

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles <editor@ascentofsafed.com>

Story #1206 (5781-18) 5 Sh'vat 5781 (Jan. 18, 2021) FREE [email subscription](#)

Discover! the "TillesTells" [WhatsApp Weekly Stories Group](#)

“A Blessing for Broadway”

I [**Dudu Fisher**] am descended from generations of those who opposed Chasidism, and yet I am walking this earth because of a blessing from a chasidic rebbe, **Rabbi Yosef-Yitzchak Schneersohn** the **Rebbe Rayatz**, who was the Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch from 1920 to 1950. This is what happened:

During the time that the Rebbe Rayatz was staying in Riga, Latvia, my grandparents were living on the outskirts of the city. In January of 1932, in the freeze of the winter, my grandmother went into labor with my mother, and things started to go wrong. She was rushed to the hospital where the doctors decided that it was necessary to abort the baby in order to save her life.

My grandmother, Frieda-Gisha, was unwilling to accept the doctors' verdict but, fearing for her life, she asked her sister Leah to run to the nearest synagogue and pray for her. She said she would not make any decision until Leah returned.

So, in the middle of the night, Leah, my great-aunt, did just that — like her sister asked, she ran to the nearest synagogue and started praying. She went up to the holy ark, where the Torah scrolls are kept, grabbed onto the curtain and pleaded with G-d for the life of her sister and her unborn baby.

As she was praying and crying, a woman tapped her on the shoulder. Leah did not know who this woman was — perhaps the cleaning lady — but when this woman said, “Come with me,” she followed her.

Together they went to where the Rebbe Rayatz was staying at the time and asked for his blessing. They received it in writing, and I still have it; it is a treasured possession in my family. It says: “With the help of G-d, everything will go well. You will give birth to a healthy and living child.”

Leah took this blessing and rushed to the hospital, where she was informed that her sister had just been taken into the delivery room. A short while later Frieda Gissa gave birth in a totally normal way to my mother, Miriam, whom the doctors had recommended aborting.



Our family has kept the Rebbe's note for these many years. It is preserved in a safe, and we take it out only when a relative is giving birth so she can take it to the hospital with her. I myself have a copy, and I carry it with me wherever I go.

Two years after my grandmother gave birth to my mother, my grandparents left Latvia and went to live in Israel. It was just in time. The members of my family who

stayed behind — fourteen in total — were murdered by the Latvians in the streets. We have witness testimony from those who saw it happen.

Meanwhile, my mother grew up in Israel with an unusual attachment to Chabad, despite her father's anti-chasidic attitudes. Later on, it was in her house, and with her help, that Rabbi Menashe Althaus started the Chabad Center in Tivon.

Myself, I enlisted in the IDF, and after I completed my army service, I started singing professionally. I was a cantor for many years. Then, while I was in London for a cantorial concert, a cousin invited me to see the musical, *Les Miserables*, and when I went back to Israel, I told my manager that I wanted to take part in the Hebrew production.

He had no idea what I was talking about, but he quickly found out that 'Les Miserables' — called in Hebrew, '*Alway HaChaim*' — was coming to a theater in Tel Aviv. I got the part and became famous for it.

While I was performing in Tel Aviv, Sir Cameron Mackintosh, the world producer of 'Les Miserables,' saw my performance and asked me to come to Broadway. I was stunned.

Of course, every singer wants to appear on Broadway, but I turned him down. I said, "I don't think this will be possible for me, because I am an observant Jew; I don't work on Shabbat or on Jewish holidays."

He said, "Let us meet again to see how we can solve this problem."

"Meanwhile, the story leaked out to the media and the Israeli newspapers blared, "Dudu Fisher goes to Broadway," which was by no means a done-deal.

My mother saw that this whole thing was making me depressed, and she suggested, "Why don't you go see the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Brooklyn, the successor to the one who blessed your grandmother?"

I said, "What am I going to talk to him about — Broadway? So many people are coming to him with real troubles like poverty and illness. How can I bother him with this?" She insisted, "The blessing of a Lubavitcher Rebbe helped us once before; it will help us again."

This was in early 1992. It was no longer possible to see him in a private audience, but it was possible to receive a dollar for charity and a blessing every Sunday.

When my turn came the Rebbe gave me a blessing and told me not to worry; everything would turn out well. His exact words were, "G-d willing, you will hear good news soon. You will go from strength to strength."

And that is exactly what happened.

I got the part. Not only that, the Playbill featured the announcement that, for religious reasons, Dudu Fisher would not be playing the part of Jean Valjean on Friday nights and during Saturday matinees.

In fact, this outcome was nothing short of a miracle -- which never happened before or after, it was a one-time only occurrence.

They called me “the Sandy Koufax of the theater” — referring to the great Jewish baseball player who refused to participate in the 1965 World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur.

Personally, I consider it one of the biggest achievements of my life. When I leave this earth, I hope that people will remember me for this: that I would not violate Shabbat and that I showed it was possible to make it in the world without compromising one’s beliefs.

But, most of all, I am ever so grateful to the Rebbe for helping me to get this message across to the Jewish world at large.

~~~~~

*Source:* Edited and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from a mailing of "JEM - Here's My Story" ([//JEMedia.org](http://JEMedia.org)), as part of their *extraordinary* “My Encounter with the Rebbe” project, documenting the life of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi M. M. Schneerson of righteous memory. More than 1500 videotaped interviews have been conducted to date, all based on the recollections of the people recounting them.

**Dudu Fisher** is a famed Israeli cantor and popular singer, who also played the role of Jean Valjean in the musical *Les Miserables* in Tel Aviv, in New York and in London. He was interviewed in July of 2015, a few months before his 64th birthday.

*Connection:* Seasonal--the 71st yahrzeit of the Rebbe Rayatz of Chabad.

*Photo source:*

R' Chaim Dalfin relates that he heard from R' Meir Plotkin, who heard from R' Yosef Zalmanov -- the only son of R' Shmuel Zalmanov, regarding this picture:

“Twice a year the Rebbe Rayatz would instruct that the door to his apartment should be locked and no one allowed to enter. This was on *Erev Yom Kippur* and on *Chanukah*. On Chanukah 5710, his son-in-law and eventual successor, the Rebbe, quietly called R' Shmuel Zalmanov and told him:

“Stand outside the door with a camera, I will open the door a little, and see how my father-in-law the Rebbe sits by the menorah. You will take a photo, whereupon I immediately will close the door.’

“And so it was.”

*Biographical notes:*

**Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn** [of blessed memory: 12 Tammuz 5640 - **10 Shvat** 5710 (Jan. 1880-June 1950)], known as the **Rebbe Rayatz**, was the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, from 1920 to 1950. He established a network of Jewish educational institutions and Chassidim that was the single most significant factor for the preservation of Judaism during the dread reign of the communist Soviets. In 1940 he moved to the USA, established Chabad world-wide headquarters in Brooklyn and launched the global campaign to renew and spread Judaism in all languages and in every corner of the world, the campaign continued and expanded so remarkably successfully by his son-in-law and successor, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Schneerson.

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe** מנחם: [11 Nissan 5662 - 3 Tammuz 5754 (April 1902 – June 1994 C.E.)], became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law’s passing on 10 Shvat 5710 (1950 C.E.). He is widely acknowledged as the greatest Jewish leader of the second half of the 20th century. Although a dominant scholar in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah and fluent in many languages and scientific subjects, the Rebbe is best known for his extraordinary love and concern for every Jew on the planet. His emissaries around the globe dedicated to strengthening Judaism number in the thousands. Hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, as well as dozens of English renditions.