



Someone Who Cared

Rabbi Mendel Blachman
of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh
related the following story.

I am not from a Lubavitcher family, to say the least. My *zeyde* learned in Volozhin and was a *dayan* in Grodno. My father prepared *shiurim* with Reb Shimon Shkop — we didn't exactly come from the Chassidische world.

B'hashgacha pratis, as an eleven-year-old boy I ended up learning in the Lubavitcher yeshiva on Bedford and Dean in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. For Shabbos, we would be sent off to eat with various families in Crown Heights. I was fortunate enough to be a *ben bayis* at the home of Reb Yochanon Gordon, who was the *gabbai* of 770.

We used to daven in 770 in the *small zal* upstairs. One day, my *menahel*, Rabbi Tenenbaum called me into his office and said, "The Rebbe says you're losing weight. And the Rebbe says that it's probably because you're too lazy to *bentch*, so you don't eat bread. The Rebbe says to assign two *bachurim* to make sure that you wash and eat bread at every meal."

The Rebbe was exactly correct.

This was something that changed my life. The Rebbe cared about a boy like me, who did not come from a Lubavitcher family, and I planned to stay just for three years and then go on to learn in Ponevezh. But the Rebbe was concerned about me and I will cherish it for the rest of my life.

My bar mitzvah took place while I was learning in Lubavitcher Yeshiva. It was between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, a time when every Chossid wants to be near the Rebbe. So I told my parents, "I'll come home after Shabbos Bereishis and you'll do my bar mitzvah then."

Soon afterwards, I went into *yechidus* for the first time. The Rebbe went through my *pan* and asked me, "Do you know your *pshetl*?" I answered that I did. "Your father isn't here, so I will test you on your *pshetl*," the Rebbe said.

I was in awe — it was daunting, but at the same time, the Rebbe was telling me, "I'll be your substitute father." I somehow got through the *pshetl*, and then the Rebbe asked, "Nu, and what's with a *maamar*?" Again the Rebbe said that my father wasn't there to *farher* me on the *maamar*, so he would do so.

I began saying the *maamar*, and the Rebbe stopped me in the middle, saying that that was sufficient for the *farher*. Then the Rebbe called for Rabbi Gordon and said, "This boy will have his *aliyah* two days after Yom Kippur. His parents aren't here; we have to make him a party. Call Rabbi Simpson, Rabbi Jacobson, Rabbi Levitin; tell them to come after Shacharis and he'll *chazzer* the *maamar* in 770."

The Rebbe made me my bar mitzvah. ❶