

THE Rebbetzin & THE Doctor

Dr. Ira Weiss was privileged to care for the Rebbe after his heart attack in 770 on Shemini Atzeres 5738/1977.

Although the Rebbe was his “patient,” so to speak, Dr. Weiss also had some dealings with Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka. N’shei Chabad Newsletter thanks Dr. Weiss for allowing us to publish some of those precious memories, transcribed and edited by Sara Gold from a talk given by Dr. Weiss.



Dr. Ira Weiss receives kos shel brachah from the Rebbe on 24 Tishrei 5741. JEM photo ID#190578.

The Rebbe, after he saw that his hypotension and cardiogenic shock from the heart attack had come under control, asked me to listen for a minute to the Rebbetzin’s heart. I readily agreed. Lo and behold, I heard a faint heart murmur over one of the valves.

Although of delicate build, the Rebbetzin was really hale and hearty. She would drive by herself around the whole city of New York, parking the car herself and all, going wherever she needed to go. She was always a lady, but independent and brave.

I said, “I’m just going to tell you, Rebbe, that she has a small murmur, but you need not panic because there’s nothing that we can do about it other than follow it and listen periodically, to see if things are changing or if there are cardiac signals.”


I made this observation in 1977. In 1981, my public high school class was preparing to hold its 20th reunion. I told the Rebbe that I was very much looking forward to my reunion. The Rebbe was

interested in it; he wanted to know all the details about the reunion and my classmates.

On the eve of the reunion, I got a call from Rabbi Binyamin Klein, a member of the Rebbe’s secretariat, telling me that all of a sudden the Rebbetzin had developed a fever and just wasn’t herself. I asked Rabbi Klein to take a picture of her fingernails for me. I saw under her fingernails what I’d worried about. It seemed there was an infection of the aortic heart valve that was spraying bacterial fragments to the periphery of the body. The fingernail provides a window of opportunity to see what’s going on with the circulation. It was the symptom of endocarditis, which is a fatal disease if left untreated.

I realized it had to be attended to right away, and I prepared to come to New York immediately. The Rebbe asked me, “Dr. Weiss, why not go to the reunion? And you’ll come in after that.” I said, “Rebbe, this can’t wait two days. I have to come in now.”

The Rebbe asked me a few times to please wait



and come in after the reunion. I have great respect for the Rebbe, but in this case, I had to make my own plans. I couldn't listen to the Rebbe. I just didn't feel right postponing treatment for two days.

I took a plane into New York and came straight to the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's home on President Street. The minute I touched the door, it swung open and the steward of the house, Rabbi Chessed Halberstam, was there, announcing my arrival to the Rebbe who seemed to be expecting me. The Rebbe knew his customers very well. He knew I would not listen to his request to delay my visit. In fact, the Rebbe had prepared four newly translated *Tehillas Hashem siddurim* for my wife, our two daughters, and me. The *siddurim* had been stacked near the door, awaiting my arrival.

I went to see the Rebbetzin upstairs in her room and found that she did have all the signs of endocarditis. I called a few doctors who were all in agreement on how we should treat the Rebbetzin. The appropriate intravenous antibiotics worked. The treatment took six weeks, and because we didn't want to put her on an indwelling line which can give people infections, I had Dr. Moshe (Bob) Feldman go over four times a day to administer the antibiotics. She was a small person, very daintily built. Her veins were even daintier; it was difficult to put the needle in. Never once did Dr. Feldman complain about this painstaking assignment.

The Rebbetzin responded quickly and fully to the treatment, which solved the bacterial problem on her heart valve and cured it. It was unbelievable that the Rebbe had told me in 1977 to listen to her heart. Otherwise, I wouldn't have known what was going on when I received the call from Rabbi Klein.

Over the years, the Rebbetzin noticed that I often came with my wife and two young daughters. One time she asked me, "We haven't heard for several years now about any more children being born. Is there a problem?"

I said, "You know, I won't say there's any problem, but I'm just too busy and overworked to deal with having another child at this point."

The Rebbetzin looked at her calendar to see when the next *farbrengen* would be, the type of *farbrengen*

when I would come in to examine the Rebbe. The Rebbetzin told me, "Dr. Weiss, I'm looking at the calendar. It looks like we're going to have a *farbrengen* on [these dates]. I will give you a *brachah* and a request. Don't come for the *farbrengens*. That way you'll be less stressed and less overworked. And we'll see what happens."

Lo and behold, with the Rebbetzin's *brachah*, we had a third child, Rachel Chana. Her middle name was after the Rebbe's mother. What a wonderful addition to our family!

I'll tell you one more story about the Rebbetzin. My daughter Becky was a little bit of a Dennis-the-menace type of child. My wife and I were talking with the Rebbetzin in her living room and suddenly we heard a worrisome noise. We were horrified to realize that Becky had opened the china closet and was about to start examining its contents!

The Rebbetzin didn't bat an eyelash. She acted like it was no big deal at all. In fact, she loved Becky so much that she sent her Chanukah *gelt* every year.

It is difficult to describe the Rebbetzin's love for us and how she let us feel it, but it was definitely real and we always knew what a gift it was.

Throughout my career, I commuted to the hospital and to my office almost exclusively by bicycle. The Rebbetzin made a habit of tracking the weather in Chicago. Not infrequently she would comment, "I see it's cold and windy in Chicago today. Are you sure it's safe for you to go biking in this kind of weather?"

I said, "Rebbetzin, you're more worried about me than my own mother!" That's the relationship we had.

From the time of the Rebbe's heart attack all the way to the end of the Rebbetzin's life, I spoke to the Rebbetzin on the phone every night except Shabbos and Yom Tov. The Rebbetzin would update me on the Rebbe's health; our phone calls usually lasted about 15 minutes or so.

Every conversation with the Rebbetzin, every moment spent in her presence, was an unforgettable gift. ❧