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This story is dedicated in honor of one of the three couples that together founded Ascent in 1983, YERACHMIEL & SHULAMIT TILLES, on the occasion of their **Golden Anniversary** on 21 Kislev 5783 (Monday Dec. 4).

~~JUBILEE!~~

THE NAZI'S GRANDSON FROM BORDEAUX¹

Arriving early to shul one Friday night in 2016, I [Yaakov Cass] noticed a young man standing at the back of the shul quietly and demurely, looking a little bewildered and out of place. I walked up to him and asked him if he had a place to eat for Shabbos.

It turned out he spoke neither Hebrew nor English, but I managed to communicate with him in broken French. He said he would love to join us and so, after the prayers, we walked home together. He enjoyed very much the Friday night dinner and Shabbos lunch together with my family.

The guest, whom we will call David, did not tell us too much about himself. Still, it was sufficient to enable me to realize that he was a fairly new *baal teshuva* (returnee to mitzvah observance) who had studied for a short while at the Lubavitcher yeshiva of Brunoir on the outskirts of Paris, but was unable to cope with its high level of learning. So he came to Israel to study at the French speaking yeshiva in Ramot, where I live. He was older than all of the other boys and the only Lubavitcher.

We invited him a few times and told him he would always be welcome. Then he disappeared into the ether.

About a year later, one Friday night I was sitting in my place *davvening* (praying) when somebody blocked my light and stood in front of me. I looked up. It was David. With a gigantic grin on his face and obviously in a really joyous and happy state of mind, he said, "Well, you said I could come whenever I want, so here I am."

¹ Perhaps you are disappointed to find this is not a story for Chanukah (which begins this Thursday night). Explanation: I could not resist sharing the contemporary story about prophetic dreams. Towards the beginning of next week, which is entirely Chanukah, we shall send you an excellent Chanukah story, which, to the best of my knowledge has never before been translated. Also, the audio and video story for my [Saturday Night WhatsApp group](#) this week are both Chanukah stories.

We hugged, and back he came to eat with us again. This time we heard the whole long story of his life and how, amazingly, against all odds, he had become a *baal teshuva*.

He told us he came from the town of Bordeaux in France. He had been studying at the university, and was one of the only two Jews in the whole institute. His grandfather had been an officer in the Nazi (*yemach shemam*) army (!!) and had escaped justice by running away to South America.

The officer's son, David's father, moved to France to seek his fortune. He remained a rabid anti-Semite throughout his life. After a lightning courtship, he married David's mother, a Jewess, but after she gave birth he disappeared, never to be seen again.

David's mother was vehemently anti-religious and warned him that if he were to become involved in Judaism in any shape or form, she would immediately disown him.

That was how David was raised. Nevertheless, he developed a deep desire to find out about Judaism, learning and reading up as best as he could, but never daring to tell his mother. Furthermore, he befriended a young Lubavitcher family living not far from his university and they encouraged him in his quest.

One night he fell asleep and had a vivid dream: He was standing in front of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's desk and the Rebbe picked up a letter from a pile in front of him and read out loud:

"We have in our town, a young man named David who is searching for meaning in life and we have befriended him. However, there is no Chabad *shliach* (emissary of the Rebbe) in this section of Bordeaux who could help him. Would the Rebbe please send a shliach to help him become a properly committed Jew."

The Rebbe put the letter down and, addressing David, said, "No, I will not send a shliach. I will take responsibility myself to bring this young man *fully* to Judaism."

He then told me to leave university and go to yeshiva and that he would be with me wherever I went; there was nothing to be frightened or concerned about.

After hearing this story, I was captivated. I asked him what happened next. He told me what I knew; that he had been to Brunoir and had then come to Israel. He went on to relate that one fine summer's day, his yeshiva went to the tomb site of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron.

While he was there somebody pointed out to him a book that he was not familiar with, '*Igrot Kodesh* (Holy Letters) of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,' and suggested that he write to the Rebbe. He wrote a letter asking the Rebbe for

help and guidance in his studies and placed the letter randomly into the book.

Upon opening the book to where he had placed his letter, he nearly passed out when he read the words, “Why are you concerned? I told you that I have taken responsibility for you. I will be with you in all your endeavors. Just concentrate on learning Torah.”

That is exactly what David did from then on.

As mentioned above, there was only one other Jew in the university of Bordeaux. Now David revealed to us that the ‘other’ was a female medical student whom David had courted *before* becoming religious. After a couple of years, David returned to Bordeaux to renew this courtship.

How elated he was to discover that the girl had become religious as well, despite having a background as far away from Judaism as David’s! She too had a non-Jewish father who had come to live in France; he was originally from Libya. And just like David’s, her mother was fiercely against Judaism.

The young couple had agreed to marry and the reason why David was back in Jerusalem was to get married, on the very next day after that Shabbos! He told me that there was not a single guest from either side of the family who would be attending the wedding, apart from his mother. She had become reconciled with David’s return to Judaism, and had even begun to keep mitzvot herself. Sadly, the bride’s mother refused to travel to the wedding.

My local Chabad shul in Ramot arranged an impromptu *ufruf*² for David. The French yeshiva sent students to sing and dance at the wedding, and then sent them again to liven up each night of the *sheva berachot*.³

The end of the story is even more astonishing. While in Bordeaux, David had gone to visit his Lubavitcher friends and told them about his dream and the letter that the Rebbe had read to him and his comments.

The wife turned pale. She barely managed to articulate, “On what date was your dream?”

David told her and she promptly fainted.

When she had recovered somewhat she told him that the letter the Rebbe had read out to him was the very same letter that she had written asking the Rebbe to help him, and she had placed it into *Igrot Kodesh* on the morning immediately preceding his dream.

² (Yiddish) An aliyah to the Torah on the Shabbat preceding the wedding, and a joyous *kiddush*-celebration after the Services.

³ For the 7 nights and days after the wedding ceremony, any time the new couple is at a meal in which ten Jewish men are present, a special set of seven blessings is recited in their honor at the end of the meal.

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by Yaakov Cass in “*Living Jewish*” #73. **Rabbi Yaakov Cass** is a Lubavitcher chasid living in Jerusalem. Until recently, he was a senior official in the Israel Ministry of Health.

*Connection:* In this week’s Torah reading, *Vayeishev*, there are four prophetic dreams.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe** (11 Nissan 1902 - 3 Tammuz 1994), became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law, *Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn*, passed away in Brooklyn on 10 Shvat 1950. 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. Many hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, and hundreds of English renditions too.