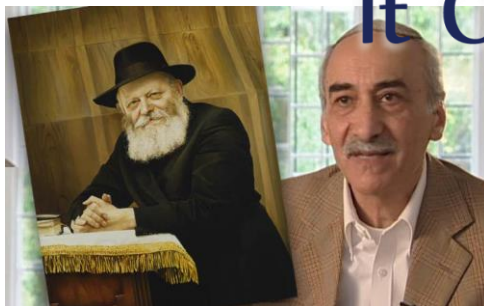
About that time, my wife and I were living in London, next to a Lubavitch family – the Rutmans. When I visited their home, I saw a photo of the Rebbe hanging on the wall, and I was inspired to paint his portrait. It was a difficult decision, because I needed to relate to him. When I paint someone, I don't just portray their resemblance; I need to convey their character and feelings.

Although I had previously painted many well-known personalities, including the Shah of Iran, I had never painted a holy man before. I always approached my subjects by trying to get to know them, but how could I get to know a holy man?

I felt distant on a number of levels. In addition to being thousands of miles away from the Rebbe physically, as a secular person, I didn't feel like I could relate to him on a personal level either. I had to remedy this by becoming closer, both physically as well as spiritually.

To begin with, because the Rebbe was in New York and I was in London, I started watching videos of him, and borrowed some photographs from Mr Gedalya Rutman, my neighbor. But that was not enough. In my quest to get closer to him, I began to pray, to put on tefillin and even to keep Shabbat and the holidays.

After two months of living an observant life, I felt I was ready to begin painting the Rebbe. When painting in the past, I would often sketch and erase the outline many times before being satisfied; I'd rub out what I had done and start all over – sometimes two or three times. But in this case, I never rubbed out anything – not even once! I felt as if a force was conducting my hand to the destination of every single line. I began with



Raphael Nouril with his painting of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

the Rebbe's eyes, painting them on blank canvas and then, with his eyes looking at me, I moved forward to paint the face and the rest.

When I nearly finished the painting, I traveled with Gedalya Rutman and my family to see and speak to the Rebbe and complete the final touches of the painting. However, in 1984, the Rebbe was no longer granting private audiences and, when I arrived at Chabad Headquarters, I was told to leave the painting with his secretary and that it would be shown to the Rebbe later.

This I could not do because I had come all the way to meet the Rebbe in person. So, instead, I waited outside, the portrait covered with a cloth, hoping to unveil it when the Rebbe arrived in the morning. As the Rebbe exited his car, my wife took the cloth off the portrait, and the Rebbe was immediately drawn to it.

I had planned to ask his opinion but, without any prompting, the Rebbe said, "The hands like this are prohibited ... they should be like this." And he put his right hand over his left to demonstrate. I had painted the Rebbe's hands with his fingers intertwined with one another, something that I later found out is problematic.. I asked the Rebbe to comment on the face and then he looked at the face and replied, "Very good" – he said three times. And then he added, with a smile on his face, "Better than the original."

When I returned home, I erased the portion of the hands using a special acid, and started to paint the hands all over again. When I was done, I sent a photo to the Rebbe's office and then printed 358 limited edition lithographs of the original. The reason I printed 358 is because that is the numerical value of the word Mashiach, a topic the Rebbe was so passionate about. I numbered and signed each of them and gave the final one to the Rebbe.

This whole experience brought me closer to the Lubavitch community in London. In the process, I learned more about the Rebbe, especially that he was very tightly connected to his father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe. So, I decided to paint them together.

After a long search, I found a very small, very faded photograph – which you had to view with a magnifying glass – of the two of them together. This photograph was taken shortly after the

It Once Happened...

Rebbe's marriage to the Previous Rebbe's daughter. He was very young in that photo and the Previous Rebbe was holding his hand in a touching way. I decided to reproduce this photo as a life-size painting.

It took me a year to finish it, and I brought it to New York to show to the Rebbe in 1988, the year his wife passed away. When I unveiled it for him, he was clearly very thrilled with it. "Spasiba," he said, which is Russian for "Thank you," and then he switched to English, saying, "Thank you very much for showing it to me. This painting should be a good start for you to double your efforts and spread Judaism through your works of art, together with your wife."

Then he gave me and my family many blessings for success and several dollars to pass on to charity. As I was walking away, he called me back and raised his hands upwards, saying, "Don't forget about growing ... up, up up!"

From that moment, unusual things started happening with my paintings. They became vehicles for many people returning to Judaism, which just goes to show how a blessing of a holy man can influence the world.

From among many examples, this is just one story I would like to relate:


One day I happened to be in Florida, and I stopped at a gallery in Bal Harbour. I began talking with the owner, an old man. He was Jewish but refused to have anything to do with Judaism since suffering terrible tragedies in his family. Then I pulled out my portfolio, and he was immediately taken by my portrait of the Rebbe. So much so, that he bought a lithograph from me and put it in the window of his gallery.

I had occasion to check up on him some time after and learned that he had spent five-hundred dollars framing the portrait and that he refused to sell it. Because he had it in his gallery window, Chabad boys started coming around and helping him put on tefillin. He had become religious at seventy-five!

When I heard that, I remembered what the Rebbe said to me, "Spread Judaism with your works of art," and, because of his blessing, it happened – it automatically happened!

Reprinted from an email of Here's My Story.

Editor's Note: the Lubavitcher Rebbe - Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the 7th Chabad Rebbe zt"l's, 28th Yahrzeit is this Shabbat, 3rd Tammuz – July 2nd of this year



Shabbat Times – Parshat Chukat

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	7:13	8:31	9:06
Tel Aviv	7:29	8:34	
Haifa	7:22	8:35	
Be'er Sheva	7:30	8:32	



For the Sake of Heaven By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

A festive atmosphere permeated the town of Rodnik in Poland. The cause was the presence of the three tzadikim in the home of Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, who lived in Rodnik at that time. A feeling of spiritual elevation dominated in the Beit Midrash (study hall).

But then, in the middle of the Morning Prayer, an unpleasant incident occurred.

These were the days after Pesach Sheni ('Second Passover'). The cantor (prayer leader) concluded the recitation of the prayer, whereupon Rabbi Chaim of Sanz instructed him not to say Tachanun (prayer of supplication said on most weekdays), as written in the Holy Zohar. According to the Zohar, during the seven days following Pesach Sheni, one does not say the prayer of supplication, because at that time the Gates of the Garden of Eden are open.

Suddenly, the voice of Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga of Shenova, Rabbi Chaim's oldest son, was heard.

"Forgive me father," he said, "but the Rama (a 16th Century eminent Polish rabbi and Jewish law authority) writes that on Lag b'Omer one does not say Tachanun. From this one concludes that it is specifically on Lag b'Omer that one does not say Tachanun, and therefore on the other seven days one does say Tachanun."

Rabbi Chaim insisted that Tachanun should not be said, but his son argued vehemently that it should be said. In the end Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga left the Beit Midrash with ten of his followers, said Tachanun and finished the prayers outside.

The argument between father and son continued after the prayers, back inside. One maintains this point and the other brings a different proof, both of them holding steadfastly to their opinion.

At one point Rabbi Chaim exclaimed, "I order you not to step over the threshold of my house again!"

Upon hearing this Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga left the building through the window, in order to obey his father's order about the threshold of his house.

Among the people present was Rabbi Mordechai Dov Twersky of Hornisteipol, the eighth son-in-law of Rabbi Chaim. Like the others of the congregation he was shocked by the serious confrontation between the father and his oldest son.

The whole matter was incomprehensible to him since he was aware of the respect Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga felt for Rabbi Chaim. Therefore, he was astounded when his father-in-law approached him and whispered in his ear: "I do not know how I merited to have such a holy son!"

Rabbi Mordechai Dov immediately responded, "In my eyes that is no wonder at all."

After some time, Rabbi Chaim sat down for his meal, and sent for his son, Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga but he refused to come. His refusal caused more amazement among those gathered there. Had their disagreement reached such an extent?

Years went by. Rabbi Chaim had passed away, his sons and sons-in-law were now the shepherds and leaders of different Chassidic communities.

One day, Rabbi Mordechai Dov, now the highly respected Hornisteipol Rebbe visited Sanz. It was during the seven days after Pesach Sheni. At the Morning Prayer his brother-in-law, Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga, was also present. The cantor who was familiar with the minhag (custom) of Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga to say the Tachanun prayer during those days, started to say Tachanun.

But Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga turned to him and told him to skip the Tachanun prayer and to continue to Kaddish.

"Heaven forfend to change the ways of my holy father!" he explained to the cantor.

Rabbi Mordechai Dov was astonished at this behavior. He remembered very well the argument between Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga and his father, his determined opinion in favor of saying Tachanun. To the extent that he went outside with his followers to finish his prayers.

As soon as the prayers concluded, he turned to his brother-in-law and asked him to explain what it all meant.

Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga smiled. "I'll tell you," he said. "That day in Brodnik, very early in the morning, I intended to go to my fathers' room. All of a sudden a drowsiness overcame me, I fell asleep and had a dream.

"In my dream I saw my holy father sitting on a chair, surrounded by hundreds of chassidim, when suddenly they all turned away from my father toward me and exclaimed, 'Long live our Rabbi!' My father was left alone on his chair.

"I woke up agitated and afraid. I understood the dream to be a hint from Heaven that my father was to pass the scepter of leadership to me, and because 'One kingship cannot touch another kingship' [Talmud Yoma 38b], the terrible meaning of this was that my father was to pass away in order to give his place to me. I was overcome by intense fear.

"Right away I took an oath to do a "Dream Fast". After calming down a bit I tried hard to find a way out of this frightening decree, and with Heaven's help I was successful. I came to the conclusion that 'One kingship doesn't touch another kingship' is only valid in the case of the same kingship but if there are two different ones, 'touching' does not apply.

"This did indeed remove the death sentence that was hanging over my father's head, but I was still in the middle of the Dream Fast so I couldn't participate in the meal with my father.

"As for the custom here, in Sanz, there should not be a change from my father's custom," Rabbi Yehezkel Shraga concluded.

So finally the Hornisteipoler understood both the Shinover's instructions that day as well as the mysterious words of the Divrei Chaim that were whispered to him years earlier.

In this week's Parshah we learn about the Mei Meriva. Hashem tells Moshe, take the stick, and gather the nation, talk to the rock, in front of their eyes, water will come out of the rock and there will be enough for all to drink. Moshe took the stick as he was told. Moshe and Aharon gathered the people around the rock and said to them *שמעו נא המרים המן הסלע הזה נוציא לכם מים* - Now listen you rebels, from this rock water will come out." Moshe picked up his stick and hit the rock twice, and the water came out and the nation had what to drink. Hashem says to Moshe and Aharon, "because you did not trust Me in front of the nation, therefore you won't be the ones to bring the nation into the land."

Where exactly was the lack of belief in Hashem in the actions of Moshe? Rashi says, that had Moshe spoken to the rock instead of hitting it, it would have created a greater impact. Hashem told him to take the stick. What did Hashem want him to do with the stick asks the Ramban. Remember this is the same Moshe, who used the stick for the ten plagues and Kriat Yam Suf, and all those places when he was told to take the stick, it was to use, why not here?

The Ramban in the fourth perek of Shmona Perakim explains. Moshe was punished for getting angry at Klal Yisrael when he said *שמעו נא המרים* - Now listen, you rebels. Because the people around him, knew that Moshe doesn't just get angry. If Moshe is angry, it is because Hashem is angry. We don't find anywhere to indicate that Hashem was angry. They complained they were thirsty, Hashem said to bring them in front of the rock and tell the rock to give water, and the water will come. Since Moshe gave the nation the false impression that Hashem was angry, he was punished.

Perhaps what Rashi is saying is, had he just spoken to the rock, i.e. the heart of Klal Yisrael at the time, without blasting them or calling them rebels, and just shown them look, dear friends, lets show you how much Hashem loves you, then spoken to the rock and the water would have come and flown, the Kiddush Hashem would have been massive.

Friends, we need to know that Hashem loves us so much more than we can imagine. No matter how far we have gone, our Father is waiting for us right behind the door, waiting for us to come home, so He can give us a hug and kiss to express the love He has always had for us. Though sometimes, we make ourselves unresponsive of that love, through our actions, Hashem's love for us is infinite, and if you ever hear otherwise, that some individual told you, that Hashem is angry at you, or that Hashem does not love you, they are lying and have no authority to tell you this. *כי לא תהפך במות המת, כי אם בשוברו מדרכו ויהיה* - Hashem does not anticipate the death of a person, he would rather he do Teshuva and live. *ועד יום מותו תחכה לו, אם ישוב מיד תקבלו*. Until the day a person dies, Hashem is waiting for him, if he returns, he is immediately accepted. *כי אתה הוא יוצרם, ואתה יודע צרם, כי הם* - In it is true, You have created them and understand their temptations as they are human. Let us pray that we should merit to just come back home where we feel that love of Hashem, without any barriers, He is waiting for us. The electricity is flowing strongly in the outlet, unfortunately, some of us unplug from the outlet, or we strip our wires, but that does not mean that the connection is not there, we just need to replug in and we will feel that flow of energy just as strong as ever.

B'ezrat Hashem this year Shiva Asar B'Tammuz and Tisha B'Av will be turned to Chagim when we come home and give our Father back the hug He has been giving us this whole time.

So let's try and replug ourselves in, and let's pray with all our hearts, for those suffering from the current situation in Eastern Europe, as well as for the recovery of all the sick, our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, for peace and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual and sweet Shabbat.

חוקת קרה

This week is sponsored in honor of the 28th Yahrzeit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of righteous memory

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The Jewish Weekly's
PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 3
MITZVOT ASEH: 3
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 0

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 87
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1245
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4670

HAFTORA: Shoftim 11:1 - 33

This week in Israel, we study Chapter 5 of Pirkei Avot (outside Israel one studies Chapter 4).