

I was fifteen during the summer of 1962 when a visiting Lubavitcher rabbi named Zalman Schachter came to Camp Ramah,. He sang his soft and expressive melody for the first blessing of the Birkat HaMazon / Grace after Meals which I remember to this day. It was the first time this yeshivah boy had experienced a different way of giving thanks for the gift of nourishing food, one that focused on the Source of the food. In a sense, I became his chasid that summer, although I didn't know it at the time. Six years later, while visiting a friend in Boston, we attended Shabbat services at Havurat Shalom and I moved closer to knowing that I was his chasid when I heard him sing Eyl Adon, the Shabbat poem in praise of the many realms of light, to the Yiddish folksong "Donna Donna." And four years after that, searching for a spiritual practice that affirmed the first 25 years of my life and immersion in Jewish practice and study, I wrote him from the BC Interior and asked to learn with him, consciously becoming his chasid.

Reb Zalman always said that a chasid must have a rebbe and one becomes a rebbe only when one has a chasid. When he asked me if I would accept semichah / ordination from him, we created new possibilities for others with what has become the movement for the spiritual renewal of Judaism and a current ordination program of 80 students. He offered me a semichah which I could accept and, as he put it, I gave him permission to begin a lineage which is both new and old.

On July, 3, 2014, I was teaching at our Semicha Week summer gathering at a retreat center outside of Portland, OR when one of our students opened the door to my classroom. After waiting politely for a break in the conversation, he said that he had the sad duty of informing us that our beloved rebbe had peacefully passed into the next world that morning. Supported by my students and dear friends, together we affirmed Reb Zalman's death with the traditional words, "Barukh Dayan HaEmet / Blessed be the True Judge."

Memories and images passed before me, arising from the years of learning and friendship that we had shared. In the summer of 1971, my life partner, Hanna Tiferet, and I immigrated to BC and settled in the Kootenays. It was a year of living in harmony with the Earth and seeking spiritual meaning. Our first son, Noah, was born the following summer, after our house burned down. I had written Zalman for spiritual guidance. He was living in Winnipeg at the time and teaching at the University of Manitoba. He invited me to come to Winnipeg. After Hanna and Noah were settled, I hitchhiked 1500 miles there and back to officially meet and begin my studies with my rebbe.

In 1976-77, Hanna and I lived in Philadelphia with Reb Zalman, learning how the rebbe "tied his shoe laces." Mordecai and Hana Wosk visited him that year and they encouraged me to apply for both the UBC Hillel Director position and to become Beth Tikvah's first rabbi. This provided the opportunity for us to bring this new-old form of Judaism to a place we loved in a country where I, as the son of a Toronto born Jewish pioneer, felt at home. Inspired by the havurah movement and Reb Zalman's mystical teachings, we slowly gathered people to form the Hillel Minyan which became "The Minyan," then Havurat Sim Shalom and is now Or Shalom. I served the Vancouver Jewish community for ten years and then went back to the US to work as the rabbi at Dartmouth College. After another ten years, we settled in Boston where I became the Director of ALEPH, Alliance for Jewish Renewal, and eventually a teacher in the Rabbinic Program. Reb Zalman's teachings became my life's work and I worked closely with him to translate and transcribe his thought in several books and manuals including, "Credo of a

Modern Kabbalist,” “The Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam,” “Renewal Is Judaism Now,” and “Integral Halachah.”

Reb Zalman revealed to us a Judaism which is open and inclusive. He said that once we were witness to the profound image of Earth from outer space, we could begin to comprehend the oneness of all life beyond the limitations of national borders. How could we then separate the fate of the Jewish people from that of all people nor the fate of humanity from the condition of all of life on this planet? He taught about Deep Ecumenism and showed us how to relate to Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and First Nations People, embracing and respecting the holiness in each tradition. His mission was to maintain the integrity of Klal Yisrael while also embracing the shared truth in all the spiritual and ethical paths present in our world. Inspired by him, we opened spiritual leadership to women, created services that others could help lead as they developed their skills, designed tallitot that were colourful and beautiful, included gays and lesbians and then all the wonderful and various expressions of identity in our growing communities.

Reb Zalman, together with Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, had a spiritual assignment to redeem the Jewish people after the Holocaust. These two “shlichim / messengers” from Chabad, revitalized Judaism and sparked the renewal of spirituality in every facet of Jewish life.

When I received and accepted semichah from Reb Zalman in 1974 in the Winnipeg home of Rabbi Neal and Carol Rose, I was the first and only member of this new lineage. Now there are more than 100 ordained as a Renewal Rabbi, Hazzan, or Rabbinic Pastor and students keep arriving, though we don't advertise or recruit. Meditation, retreats, ecstatic prayer, new music, poetry, art, and movement are now available options everywhere that Jews gather to pray. So much of this results from the vision, intelligence, and spiritual depth of this one man, whose life we celebrate and whose presence on this earth plane we will miss so deeply.

With gratitude for the blessing of his presence in my own life these past 52 years, I say my own kaddish for my rebbe and spiritual father, Meshullam Zalman Chiyya ben Chayah Gittel v'Shlomo haKohen, z”l. May his memory be a blessing and awaken in us the deep desire to live in peace and harmony with all of creation.