

איש הישר



**A Compilation of articles written
about the life and legacy of
a true Torah Giant**

Moreinu V'rabeinu

**HaRav Shmuel Yaakov
Weinberg Zt"l**

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Biographical introduction

by **Rabbi Mordechai Plaut**

His Links to the Past

The Weinberg family is from the Slonimer chassidic dynasty, a Lithuanian *chassidus*. The approach and relationship of the Slonim *chassidim* to Torah has been similar to the classical Litvishe approach. The founder of the dynasty was HaRav Avrohom ben Yitzchok Mattisyohu Weinberg, the author of *Chesed LeAvrohom* and *Yesod Ho'avodah*, who was the *rosh yeshiva* in Slonim before he became *rebbe*. His teachers in *chassidus* were HaRav Noach of Lachowitch and HaRav Moshe of Kobrin.

The Slonimers always had a special closeness to Eretz Yisroel. Every erev Shabbos, and on other occasions, they made a special collection of *Eretz Yisroel gelt* to support the *yishuv* there.

Even before he was bar mitzvah, the Rebbe sent his grandson Noach, along with a group of "Anash" from Slonimer *chassidim*, to Tiveriya in Eretz Yisroel in order to build a Torah *yishuv*.

The project took hold in Tiveriya. The *chassidim* contributed to the Torah development of the whole area. R' Noach grew up in Tiveriya. He became engaged in Tammuz, 5631 (1871), and in the "*Roshei Perokim*" drawn up on 3 Tammuz of that year, his future father-in-law promised him five years of *kest*. The wedding was on erev *Shabbos parshas Toldos* 5632 (1872).

On his engagement, his grandfather, the first Slonimer Rebbe, wrote him a note with important advice: "To my grandson the *chosson* Noach *n"y*. Mazel tov to you. From now on strengthen yourself and forcefully brace yourself to enter into *avodas Hashem*, as the *posuk* says: ". . . Bnei Yisroel are *avodim* to me." And this is impossible without the *gevurah* of conquering your *yetzer*. The main thing is first of all to purify your thought, and to worship Hashem with deed, word and thought. *Temimus*, *simcha* and *zerizus* are the guardians of *avoda*; *yirah* and *ta'anug* are the wings of *avoda*; and prayer from the heart and toil and steady learning of Torah are the gates to Heaven. But with all this [you need] entreating and supplicating before *Hashem yisborach*. There is no need write more because you have, Thank G-d, your teachers in front of you. And the foundation stone is to be *shomer habris*. (signed) AB"Z (*Ovicho Zekeinecho*) Avrohom

Among R' Noach's children were R' Yitzchok Mattisyohu, R' Avrohom (who was born in 1889 and became the Slonimer Rebbe in 5715-1955) and a sister Bubba who married R' Yoel Ashkenazi who was related to the Satmar family. R' Noach was *niftar* in 5687 (1927).

R' Yitzchok Mattisyohu had an intensive Torah education from a very early age. He was a big *ba'al kishron* and a *talmid chochom*, but also very practical.

He married at a very young age and his first wife passed away while giving birth to his son Yosef. His second wife bore him another son, Avrohom, before they were divorced. He struggled for several years raising his family by himself, but then he heard of a great *tzaddik* and *talmid chochom* who lived in Tzfas named Rav Avner Lorberbaum, a direct descendent of the famed Nesivos Hamishpot, whose oldest daughter Hinda was ready to be married. R' Mattis went to Tzfas to speak to him, and ended up marrying the daughter himself. He was in his early thirties at the time.

He married off his oldest son soon after. R' Chaim Yosef Dovid ("Yossel") married Pearl Lider of Yerushalayim in Adar, 5672 (1912). In those days and in that community, everyone married young. R' Chaim Yosef Dovid was about 16 years old at his marriage.

R' Mattis had a son and daughter by his second wife in relatively tranquil times. Chava, that daughter (today she is Rebbetzin Pincus), says that she does not know exactly how old she is, but they kept better track of the age of her older brother R' Moshe who was born in 1910, and she is a bit younger than he. Her treasured first memory is of her father and grandfather R' Avner learning together while rocking her.

World War I was raging in Europe, and times were very rough for the *yishuv* in Eretz Yisroel. A significant portion of the regular income of the Jews of *Eretz Yisroel* was composed of donations from *chutz la'aretz* such as the *Eretz Yisroel gelt* collected in Slonim. The severe disruption of the communities that was caused by the war made it difficult to collect the regular monies and impossible to send whatever was collected to its intended recipients.

Life in *Eretz Yisroel* was also disrupted as the Turks, who were allied with the Germans, used the area as a base of operations, and the presence of the army and its movements were very disruptive. The Turks also imposed taxes and other restrictions on Jews, especially those who were citizens of hostile powers.

R' Mattis had built a mill on the Jordan River near Tiveriya. His main customers were the kibbutzim in the area -- some of the earliest -- who brought in their wheat for milling.

Many of the area kibbutzim were far from religion. R' Mattis had a horse and he used to visit the kibbutzim to circumcise the children, unannounced. Although the kibbutzniks would not call a *mohel*, they did not usually refuse his services when they were proffered for free.

The Slonim community in Tiveriya founded a learning *kollel* near the hot springs there and the tomb of Rav Meir Ba'al Hanes. Rav Noach was involved as was R' Mattis and other members of the Slonim community in Tiveriya, including R' Mattis' good friend R' Osher Werner. The mill was powered by the waters of the Jordan. Where the water entered the mill to turn the water wheel, it flowed strong and fast. The currents apparently brought fish to the area, as they had a perennial problem with the *Arabkes* (Arab women) who came to sneak in to catch fish. R' Mattis was concerned that someone might get hurt and he posted signs and even *mashgichim* whose job it was to keep out the *Arabkes*. All this did not prevent one of them from getting her hair caught in the machinery and getting severely injured or killed. This brought the wrath of the Turkish authorities down on R' Mattis, despite his efforts to avoid just such an accident.

Some said that the Turkish authorities had their eyes on the mill even before the incident. In any case, this incident gave them an opportunity: If they executed the owner they could take over his property. R' Noach's second wife, Mumma ("Aunt") Brocho, was a citizen of Russia, and she wasted no time in traveling to Yerushalayim where she prevailed upon the Russian consul to go to Tiveriya to free her step-grandson -- which he was able to do.

The European powers had all established consuls in Eretz Yisroel as part of their grand designs on the crumbling Ottoman Turkish Empire. Each consul had wide powers under Turkish law, and they watched over their citizens jealously.

Once World War I began, however, and the Ottoman Turks were at war with the European powers, all of the old power that European consuls enjoyed disappeared. The authorities began to arrest those who had been freed because of the

intervention of a foreign consul, and R' Yitzchok Mattisyohu hastily fled for Alexandria with his close friend R' Osher Werner. This was in 1915.

From the relative safety of the Egyptian port (which was under British control) they wrote to the Slonimer Rebbe for advice. R' Mattis thought that the war would not last long, and he wanted to sit it out in Alexandria and return to his family and community in Tiveriya after it was over.

The Rebbe wrote him back that he was mistaken. The war would be a long one, and he should not expect to be able to return soon. He advised him to take the next ship out for America.

It is hard to imagine any other circumstances that would have brought R' Mattis to America. Although the streets of America held a strong attraction to many who were concerned about *parnossa* and material wealth, for a Yid like R' Mattis the well-known spiritual dangers of America made it very unattractive, to say the least. However, under the circumstances he had little choice, and on top of that he had the advice of the Rebbe. The Torah community of America and the English-speaking world was immeasurably enriched by his move.

The trip took a long time under the wartime conditions. They had little to eat, but R' Mattis and R' Osher had a *gemora* and they did not care if the food was sparse or monotonous.

R' Mattis' family was left behind, and things were not easy for them. There was real famine in Eretz Yisroel, and thousands of Jews died of hunger. This was true all over Eretz Yisroel. The Yerushalayim community in particular has bitter memories of that period, as the Zionists seized control of all the money that did trickle through from *chutz la'aretz* and refused to release it to those who remained faithful to the traditional ways.

In Tiveriya, Rebbetzin Hinda Weinberg proved bold and resourceful, perhaps pushed by the circumstances. Her sister Esther got her a machine for making woolen stockings and other warm clothing. It gets quite cold in those areas in the winter, and there was a big demand for warm clothing. After making them, she took them herself, at great risk, to Syria to sell. She came back with flour, a scarce and precious commodity in those days in Eretz Yisroel. They used the flour to bake large loaves and measure the pieces into which they cut them, so that everyone could be fed.

Living in Tzfas

Left alone, Rebbetzin Weinberg spent most of her time in Tzfas with her own family. Chava's childhood memories are not of a harsh or difficult time. She remembers sitting in those days on Shabbos afternoon in the large window of their house that led out to the courtyard, as her mother, grandmother and aunt softly sang *G-tt fun Avrohom* at *shalos seudas* time.

She also remembers the early snows of the winters in Tzfas. Tucked warmly into her mother's fur jacket, she would listen for her older brother Moshe walking home from *cheder* in the dark. The *cheder* boys were nervous about walking home by themselves in the dark, and they used to carry torches and sing *Ho'aderes veho'emuna* to keep up their spirits.

From time to time the family went to visit their relatives in Tiveriya. To do so, they had to organize a *shayoro*, a small caravan to travel by mule or donkey. These caravans were led by local Arabs or by one of the Sephardic Jews. The family had to be ready early in the morning, for the journey took them a full day (today it takes less than an hour). As evening fell they could just make out the twinkling lights of Tiveriya in the distance.

The Struggle in America

R' Yitzchok Mattisyohu had to struggle to establish himself in America. Working on Shabbos was out of the question for him, but it was not easy to find work during the rest of the week for someone who was not willing to come in on Shabbos. In those days all of America worked five and a half days, including half a day on Saturday. It was not until much later, in the 1940's, that America went on the current five day workweek that made things so much easier for those who keep Shabbos.

So R' Mattis tried many things. One of his ideas was to start a small dairy to supply *cholov Yisroel*. He found someone who had a place in the mountains that he called "Har Sinai." That man used to rent out rooms in the summer to those from the city who wanted to escape the oppressive heat. R' Mattis tried keeping some cows on his place, but it did not work out.

After many trials, R' Mattis eventually opened a wholesale trimmings store on the Lower East Side on Bleeker Street. Since he owned his own business, no one could tell him to stay open on Shabbos. He became known for his scrupulous honesty in business.

But it was not only *shemiras Shabbos* that was important to him. R' Mattis was determined to live even in America just like he had in Tzfas and Tiveriya, in terms of *kedusha* and *taharo*, and in this he very much succeeded.

Together Again

Still, it was six long years, and 1921, before he could send for his family to join him.

Today, Rebbetzin Pincus still remembers the trip well. They first went to Jaffa where they stayed a few nights at a hotel near the beach. They boarded the ship for the two-week trip to America. On board they had to make do with salads and eggs.

As they approached the American shore, the young Chava recognized her father waiting for them. Although she had been too young to remember him the last time she saw him, before he fled, the resemblance between him and her older half- brother Yossel was so strong that his identity was unmistakable.

The reunited family set about building *Yiddishkeit* in America, both on a personal level and in the community.

R' Mattis was described by his son-in-law, Rav Avrohom Pincus, as a *kodosh* and a *tohor*. He was determined to live in the *arba amos shel halacha* even in America of those days, when *shemiras Shabbos* was the big *nisoyon* for many Jews, and there was not even any dream left of such rarefied *kedusha*. R' Mattis created and lived in a veritable *teivas Noach* in the turbulent waters of the *yetzer hora* of America.

As one stunning indication of his achievements, he did not look out of his own *arba amos*. He lived within the *arba amos* of Hashem and learned Torah constantly. There are many anecdotes connected with this, and as incredible as it seems to one who did not know him, it was part of life for his family. The Rosh Yeshiva used to tell how he always knew that he could avoid his father if he remained silent in his vicinity. R' Mattis would simply walk right by, completely unaware that his son was standing there.

Rebbetzin Pincus tells that she once left their house just as her father was approaching. In a mischievous mood, she blocked his path. Her father moved to one side to go around her. She quickly moved over as well. R' Mattis tried once more, but then suspected something. He looked up, saw that the woman was his daughter, and they both had a laugh.

R' Mattis learned at every opportunity that he had. In between customers in his store, he opened a *sefer*.

On Sundays, which was not a business day in those days, he used to go around to collect *Eretz Yisroel gelt*, with a leather valise. While speaking with people about the money, he also spoke to them about Shabbos, learning and *kashrus*.

He was also deeply committed to bringing up his children in the path of *Yisroel Saba*, and did not spare effort nor expense to realize this.

His daughter was the only American to go learn with Soroh Schenirer in Cracow. R' Mattis wanted to send her almost as soon as she arrived in America, but her mother insisted that she wait until she was 18. Rebbetzin Pincus remembers that her father used to pay her a dollar for each *perek* of *Pirkei Ovos* that she learned -- and that was in the days that a dollar was a dollar.

Showing his combination of business acumen and commitment to Torah learning, R' Mattis developed this approach of giving rewards for his children's learning, and to each the offer was different, as they discovered only years later when they compared notes. R' Noach remembers that he was also offered a dollar a *perek*, though his sister Chaya was offered the princely sum of five dollars. Recognizing his older son's abilities, R' Mattis offered R' Yaakov only ten cents a *perek*!

He felt this a very effective method of *chinuch* and wrote his son Yosef in Eretz Yisroel to offer his own children financial incentives to learn Torah (their families were both about the same age).

One can imagine that the sons got a lot of attention. Although he sent them to the best schools he could find, he did not spare himself in learning with them as much as possible. On *leil Shabbos* they davened in the Nine Unninetzik *shul* on the Lower East Side, and R' Mattis learned with his sons for two to three hours before they all went home to their *seudas Shabbos*.

A Trip to Eretz Yisroel

In 1931 (5691), Mrs. Weinberg went to Eretz Yisroel to visit her family. She left her oldest son Moshe in America. Her daughter Chava was in Cracow, the only American student of Soroh Schenirer. She took her two younger sons with her, R' Yaakov, who was eight at the time, and R' Noach, who was just a baby.

In Tiveriya, the young Yaakov was tested by his father's family almost as soon as he arrived. They were surprised to see that he had mastered two *masechtos*. When he was asked who taught him, he answered, "My father."

At first he went to *cheder* in Tiveriya, until a certain incident that he often retold in later years. Outside the *cheder* one day, a woman's clothing caught fire and she screamed for help. She burned to death. The rebbe of his class said they could not go to help her because she was a woman. The young Yaakov refused to go back to learn with that rebbe, since he displayed the obvious trait of a *chossid shote*, and he could not bear to learn Torah from such a person. "This is not Torah," he said. "If he does not do what the *Ribono Shel Olom* wants, I cannot learn with him."

Altogether, they spent three years in Eretz Yisroel. For a time R' Yaakov learned in the famous Yerushalayim *cheder* Eitz Chaim.

He was young and at first the yeshiva did not want to even interview him. For one thing, they said, he is American. For another, he is very young. They could not do anything about the first but to at least make the second less obvious his mother bought him an older boys' type hat (a *cappalootch* or "super"), so that he would not appear so out of place.

Materially the life was very simple, even as it was spiritually rich. It was still the time of the old-time *Yerushalayim shel ma'alo*.

The young boy lived with his older half-brother. He slept on the floor. The school day was from eight in the morning until eight at night. He used to say that breakfast in those days was bread and onions, while supper was onions and bread. Even in later years, material comforts meant nothing to him and those years certainly taught him that one can survive without material comforts.

Back in America, he went to Torah Vodaas, and then to the Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva started by HaRav Dovid Leibowitz, now in Forest Hills. R' Mattis liked the fact that they hardly had any *bein hazmanim*, learning through Tisha B'Av, just like in Eretz Yisroel.

When he got older he went to Yeshivas Rabbenu Chaim Berlin under HaRav Yitzchok Hutner, *zt"l*, where he became a star *talmid*.

Rav Hutner said of him that he has a *tefisa* and a *schnellkeit* in *kishron* that are unparalleled. HaRav Aharon Schechter quoted HaRav Hutner as saying that he had a *shtarker kop*.

Rav Emanuel Feldman, formerly of Atlanta and now of Yerushalayim, recalls that when he went to the high school of Yeshivas Chaim Berlin in 1942-43, Rav Hutner gave him special attention since he knew his father from Slobodke. Every young *bochur* was assigned an older *bochur* who took care of him, making sure that his needs were met. The younger boys had their older mentors to turn to when anything bothered them. Because of Rav Hutner's special relationship with the senior Rav Feldman, Rav Hutner assigned R' Yaakov Weinberg to be R' Emanuel's mentor.

When R' Emanuel arrived and went to greet Rav Hutner, the *rosh yeshiva* told him, "I have arranged for you a special young man to take care of you." Then he introduced him to R' Yaakov, the top *bochur* in the *beis medrash*.

R' Emanuel Feldman eventually met up with R' Yaakov later at Ner Israel in Baltimore, and much later they became *mehutonim* when R' Yaakov's daughter Miriam married R' Emanuel's son Ilan, now the rabbi of his father's former *shul* in Atlanta.

As the star *talmid* of HaRav Hutner, R' Yaakov was sent to a weekend rabbonus at the tender age of 19. He received *semichah* from his *rosh yeshiva* in 1944, at the age of 21.

A Time of Transition

In June of 1945 (5705), R' Yaakov Weinberg wed Chana, the only daughter of HaRav Yaakov Yitzchok Halevi Ruderman, *zt"l*, one of the Alter of Slobodke's star *talmidim*, who had founded the Ner Israel Yeshiva in Baltimore. Only a few weeks later, R' Yaakov's father Rav Mattis was *niftar* at the too-young age of 68.

R' Yaakov moved to Baltimore and his father-in-law's yeshiva, where he spent the rest of his life in *harbotzas Torah*, aside from a seven year period in the branch of the yeshiva in Toronto. His brother R' Noach, who later founded his own yeshiva Aish Hatorah in Yerushalayim, regarded his older brother as his *rebbe* and followed him to Baltimore.

R' Yaakov continued learning and soon began to say *shiurim* in Ner Israel. R' Nachman Kline, a close *talmid* of HaRav Ruderman in those days, recalls that the Rosh Yeshiva told him that he should go to his son-in-law's *shiur*. "You will hear things like you never heard before." He told other people that others make two or three *shiurim* from what his son-in-law says in only one *shiur*.

During the *shiva*, the family received a letter from a woman who lives in an isolated community in St. Mary's County, Maryland, a two hour drive from Baltimore. The correspondent was the daughter of someone who heard classes from Rav Weinberg more than 40 years ago. For seven years the young Weinberg couple would drive two hours each way to give classes (both of them) in that isolated Jewish community. The writer merely wanted to express her gratitude for that effort so long ago, and to say that there are now three *frum* generations as a result of that effort.

In those days the community in St. Mary's County built a *shul*. Everyone pitched in and even Rav Weinberg climbed up to bang in some nails on the roof. He never held himself above or aloof, but was a part of things with everyone else.

"The Chabura"

Once Rav Weinberg's son asked his father which were the best times in his life. Without hesitation he answered the period of the Chabura in Ner Israel and the years in Toronto.

By any measure, the Chabura was a remarkable phenomenon. A group of about 18 outstanding young students were selected, and put together in a special room with a devoted *rebbe* to learn and develop. They spent the whole day together, but separate from the rest of the yeshiva. HaRav Weinberg said *shiurimin Bovo Kama* and in *Pirkei Ovos* with the commentary of the Chossid Yaavetz. Everyone who participated remembers it as a time of tremendous, stimulating growth.

It is evident from a partial list of the *talmidim* just how much they grew, for many went on to great achievements of their own: HaRav Yochanan Zweig (*rosh yeshiva* in Miami), HaRav Moshe Hochman (a *rosh yeshiva* in Toronto), HaRav Nochum Lansky, HaRav Simcha Soloveitchik, and HaRav Uziel Milevsky, *zt"l*. This, again, is only a partial list.

In 1964 (5724), HaRav Weinberg went to the branch of Yeshivas Ner Israel that had been established a few years earlier in Toronto where he served as *rosh yeshiva* until 1971 (5731).

During that period many *talmidim* from the main yeshiva in Baltimore went to Toronto for various periods in order to learn with the Rosh Yeshiva there. He said many *shiurim* including, for a time, a daily *shiur* in *Chumash* in which he went slowly, *posuk* by *posuk*, analyzing and treating everything carefully and thoroughly. It was a relatively small yeshiva (the high school was the larger component) and there was an opportunity for those who wanted to learn from the Rosh Yeshiva to do so.

After that he returned to Baltimore, as the Toronto yeshiva became independent. He spent the next 28 years in the Ner Israel yeshiva in Baltimore, the last 12 of them as *rosh yeshiva* after his great father-in-law was *niftar* in 1987 (5747).

Talmidim from Yeshiva

A Talmid's Appreciation

By Rabbi Sheftel Meir Neuberger

It is presumptuous for a *talmid* to even attempt to encapsulate in mere words a definitive portrayal of his *Rebbe*. It is especially so when the *Rebbe* was an individual as unique as was my *Rebbe*, Rabbi Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg Zt"l, *Rosh HaYeshiva* of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore. The most I can do is try to share some facts about his life and a limited perspective of the *Rosh HaYeshiva* gleaned from observations made over the course of a relationship - which was my deep privilege - that spanned several decades.

Rabbi Weinberg was the consummate *Rebbe* to his *talmidim*, an innovative yet deeply traditional *mechanech* who, above all, inspired those he taught to take responsibility for the *Klal*. He was a compassionate counselor to those who sought his advice, and, at the same time, an inspiring leader; a man incredibly simple in his personal needs, yet intellectually complex, even at times inscrutable. He was a deeply caring human being who fully shared in others joy and sadness, and, above all, a relentless demander of truth.

Deep Roots In Holy Realms

In the 1860s, the first Slonimer *Rebbe*, *Ha'Admor Rav* Avraham (the author of the *Yesod Ha'avoda*) sent his young grandson Reb Noach Zt"l, along with a group of *Slonimer chassidim*, to establish a Torah community in Tiberius. Reb Noach's son, Reb Yitzchak Matisyahu Zt"l, was an extraordinary *talmid chacham* whose *hasmada* was legend; he might well have become the Slonimer *Rebbe*, but deferred to his brother Reb Avrohom Zt"l.

"Reb Matis" was forced by circumstances to move to America during World War I. Though he earned his livelihood as a businessman, he would study Torah constantly. When a *sefer* wasn't available, he would review *Mishna* by heart, interrupting his learning only when a customer stood before him. He and his third wife, Ayala Hinda - the daughter of a well-known *tzaddik* and *talmid chacham*, Reb Avner Loberbaum Zt"l of Tzefas - had five children. The third, born in New York in January, 1922, was Reb Shmuel Yaakov¹.

Rabbi Weinberg rarely spoke of his childhood years to his *talmidim*, other than to occasionally employ an anecdote to illustrate an idea. Those occasions, though, were windows into his rarified personality, and brightly reflected his uncompromising dedication to *emes*.

Once, for instance, he recalled with awe how a *rebbe* of his in Yerushalayim's Yeshivas Etz Chaim - where Rabbi Weinberg had studied for several years before his bar mitzva - had meticulously worked out the subtle difference in meaning between *Rashi's* use of the phrases "*mefaresh b'gemara*" and "*b'gemara meparesh*". There was little doubt to his listeners that the deep impression made by that *rebbe* on Rabbi Weinberg as a boy had played a role in the *Rosh HaYeshiva's* own approach to Torah texts, whose nuances of phrase seemed to constantly occupy his formidable mind.

Another insight into Rabbi Weinberg's character - this about his exquisite sensitivity to the honor of others - was evident in his account of his having joined friends during those childhood years in Yerushalayim in acting with a lack of

¹ The others were: Rabbi Moshe, Rebbetzin Chava Pincus, Mrs. Helene Moskovitz, and Rabbi Noach Weinberg.

full respect in the presence of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook Zt"l. One day, he recounted, he was struck by the sight of Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld Zt"l, speaking with Rabbi Kook and showing him the greatest *kavod*. From that single observation, the young Rabbi Weinberg immediately understood that something had been terribly wrong with his prior behavior. From the deference and honor the *Rosh HaYeshiva* constantly showed others, it was clear that he had seized upon and internalized that lesson completely.

(Once, in the late 1970s, he was flown to a *talmid's chasuna* in another city to be the *mesader kiddushin*. When a younger rabbi, with whom the *chassan* had also studied, "laid claim" to the honor himself, Rabbi Weinberg deferred without hesitation or complaint. While he would never hesitate to stand up for the honor of the yeshiva - as an institution founded by his father-in-law and that has produced and continues to produce exemplary *talmidim* - he seemed entirely empty of any desire for personal *kavod*.)

Among Giants

After his return to America, Rabbi Weinberg lived in the East New York-Brownsville section of Brooklyn. His father sent him to study in Mesivta Torah Vodaath, where his extraordinary talents were quickly recognized. Perceived by that point as a teen-aged prodigy, he was placed in the *shiur* of Rabbi Shlomo Heyman Zt"l; though he was considerably younger than most of his classmates, they respected him all the same for his intellectual prowess and dedication to his studies.

Then, in what would prove a crucial turn in Reb Yaakov's life, Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner Zt"l began to organize what would become Mesivta Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin. In an effort to support the project, Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz Zt"l, drew a line on a map through the center of Brooklyn and decreed that all those learning in Torah Vodaath whose homes were east of the line would have to switch to Mesivta Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin. As a result, Reb Yaakov was asked to join Rabbi Hutner's yeshiva.

Though Mr. Mendlowitz's decision caused him an unplanned move, Rabbi Weinberg was not perturbed. He later explained that he saw it only as an incredible example of *mesiras nefesh* for the growth of *mosdos* Torah, a readiness on Mr. Mendlowitz's part to give away some of his most promising *talmidim* so that another Mesivta could have a chance at success, and the cause of Torah-study in America could be advanced. As it happened, it also afforded Rabbi Weinberg the opportunity to learn under Rabbi Hutner, who immediately recognized his new *talmid's* enormous potential.

Having studied under the *Alter* of Slabodka, Rabbi Nasson Tzvi Finkel Zt"l, Rabbi Hutner was well equipped to help others develop and realize their potential. Rabbi Hutner not only encouraged Reb Yaakov to further develop his power of analysis and plumb the depths of Torah texts, but introduced him to his own unique approach to *machshava*, the philosophical underpinnings of Torah and *Avodas Hashem*.

To further broaden his exposure to Torah, Rabbi Hutner sent his prize *talmid* to Lakewood for *Shabbosos*, to afford him the opportunity to observe and learn from Rabbi Aharon Kotler Zt"l, as well.

Lilmod U'lelameid

At the same time, Rabbi Hutner also sent his *talmid* in a different direction, advising him to put his special talents to use in "Release Time" programs - scheduled opportunities for public school students to spend an hour a week

studying religious matters. At the program's inception, *talmidim* from all New York *yeshivas* participated in helping familiarize Jewish public school students with their religious heritage, and Rabbi Weinberg was at the forefront of the effort. Throughout his life, the *Rosh Hayeshiva* would actively seek to speak to and counsel Jews who were estranged from - or who had never been exposed to - *Yiddishkeit*.

He used his keen intellect to develop cogent source-based arguments to demonstrate the truth of Torah and to combat approaches that seek to undermine authentic Jewish belief. Years later, he would present many of those ideas in a beautifully articulate manner to a variety of groups and audiences.

During the 1950's he gave a series of lectures as part of an adult education program. My mother ob"m, knew someone who had attended the first three lectures but who then suddenly stopped coming. When asked why she was no longer attending, the woman answered, "If I continue listening to this man I will have to make profound changes in my life. I am simply unwilling to do so." The majority of the group stayed on to adopt a religious way of life.

During the years Rabbi Weinberg was studying at Mesivta Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman Zt"l, one of America's foremost Torah pioneers, had successfully established Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, beginning in 1933. *He* and Rabbi Hutner shared a deep friendship of mutual admiration and respect, based upon their shared *chinuch* under the tutelage of the *Alter* of Slabodka. Rabbi Hutner knew that the Baltimore *Rosh Ha Yeshiva* had an only daughter, Chana, of marriageable age, and, although Reb Yaakov was still quite young, Rabbi Hutner proposed his *talmid* to Rabbi Ruderman as a *chassan* for his daughter. The offer was accepted, and, after the marriage, Rabbi Weinberg moved to Baltimore, where he became an immediate influence on the Yeshiva. His clear-headed analyses of Torah-texts and ideas bespoke a powerful dedication to truth, and his *chiddushim* often left his *talmidim* (- and other listeners, for he often addressed a variety of Jewish forums -) amazed at the scope of his knowledge and the originality of his thoughts.

Rebbetzin Chana Weinberg, proved to be unusually innovative and capable herself, following in the determined footsteps of her mother, Rebbetzin Ruderman ob"m. She was, and remains, actively involved in Ner Yisroel's Ladies Auxiliary, and created a women's Service League that helps support Kollel Avodas Levi. Over recent years, she founded a highly effective Bikur Cholim organization in Baltimore, and remains its driving force. She is active as well, both in Baltimore and nationally, in addressing the issue of spousal abuse.

Rabbi Yaakov and Rebbetzin Chana Weinberg were blessed with almost five and a half decades together and have six distinguished children, who, along with their spouses, are deeply involved in the realms of *harbotzas Torah*, *rabbanus* and *chinuch* in America and Israel. Their son-in-law, Rabbi Beryl Weisbord, is the *Mashgiach Ruchni* of Ner Yisroel.

Rebbe Par Excellence

Rabbi Weinberg had an incredibly facile mind, quick, deep and focused. The scope of his knowledge was striking and his insights could be breathtaking. He taught his *talmidim*, moreover, how to look at everything analytically and critically. We were always cautioned to examine the words of the *Gemora*, *Rashi*, *Tosafos*, other *Rishonim* - especially the *Rambam* - very carefully. He often found critical meanings even in the way the *Rambam* ordered the placement of *halachos*. He was a phenomenal listener as well as an exacting critic. How often would we present what we thought was a well reasoned and supported idea, and watch him carefully analyze and test it, only to then hear him

conclusively demonstrate its weakness. When that would happen, he would then try and help us modify our thought, to bring it into line with demonstrable truth. His excitement at a *talmid's* unassailable *chiddush* practically shone from his captivating smile.

And if a *talmid* managed to present a critically valid challenge to something the *Rosh HaYeshiva* said, he would always acknowledge the fact and immediately withdraw his assertion.

Rabbi Weinberg would also urge his older *talmidim* to learn with and mentor younger *talmidim*; he stressed that the experience was an inherently valuable and meaningful one. Moreover, he firmly believed, and taught, that the best way to achieve greater clarity and understanding of a text or idea is by explaining it to another, and that teaching and mentoring can help develop the teacher/mentor's own latent talents and strengths.

At the same time, the *Rosh HaYeshiva* would also often caution us concerning the extraordinary trepidation one must have when dealing with *talmidim*, once remarking that one who chooses to become a *rebbe* must realize that he is thereby jeopardizing his own *Olam Habba*. "Dealing with *talmidim*", he said, "is *dinei nefashos* (a matter of life and death)." A true, caring *rebbe* knows that he bears responsibility for the totality of his *talmid's* outlook, personality, development and future. Rabbi Weinberg himself was such a *rebbe*.

All For The Klal

He was able, too, to impart to his *talmidim* a sense of responsibility to bring *Yiddishkeit* to Jews who were not fortunate to have been raised within the framework of Torah Judaism. It is no wonder that so many personalities of note in *kiruv* and *klal* institutions and efforts across the continent - and around the world - are *talmidim* of Rabbi Weinberg.

He himself was open - and approachable - to anyone who sought his counsel or wanted to learn from him. He had a keen ability to deal with every individual on that person's level, and was equally comfortable explaining the essential principles of *emuna* and *bitachon* to a novice as he was deciphering a complex issue in the *Gemora* with a *talmid chacham*. And he made himself available at all times.

Indeed, he was always ready to travel whenever a community or institution wanted him to address a group, or needed his advice on a *Klal* issue. He would even take a trip on behalf of an individual - sometimes even when the individual didn't even recognize his need for Rabbi Weinberg's wisdom.

Rabbi D., principal of a day-school in a Mid-Western community, received a call from his beloved *Rebbe*, Rabbi Weinberg: "I'm going to be in your city tomorrow. Can you pick me up at the airport?"

The next morning, Rabbi D. warmly welcomed his *Rebbe*, and as they got into the D.'s family van, Rabbi Weinberg told them, "Could I see the school where you work?" This was followed by various detailed questions regarding the school.

"Where do you live? Can we pass your house?"

After some personal questions, Rabbi Weinberg asked Rabbi D., "Do you ever lose your temper with the lay leaders of the school?"

"Yes," replied the principal. "Sometimes they are so far afield from understanding the school's goals, and how we are to achieve them, that I lose my patience with them."

Rabbi Weinberg spent the next few minutes explaining how the *baalebattim*- the lay leadership - are his partners in his sacred mission, and they deserve his respect. If they fail to share his goals or understand his approach in *chinuch*, it is his task to educate them - with patience and with dignity. But never to lose his temper. Never.

At that point, Rabbi Weinberg checked his watch and told his host that the time for his return flight is approaching. Could he drive him back to the airport?

Typical of Rabbi Weinberg's concern for Jews wherever they might be was his dedication to a group of Iranian families who had relocated to Los Angeles. He would spend *Shabbos* several times a year with them, teaching them and encouraging them to strengthen their attachment to Torah and to the maintenance of their holy traditions.

He regularly crossed not only the United States but the Atlantic Ocean, as well. For many years he would spend the latter part of Tamuz in Yerushalayim at Aish Hatorah, where his brother Reb Noach is *Rosh HaYeshiva*, and would present *shiurim* to a variety of groups for hours on end.

He touched so many individual lives in so many different ways that even those closest to him were not fully aware of the scope of his activities. Reb Yankel Weinberg, a distinguished member of the Baltimore community, who never, however, served as the *Rosh HaYeshiva* of Ner Yisroel, related during *shiva* that he had received a call earlier that week from a woman he had never met or heard of. She wanted to know why she hadn't received a check so that she could purchase a new inhaler for her respiratory problem. Whenever she had needed the device in the past, it seemed the check from Rabbi Weinberg had always arrived promptly; she had never before had to look up his name in the phone book and call him, until this week.

Eloquent Leadership

The last eleven years of his life, when he served as *Rosh HaYeshiva* after the passing of his revered father-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman Zt"l, were particularly fruitful ones, as he applied himself, even with his dedication to a much larger Jewish world, to ensuring that the yeshiva would continue on the path forged by Rabbi Ruderman. Yeshiva Ner Yisroel, housed on the 90-acre Beren Family Campus in Pikesville, Maryland, continued to grow under Rabbi Weinberg's leadership. The Yeshiva's graduates serve in *chinuch*, the rabbinate, outreach and lay leadership in communities across the continent and virtually around the globe.

Rabbi Weinberg took pains to prevent the introduction of any element that could in any way alter that continuity. Though by inclination he was open to new ideas and fresh approaches, he saw his role as *Rosh HaYeshiva* as guardian of the integrity of Rabbi Ruderman's legacy. At the same time, he brought to his position of leadership many of the unique elements of his personality. He was always more comfortable, for instance, learning and teaching *Gemora* in smaller groups; "giving a *chabura*" was always his preference. He took great pleasure from the give-and-take inherent in a more intimate setting and, until his final days, continued giving *chaburos* both within the Yeshiva and over the phone to *avreichim* in *kollelim* across the country.

When it came to delivering a *mussar* or *hashkafa shmuess*, though, no matter how large the audience, he was not only ready and willing but always seemed to find the precise sources most appropriate for the time; his eloquence and delivery are legend.

And he spoke up without hesitation when events created the need for a strong clear voice. Many years ago, when Rabbi Elazar Shach Shlita's honor was publicly besmirched, the Torah community throughout the world registered its collective protest. Rabbi Weinberg's *drasha* at the time, delivered to a community-wide gathering in the *Beis Hamidrash* of the Yeshiva, was a magnificent and forceful declaration of the centrality of *emunas chachamim* (trust in our sages) and *kavod haTorah* (honoring the Torah).

And at the end of 1997, when Baltimore's Jewish Community Center threatened to change its policy and open one of its facilities on *Shabbos*, and more than 3500 people attended a rally to honor the *mitzva* of *Shabbos*, Rabbi Weinberg galvanized the gathering by eloquently portraying the seriousness of the situation, and set the tone for what turned out to be a most powerful *kiddush Hashem*: the rescinding of the plan.

He fully supported the philosophy and ideals of Agudath Israel of America, urging his *talmidim* to identify with the Agudah movement and actively taking part in the activities of its Baltimore branch. He also participated in events of the National Agudah whenever called upon, and had a special regard for the many *talmidim* of Ner Yisroel who are prominent in both the professional and lay leadership of Agudath Israel.

At Torah Umesorah Conventions, where Ner Yisroel *talmidim* were also always very well represented, he often delivered spectacular presentations at the major sessions, and made himself available for smaller groups gathered to discuss practical approach to pressing Jewish educational issues.

His participation at gatherings of the National Council of Young Israel's Rabbis and the Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals also was a source of great *chizuk* to countless dedicated individuals who are devoting their lives to the pulpit rabbinate and the challenging and vital field of *kiruv*.

Weeks after the *Rosh HaYeshiva's petira*, one highly respected *rav* of a major *shul* in the New York area was heard to remark, "With his wide understanding of the mode of thought of people far from Torah, he was so able to address the thorniest, most difficult contemporary challenges *rabbanim* and *kiruv* workers are faced with. I can't imagine who will be able to take his place".

His loss is felt no less heavily by all who were privileged to hear his public words, or his private ones. Thousands of hours of his recorded voice are readily available to educate, excite, broaden and deepen our understanding and appreciation of the Torah. But the new questions that we will have - that we have already - the new challenges we face, the advice we need, will no longer be resolved, and with such clarity and care, with a simple phone call.

We will never be the same

By Rabbi Ilan D. Feldman

Chazal tell us that Torah should be taught k'nisonoso, in the manner it was given at Har Sinai. It has always seemed to me fitting, therefore, and most accurate to say, that it was at Har Sinai where I first came to know my rebbi, Rav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg ztz"l. By that I mean that my first encounter with him was on Shavuot, at a mesibah in Yeshivas Ner Israel, where I was a talmid. At the mesibah, Rav Weinberg spoke about kabbalas haTorah. I don't recall what he said; I do recall the impact it had on me. When he finished his talk, I stumbled out of the beis medrash in astonishment, encountering a friend and older bochur, and I exclaimed, "I have got to make this man my rebbi!"

What touched me that day wasn't the content of what he said. It was who he was while he said it. He wasn't talking about Torah; he was Torah. He was the truth of Torah, the energy of Torah, the bond between Klal Yisrael and Hashem that was Torah. In that one talk, the Torah was transformed for me from a Torah to a Toras Chayim. Before he spoke, I knew there was Torah, and I was committed to following it. After he spoke, I knew there was Torah, and I knew it was mine. Before he spoke, there was a Torah and I was required to learn it; after he spoke, I knew that a life of relationship and connection to the mekor hachayim was in store for me — no, was a gift of love, directly for me, from HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Having a future like that become yours is exhilarating and transformative. It is the experience of being at Sinai for kabbalas haTorah.

What I did not know then was that he was destined to give me no less than the entire Torah a second time. By the time I entered his shiur a year later, I had become oriented to thinking of serious talmud Torah as the property of the gifted few. Listening to the shiurim of the then-rosh hayeshivah, Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Harav Ruderman, and other talmidei chachamim, whose mastery of Shas and Rishonim was almost supernatural, I dreaded the day I would leave the yeshivah, knowing that I lacked the head of these giants and could never mimic their approach to learning. I would have to settle for a rudimentary level of learning for the rest of my life, always looking back wistfully to the heydays of my learning career in yeshivah, never feeling fulfilled.

Rav Weinberg changed all that. He showed us that through rigorous discipline, by abandoning preconceived notions, through formulating our questions properly, by listening to the nuances of language embedded in the holy words of the text, we could come to "hear" the Torah, unadorned and unadulterated by what we might want it to be saying, and successfully plumb its depths. What all this meant for me was that, no matter where I was located geographically, the freshness, excitement, and creativity of talmud Torah would come with me, as long as I was willing to do the work. The keys to accessing the fullness of Torah were embedded in the Torah! For a talmid who would be willing to leave the yeshivah to serve in a community where there was not even a beis medrash, that is a priceless gift. Sinai would be with me wherever I was.

What was remarkable to me about Rav Weinberg's approach to learning was that our rebbi possessed the brilliance that allowed him to amaze his students with "fireworks" of dazzling logic. Yet, instead, he led us daily through the grunt work of listening carefully, following clues to make critical, revealing, but subtle discoveries, inviting us to toil, refusing to intoxicate us with dramatic questions and answers that would leave us marveling at the beauty of his Torah but that would never be our own.

This was how he learned. The text was not a playground for his brilliance. The pasuk, the statement of Chazal, the Rashi, the Rambam — these were always his teachers; he was forever the student. His brilliance was evident after he discovered what was being said, when he took the nugget of emes he had just uncovered and followed its implications through the entire sugya, or showed how life itself would change with this insight.

That same willful effort at intellectual humility seemed, to me, to govern his approach to life itself. Time and again, I watched as he practiced tzimtzum, contraction of self — removing himself from the equation, focusing only on what was a kiddush Hashem or a chillul Hashem, what would yield results in fulfilling Hashem's Will or what would not. I never saw an ego. But when he perceived an assault on the glory of Heaven, he was a fierce lion.

He "listened" to life the way he "listened" to a pasuk. Nuances of a situation mattered greatly. He listened keenly to the presenter of a dilemma the way he listened to a Rashi. He had no formulaic responses; he crafted his direction based on the particulars of each unique circumstance. Policy was for those who didn't want to think, or who were protecting turf or reputation, not for those consciously acting as agents of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. (He once told me, "If anyone ever defends what they are doing by saying it's a matter of principle, run the other way," emphasizing the word "run.")

He was willing to abandon his approach to an issue based on the emergence of a new detail, even one that might seem minor to others. To him, there was only the question: What does the Ribbono shel Olam want at this moment? What will be a kiddush Hashem in this instance? This meant that different people could sometimes receive differing advice in response to seemingly similar situations, perplexing those insensitive to nuanced thinking. Rav Weinberg's advice was designed to fit a particular individual, with unique strengths and in a precise context.

He never directed; rather he laid out with clarity what the options were, allowing the inquirer to grow into the answer. When my wife and I were consulting with him about a decision we had to make that might affect my future as a rav, he said something that became a lodestar for me: “What you should do I am not sure. But this I know: good rabbanim are the light of Klal Yisrael.”

He was in love with Klal Yisrael. That is to say, he loved the entity, not only the individuals in it. He loved its leaders, the talmidei chachamim who directed their people. An accurate story that captured the attitude of a leader of Klal Yisrael would move him to tears. (“It’s worth being born to hear such a story,” he would say.) Klal Yisrael bears Hashem’s Name, serves Him, loves Him, sacrifices for Him, is inseparable from Him. He worried about it. He anguished over its wellbeing. He reminded me of Moshe Rabbeinu’s plea to Hashem before his passing: “Let not the congregation of Hashem be like sheep who have no shepherd.”

Rav Weinberg was a founder, a pillar, of the outreach movement. As a young bochur, well before outreach was a familiar term, when American Jewry was experiencing its inexorable slide into ignorance and indifference, he was employing his clarity in hashkafic matters and his passion for emes to seek out public school students and connect them to Hashem. He was the personal mentor for those many who became the army of outreach experts and institutions, providing and leading the charge that motivated them for a lifetime to reach out to their brethren in Klal Yisrael. His younger brother, Rav Noach Weinberg, considered Rav Yaakov to be his rebbi and the chief inspiration for what eventually became Aish HaTorah.

His clarity in matters of emunah, his ability to articulate the significance of the Avos, the impact of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the essence of the machlokes of Korach, provided a level of confidence and clarity to those of us who were confronted regularly with ignorance cloaked in the sophisticated parlance of the academy. The principles of Yiddishkeit were articulated in a precise and compelling way. And he was always there to respond to a question or problem from his talmidim, or to an invitation to travel across the globe to address a critical issue. We knew he had our backs.

Perhaps his greatest contribution to the cause of kiruv was that he altered the consciousness of Klal Yisrael. This breathtaking virtuoso of the Rambam, this masterful detective who uncovered the deepest secrets of our Torah, this mentor of mentors and rebbi of major talmidei chachamim — he was the one who spent ten to twelve hours a day in the summer lecturing at Aish HaTorah, teaching newcomers to Torah, showing how the Torah addressed the philosophic and cultural issues facing our generation. Outreach was not a specialty; it was the natural outcome of love for HaKadosh Baruch Hu, of absorbing His Torah with clarity, of caring for His people. The flag of outreach would be raised not by those who could not do well in the confines of the beis medrash, but precisely by talmidei chachamim of the highest caliber.

Rav Weinberg was a revolutionary. There was an urgency to his being, an impatience with the status quo. Those who sought the comfort of complacency and contentment might have found him discomfiting. After the Persian Gulf War in 1991, when there was an unavoidable sense that we had witnessed miraculous Divine protection of Eretz Yisrael, I discussed what appropriate teshuvah would look like in response to seeing the Hand of G-d so overtly.

He made a point that has haunted me since: Teshuvah does not simply mean doing more of what you were already doing well and fewer aveiros than before. It means the courage to assess basic assumptions or attitudes, even the willingness to abandon these approaches in favor of new ones, including those we might previously have rejected. The Hand of Hashem revealed in current events is intended to wake us up to reality we haven’t yet seen, not to reinforce what we already thought or “knew.” Of such ideas revolutions are made.

We were here to transform life as we know it, and never to be satisfied with “good enough.” He was at war with complacency. The Rambam’s 12th Principle of Emunah, belief in Mashiach and anticipating his arrival, required a Jew to be aware constantly that something essential was missing. A Jew knew what was really possible, what the world should really look like, how the world was supposed to work. It was a Jew’s responsibility to address it, to daven for it, to live for it. Being content with careful shemiras hamitzvos and well-developed frum communities, while not yearning for a restoration of Klal Yisrael to its original splendor, was insufficient for a servant of G-d. This principle called for nothing less than an awareness that the current state of affairs — exile, Hashem’s reign partially hidden, Klal Yisrael mostly unaware of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Rachmana litzlan — was unacceptable. Everything he taught was imbued with this urgency.

And with this urgency came a promise. If one's relationship with Hashem demanded a yearning for a transformed world, then a transformed world was possible. Living for it, working toward it, even in its absence, puts one there already. Klal Yisrael had a future, a promise to fulfill. Rav Weinberg and his Torah embodied that promise.

Just as Shavuot was, for me, an apt introduction to Rav Weinberg, the tragic day of the 17th of Tammuz, the day of the shattering of the first Luchos, seems fitting as the day marking his physical end. His passing was a shattering of promise. There is always a sense of profound, irreplaceable loss when a tzibbur loses a gadol of this stature, irrespective of what they managed to receive from him and how old he is when he passes.

But something more than the grief of loss was experienced when our rebbi died. There was, and still is, the anguish of tragedy. He was taken from us so young, so filled with the energy and vitality and creativity of Torah, so urgent about work still to be done, so secure in HaKadosh Baruch Hu's promises, it was difficult for us to acquiesce with ease to Heaven's decree. Those who knew him could be excused for forgetting that the one who embodied and epitomized Toras Chayim could ever be overcome by an illness. There was the sense that his gadlus had not yet come to its fullest expression, that Klal Yisrael had not yet absorbed his message and the possibilities he represented. The Luchos were shattered.

But then we remember that the fragments of those Luchos are preserved in the Aron. The remnants beckon us to realize that our encounter at Sinai, aborted though it was, left us permanently altered. They are not there to torment us; they are there to remind of us two imperatives that go hand in hand. Those fragments are there to remind us of what is possible, of the promise our full relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu holds for us and the world. Sinai did occur. And they remind us of the nature of emes. The smashing of the Luchos at Moshe's hand was ratified by their Author, because the truth is uncompromising and unaccommodating. Shivah Asar B'Tammuz is not only a day of tragedy; it is an invitation to remember what HaKadosh Baruch Hu thinks of us, and to accept responsibility to develop ourselves to be worthy custodians of Toras Emes.

So, too, it is with our rebbi, Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Harav Shmuel Yaakov ben Yitzchak Mattisyahu Weinberg. He brought us to Har Sinai, and we will never be the same. The work continues.

Yehi zichro baruch.

A Rebbi for America: HaRav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg, zt'l

by Mordecai Plaut

The *Mishnah* (*Bovo Metzia* 33a) says that one should return a lost object to one's *rebbe* before returning the lost object of his father, "for his father brought him to this world, but his *rebbe*, who taught him *chochmah*, brings him to the life of *Olam Haboh*."

In our times, children grow up in environments that are suffused with Torah and *yiras Shomayim*. In Yerushalayim, Lakewood, Bnei Brak and Baltimore, and many other communities, with Hashem's mercy, the children of the chareidi community today can imbibe the basics of the path to *Olam Haboh* from numerous sources.

In the postwar generation, many of those who grew up and came of age in the 50's, the 60's and even the 70's, were not so fortunate. Even those who grew up in homes where they were educated to keep Torah and mitzvos and did not lose their basic observance along the way, could go through life without having tasted the sweetness and truth of Torah and without truly recognizing and following the real *derech Hashem*.

Those who came to maturity in those days and were *zoche* to become *bonei Torah*, know and understand from their own experiences what it means to have a *rebbe* who brought them to *chayei Olam Haboh*. Most can think back and see how things could have turned out terribly different, if the right *rebbe* had not brought them to the *derech Hashem*.

Outside culture was powerful and the Jewish community then was weak. The lure of the street and the university was strong. The temptation of American wealth was almost overwhelming. The vital links to the deep Torah tradition were in ruins. The Jewish community was dominated by the secular and anti-religious. The *emes* was truly rare and almost impossible to find.

It was in this context that the Rosh Yeshiva *zt"l*, HaRav Yaakov Weinberg, Rebbi, stepped in and brought so many to *chayei Olom Haboh*, who would have otherwise almost certainly have joined the American rat race to the *be'er shachas*.

Speaking at the 53rd annual convention of Agudas Yisroel of America in November 1975 (and later reprinted from the *Jewish Observer* in ArtScroll's *A Path Through the Ashes*), the Rosh Yeshiva observed: "Since 1945, *Klal Yisroel* can never be the same. Our areas of function, the nature of our feelings, the nature of our problems, the methods we employ to solve them, even our very feelings have undergone a permanent change because of *Churban* Europe. Not only has the focal point of *Klal Yisroel* been transferred from Europe to Eretz Yisroel, which brings with it a host of challenges, problems and shifts in perspective; not only have we lost our centers of vibrant Jewish life, with all the ramifications this must have on ourselves and our children for all generations to come; but we have lost our prime source of living *Yiddishkeit*. We must now struggle on a different level not only to understand the *hashkafah*, the philosophic outlook of Torah, but even to properly experience the simple awareness of our existence as Jews. Thus, our children are more impoverished than all preceding generations, for they cannot draw from this reservoir of a continuous, ongoing Jewish existence *per se*. The continuity has weakened and we must now recreate it."

And that is exactly what he did.

For the postwar generation, the Rosh Yeshiva reconstructed the link between American Jewish youth and the flow of tradition, the living Jewish essence that had been so cruelly and suddenly cut off by the Nazi legions. It is this link to the vital core of Torah life that is so important; and it is by no means guaranteed even among those who keep mitzvos.

It is, as he might have said, perfectly clear that he could not serve to link the younger generation to the *mesora* without being thoroughly grounded in it himself. In fact, his own connection was very broad and very deep.

As the American Torah community developed, the function mentioned above, of linking those who grew up in America with the living wellsprings of the Jewish *mesora*, became less critical because now there are so many different ways in which everyone is connected. However, he had much more to give, and in his whole life he constantly gave more and more to his *talmidim* and everyone who came in contact with him.

A Selfless Individual

With his remarkable intellectual gifts, it would have been easy for him to dominate people. Thus, it is all the more impressive that no one ever felt that the Rosh Yeshiva was imposing himself on them even in the slightest way.

The fact is that his whole approach to living was based on a thoroughgoing and deeply rooted conviction and understanding that his efforts should be properly directed towards the outside, towards others. He stressed and lived the fact that a person's overall goal is to be an *eved Hashem*, a human tool of Hashem who lives to fulfill Hashem's

will. Translated to the interpersonal level, this meant that he lived for his *talmidim* and was interested only in their benefit.

He once told a *talmid*: "You are interested in `why,' but I am interested only in `what.' "

"Why" did not matter to him. He made himself like a *midbar* to simply accept whatever Hashem wants, without question, without seeking any further basis behind it. Even to search for a "why" implies that there is some other standard, some other measure for what to do, and this is often where a person's self comes in. For him, there was nothing there.

He was an original thinker and had many ideas, and conceived many plans. However, once he was convinced that *rotzon Hashem* was otherwise, he accepted that and simply worked with the situation as it was. He no longer harbored any thoughts of "what if" or "if only." Once it was clear to him what the *rotzon Hashem* was in a given situation, he did it with all his powers and to the fullest of his abilities.

As one example that was cited by several people, when he came to their *chasuna*, he came early and stayed on. No one doubts that he had other things to do, other pursuits that might seem to be "higher" or "better" than sitting at a *chasuna*. But once it was clear that he was going, he went to fulfill the *rotzon Hashem behidur*, not grudgingly or sparingly.

Very Different

There were some ways in which he was very different from our generation. He was so abstracted from his physical needs, so far removed from normal physical desires, that in this aspect he seemed not of our times.

Once, when giving a *shmuess* in *Mesilas Yeshorim*, he was talking about a certain *taava*, a physical desire. He said that it was an absurd *taava*, something beyond the desire of normal people. Searching for a proper analogy, he finally came up with, "It is as absurd as saying, `He sat down and ate a quart of ice cream by himself.'"

This certainly caused some raised eyebrows among the *talmidim* listening to him. They understood the point he was trying to make, but the example he chose taught them more about the Rosh Yeshiva than about the *Mesilas Yeshorim*.

Only the Truth

The Rosh Yeshiva was always focused on the truth, even when it may not have been the most comfortable way to look at things. He was prepared to talk and act in ways that often sounded strange to others, when he knew that his way was the truth.

One instance was the case of a particular *shidduch*. The parents of a girl of marriageable age came to ask him about a particular young man, and he told them it was a good *shidduch* and they should pursue it. Someone from the side of the *bochur* came to ask about the same *shidduch*, but the Rosh Yeshiva told him that he did not know if he should pursue that offer.

Those who heard about both answers thought that the combination was strange, but the answer was simple: it was clearly good for the young lady, but not so clear that it was good for the young man. It was not a case of the Rosh Yeshiva taking a bold stand for truth, but simply that he was unwilling to answer any other way than to tell each what was exactly best for him or her.

To Reach the Soul

His goal with his *talmidim* was not just to impart knowledge but to elevate them. The truth that he wanted to give over was much deeper than what many people give over.

At one time, a certain *talmid* used to go to him to ask him questions consistently after every *shiur* that he gave. He confided in someone that the *talmid* was very *krum* and he thought that he could straighten him out, but he was not sure if he had the time and strength that were necessary for the task.

This is not the worry of someone who could not answer the questions that he was being asked, even to the satisfaction of the questioner. HaRav Weinberg certainly had no difficulty in merely answering the surface questions posed by that *bochur*. It is clear that his eye was on something deeper: he wanted to reach out to the *talmid* and to correct the roots in him that were leading him to ask such unnecessary or misguided questions.

Sometimes he volunteered remarks that seemed unprompted and unmotivated, almost like an oracle. He once told me, "You know Mordechai, you have to keep on thinking. Don't stop, but always push on and deeper."

I did not see why he said that. I did not understand what he could have seen in me that showed him I had such a problem, if I did in fact have such a problem.

However, I accepted the criticism and worked in the direction he indicated. Many months later I did see the wisdom of his remark and how it was excellent and important advice for me -- though I could never figure out how he could have known to tell me.

Stunning Brilliance

Time and again the Rosh Yeshiva would stun us. One could never know how he would react. One could have prepared a *gemora* so carefully, and worked on it so hard, only to sit on it with him and find out that he missed the main point. As HaRav Mordechai Blumenfeld put it, no matter how much you had prepared, "He would show that you hadn't begun to think about it."

But this did not only apply to *divrei Torah*. It was also true in *derech erez*. Telling him over the apparently simplest story could be an adventure. He would often find some completely overlooked aspect that was critical, and put the whole thing in a new and surprising light.

This was a consequence of the fact that his *yiro* preceded his *chochmah*, as Chazal say it must. His wisdom was based on his fear of G-d, and grounded in everyday life, where this is important. His *chochmah* showed him not just how to think, and not just how to act, but even simply how to be. He created full, wholesome and "real" people. (Heard from HaRav Yochanan Zweig)

No, Yitzchok, You're Wrong

One of the most elusive, but significant, elements of the *avoda* of the Rosh Yeshiva was his constant, patient *chinuch* of his *talmidim*. It was something he was always ready to do, and something that he did willingly, over and over, whenever he had the opportunity. He would speak with them, elicit their comments, patiently analyze them, and develop the ideas that he wanted to convey using them. There was an interplay between the *rebbe* and

the *talmid* that was, however, extremely elusive and difficult to capture. It was not the sort of thing that one took notes of, nor even recorded on tape.

Nothing can better convey this experience than an example. However, these were usually personal lessons, tailored to the *talmid* in question and the circumstances that were at hand, and by their very nature they did not lend themselves to any sort of recording or preservation.

I have, with considerable thought and effort, constructed an illustrative example. It is an imaginary dialogue in which a *talmid* of the Rosh Yeshiva is trying to convey some basic ideas about his *rebbe* to a student of his own. The *talmid*, in talking with his own *talmid*, uses the techniques that he learned and absorbed from his own *rebbe*, the Rosh Yeshiva. It is based on a story about the Rosh Yeshiva that several people who were very close to him told me, assuming that it happened as given here, and certain that in any case it reflects the way he acted. This exercise displays the Rosh Yeshiva and how he lived -- and what we can learn from him in our own lives. (I will note the true facts at the end.)

Yitzchok, I want you to think about the following story. Now listen carefully.

Some years ago, a relative of the Rosh Yeshiva lost a son who passed away well before his time, leaving behind a young family ranging from 2 to 10 years old.

The Rosh Yeshiva and the Rebbetzin went to be *menacheim ovel*. There were other people there when they arrived. After sitting for some time, the Rosh Yeshiva rose and said, "I have some people to talk to," and left the room.

No one knew where he went. He was gone for a considerable time. Only later did they find out that he had sought out the little orphans, and taken them to a room where he sat with them and discussed what had happened to them at their own level.

Now, Yitzchok, I want you to think carefully about this story. What do you think it shows?

-- I think that it is a beautiful story that shows that the Rosh Yeshiva was a man of deep feeling.

If that is what you think, Yitzchok, then you are wrong. Completely wrong.

If that is what you understand, Yitzchok, then you do not understand the first thing about the Rosh Yeshiva.

It is so clear, Yitzchok, that this story shows something entirely different. This incident shows the Rosh Yeshiva's brilliance.

It shows how he was able to grasp a situation, to see it from all sides, and to find the key point, that crucial element that everyone else missed, but that is -- once he showed it to us -- absolutely essential to a proper understanding of the situation and, now in retrospect, we feel should have been obvious to everyone.

Surely you see that, Yitzchok. Obviously the ones most in need of attention and the *gemilus chassodim* that is the very essence of *nichum aveilim* which was the whole purpose of the Rosh Yeshiva's trip, were the young orphans. Yet everyone is naturally distracted because they know the adults better.

Even hearing about the story we are stunned and impressed. That is brilliance, Yitzchok, absolute brilliance.

But now, is that all you see in that story, Yitzchok? Don't you see anything else? Is it just pure brilliance? Is that all you see here?

It's not enough. Yitzchok, you must go deeper. If you stop here, you've left the Rebbi in the league of brilliant minds, but it could still be with thinkers like Aristotle, who were geniuses but could at the same time be corrupt and degenerate. If that's where you stop, Yitzchok, you have not yet captured his essence.

What is remarkable here is the object of Rebbi's brilliance. It is not an abstract principle that he discovered, in the realm of pure knowledge, that can be polished and displayed and repeatedly admired, but it is a truth of life, a truth of deed, a truth that left the world a better place after it was discovered.

The Real Story

This story that was told about the Rosh Yeshiva was based on a similar true event, however in fact the idea of speaking with the young orphans was not the Rosh Yeshiva's but his daughters'. They thought about it in advance and arranged it as soon as he came.

The Rosh Yeshiva went to them in a side room, he made the children at ease and invited them to ask him whatever was on their mind. The children were most concerned about their departed father. Is he happy? they wanted to know.

This was a difficult question. It would obviously pain them to know that their father was unhappy, but on the other hand how could he leave them? The Rosh Yeshiva told them that their father was happy, but he missed them.

This went on for some time. The children asked; the Rosh Yeshiva comforted and explained.

At the end the young widow, who was present, exclaimed, "I know it helped the kids, but it helped me more." The young children later said that the Rosh Yeshiva sat with them with kindness and patience, and talked about their new situation and their father.

The truth is certainly beautiful enough.

To Call Out Besheim Hashem

At the Chag Hasemicha the Rosh Yeshiva spoke about the nature of a yeshiva, based on the Rambam in *Hilchos Avodas Kochovim* (1:3). It is the chapter in which the Rambam recounts the history of the idea of *avoda zorah* and the way Avrohom Ovinu developed on his own and recognized the truth of his Creator at the age of 40. As soon as Avrohom Ovinu recognized this he started to argue with the people of his city, Ur Kasdim. He was miraculously saved from the king there who wanted to kill him, "and he got up and called out to the whole world loudly to tell them that there is one G-d for the whole world who should be worshiped." He eventually reached tens of thousands whom he taught, each according to his own understanding, and "he implanted in their hearts this great principle."

Avrohom passed on this task to Yitzchok who in turn passed it on to Yaakov. "And Yaakov Ovinu taught all of his children, set Levi aside, and appointed him the head, and set him in a yeshiva to teach the *derech Hashem* and to keep the mitzvos of Avrohom."

This was what the Rosh Yeshiva saw as the purpose of a yeshiva: to teach the *derech Hashem*. All must be brought closer and upward. The staff of the yeshiva must spread this great idea and implant it deep in the hearts of the *talmidim*. *Kiruv kerovim*, reaching those who need to be reached, is as important as *kiruv rechokim*.

This is what a person must dedicate himself to do. To serve Hashem, by being an *eved Hashem* and prominently by calling out to the whole world in general and to each *talmid* in particular, to bring him to the *derech Hashem*. (Heard from HaRav Nochum Lansky)

Summation

There is certainly much more to say, and perhaps there will be other occasions. The *avodas Hashem* of an *odom godol* in more than 75 years can certainly not be contained in 10,000 words. *Chaval al de'avdin, velo mishtakchin*.

Tehei nishmoso tzerura betzror hachaim.

Recollections of Talmidim

Rabbi Weinberg, zt"l: An Inspiration

by Rabbi Moshe Brown

Rabbi Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l, was an inspiration to me, and to everyone, in the sense that he was so religious in such a profound way. He was both profoundly religious and profoundly selfless. He was totally focused on his life's mission, which was to serve as an ambassador for the honor of G-d. So, whatever he had to do – whether learning with someone at any time of day or night, or traveling to California at the drop of hat because someone needed him – he was willing to do it without the slightest concern for his own personal well being.

This attitude of selflessness was reflected in his learning as well, in how willing he was to reconsider his understanding of an *inyan* when a student asked a question on it. He was able to reverse his understanding, held for many decades; he did not persist in the same way just because he had assumed it to be true all that time. This emanated naturally from Rabbi Weinberg, because he was interested in truth, and in G-d's will being implemented in the world.

I started studying with him after I was married, about 33 years ago. I was initially taken by the depth of his understanding and the penetrating insights with which he understood both learning and life. I learned with him about 10 years. Now, since his *petira*, I find that whenever a situation arises in my life, and I deliberate over what is the right thing to do, my first approach is to ask myself, "What would Rabbi Weinberg say?" Whether it is the proper perspective on an event that took place or on a subject I'm learning, I try to determine what his perspective would be – because it was always a very novel and a very fresh insight that he had.

Rebbe's Awe-Inspiring Legacy

by Rabbi Moshe Hauer

"What is the way that will lead to the love and the fear of G-d? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His incomparable and infinite wisdom, he will straightway love, praise and glorify Him, and long with an intense longing to know His great Name.... And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil frightened, realizing that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge." (Rambam: Foundational Principles of Torah, 2:2)

This passage in the Rambam expresses the essential tension within our service of G-d. On the one hand, our awareness of G-d draws us passionately towards Him, as we seek to absorb whatever we can of His wisdom, and to

deepen our connection to him through better understanding of the brilliance of His Torah. Yet simultaneously, we struggle with the overwhelming sense of fear and humility created by our deepened awareness of His magnificent presence. On the one hand we are drawn towards Him; on the other we recoil and stand back.

It is this tension that characterized my Rebbe, Harav Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l. Rebbe was absolutely brilliant and incredibly wise, and did not allow a learning session to pass without uncovering broad and deep Torah insights. His incredible passion for learning and thirst for knowledge were a living example of that "intense longing to know [G-d's] great Name." Yet even more profoundly and strikingly, Rebbe's every step and thought were saturated with an awareness of G-d's greatness, and filled with *yiras Shamayim*, fear of Heaven. Never have I seen anyone remotely approach his natural strength in maintaining a fear of G-d that exceeded by far his fear of man. And it is this aspect of his character and system of values that he most wanted to impart to others.

As young men in the Kollel Avodas Levi at Ner Israel, my peers and I often discussed with our Rebbe our future responsibilities as teachers of Torah. I vividly recall a particular occasion when the Rosh Yeshiva was asked about triage in teaching Torah: If we were to have one hour available per week to study with someone, how should we decide which of our students or congregants to spend it with? The Rosh Yeshiva's response was confident and immediate: "Yiras Shamayim, fear of Heaven. You must evaluate which of your students is most likely to develop the greatest depth of fear of Heaven, and it is to that student that you must devote your energies."

"In the end, after considering everything: Fear G-d and do His commandments, for that is what man is all about." (Koheles 12:13)

Rebbe loved beauty and brilliance; he valued greatly wisdom, vision, and commitment. But the ultimate consideration, the measure of every student and every teacher, was, and is, *yiras Shamayim*, fear of Heaven. For that is what man is all about. Indeed, that was what this great man was all about. May his merit protect us and all of Israel.

Always on my mind

By Rabbi Aaron Fink

My rebbi, Rav Yaakov Weinberg, *rosh yeshivah* of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel, was the pivotal figure in shaping my life and goals and helping me grow into the person I am today. Like so many others, I live with his inspiration daily.

A man of deep intellect and penetrating, all-encompassing vision, he possessed an uncanny ability to see beyond the surface and react and prepare for the geometrical outcomes of any decision. His clear grasp of *hashkafas haTorah* and its relevance to everyday life gave us a means of connecting contemporary issues with age-old wisdom.

But like all great *rebbeim*, it wasn't just genius, but rather *how* he transmitted his passion — caring for us, encouraging us, pouring his *neshamah* into each *talmid*. He made each of us feel important and helped us to locate our personal strengths so that we could find the best path to serve our Maker. But there is a particular incident that remains with me, a memory I cherish because it guides me each day as a *mechanech*.

Before being admitted to Rav Weinberg's *shiur*, he "interviewed" each of the *bochurim* who wanted to attend. Rebbi wanted to get to know us and learn what made us tick. We spoke in learning, and then he asked if I had a plan for the future. I responded that I hoped to enter the field of *chinuch* and/or *kiruv*. "Why?" he asked me. I proudly and confidently responded that having gone through certain life experiences, growing in my learning, and gaining clarity in

so many issues, I wanted to help youngsters develop and to provide them with the answers to the questions they were facing. He smiled at me and burst my bubble. "*Halevai*, but you must remember that though the questions may be the same, the answers will be different for each one. Each person experiences the world differently."

Appropriately chastened, I learned a powerful lesson from his words that still echo in my mind today. One cannot apply a cookie-cutter approach to *chinuch habanim*. Each child needs a personalized approach to maximize his or her potential, and a real *mechanech* must learn to understand his charges in order to effectively make a difference in their lives.

Lastly, well beyond what Rebbi said was the example he set. He didn't just offer words of *chizuk* but showed me the proper path through his actions.

While serving as the headmaster of the Kadimah School in Buffalo, New York, Rebbi called one day to ask if I could pick him up at the airport the following day. Naturally, I responded in the affirmative, and I headed over to Buffalo International Airport the next morning. I excitedly greeted Rebbi and asked him where he was going and how I could be of service (I had assumed he was heading to Toronto, a relatively short drive away). He told me he wasn't going anywhere, but had come to see me, to find out how I was doing, both personally and professionally. He asked if he could visit the school I was heading and later graced my home. We discussed the *kehillah*, the challenges of out-of-town living, and how I might foster my success and the school's. He offered me some very pointed and helpful words of *chizuk* and timely *eitzos* for continued *hatzlachah*, and then asked me to take him back to the airport for his return flight. I was stunned, elated, and overcome with joy and appreciation for his concern.

It was a great lesson. I was and still am inspired by that visit. I learned that a *rebbe* can never have a *hesech hadaas* from his *talmidim*. Whether miles or years apart, the success of our students is always our *achrayus*, and we must always be there for them, from near and far.

This is an attitude that has been built into the very framework and culture of the *mosad* I lead today. Our graduates know they can always count on us being there — and we are.

The consummate *eved Hashem*

According to Rabbi Nochum Lansky, a *Ram* in the Ner Yisroel Beis *Midrash*, the profundity of Rabbi Weinberg's thought process made his reaction to circumstances, and his response to questions, totally unpredictable. A certain type of reaction, however, was inevitable. When searching for an explanation for a specific *halacha* or other phenomenon, the Rosh Yeshiva would say, "You are asking 'Why?' That does not concern me! I only have to know 'What'."

This was an expression of his self-image, his overwhelming sense of mission - that of being an *eved Hashem*, in total servitude to his Creator.

Consistent with this approach was the manner in which he quoted a *Chazal* or presented an insight. It was not in the vein of "a *gut vort*" or the delineation of a philosophy, an abstraction. It was presented as his - or your - *shychus*, involvement, with *Hashem*.

Every Rosh Yeshiva underscores his central message, such as, "You must strive for *gadlus* - greatness - in Torah." With Rabbi Weinberg, the goal was "to be an *eved Hashem*." Other goals were also stated, including *gadlus baTorah*,

but the constant over-arching demand - both in private and on the public forum - was to be the consummate *eved Hashem*.

Subservient to the will of Hashem

Rabbi Simcha Cook, *Ram* in the Beis *Midrash* of Ner Yisroel, recalls: Many years ago, we were discussing *bitachon* and the *Rosh Yeshiva* told me that he had just returned from an x-ray examination. The doctor called to say that a spot appeared in the lung, and it looked very ominous. The *Rosh Yeshiva* told me that he was not disturbed one bit and he accepted it completely as the will of *Hashem Yisboroch*. It did not faze him in the slightest. He said that "*Ivdu es Hashem besimcha* - Serve Hashem with joy," instructs a person to accept completely any situation in which one finds oneself and to serve the *Ribbono Shel Olam* in this situation with the understanding that this is the will of *Hashem*. (It turned out that the diagnosis was made in error.)

Devotion to a *talmid*

A *talmid* remembers: I learned with the *Rosh Yeshiva* every Thursday night for many years. One Thursday he went to Atlanta for a family *simcha*, and I did not expect him to return in time for our seder (scheduled session). Consequently I did not show up at his house that evening. On Friday night, when I wished him the usual gut *Shabbos*, he asked me where I had been the previous night. He told me that he had left the *simcha* early, and taken an earlier flight in order to be back for our seder. He knew how much I enjoyed that once-a-week session, how much it meant to me, and he did not want to disappoint me. He cut short his own pleasure for the sake of someone else.

Mentor, Teacher and perceptive *rebbe*

Professor Aaron Twerski recalls meeting Rabbi Weinberg at a recent convention of Agudath Israel of America. They exchanged greetings, and then, holding on to Dr. Twerski's hand, the *Rosh Yeshiva* asked him, "Look at me, Reb Aaron. You seem like you're nine tefachim under the ground. What's with you?" Dr. Twerski immediately opened up with a problem that he had thought he had buried deep inside himself. But there was no hiding from his *Rebbe's* perceptive eye.

His foresight

Rabbi Yissochar Frand recalls a conversation with Rabbi Weinberg some thirty years ago, when student uprisings were sweeping campuses across the country. Social commentators, political conservatives - especially religious leaders - were appalled at the toppling of moral standards in personal conduct. Rabbi Weinberg remarked that the Orthodox community will hold its own against that particular aspect of the "moral revolution." More insidious to our way of life, he predicted, will be the rise of feminism.

Rabbi Weinberg on "*Daas Torah*"

The *Rosh Hayeshiva* explained the concept of *Daas Torah* very clearly and simply: All decisions that we make are ultimately based on axioms of thought that we assume without evidence. Mostly, those axioms are either inborn or else indiscriminately assimilated from the culture in which we live. Torah demands that one reexamine every issue afresh and discover what the Torah has to say about it. To do that, one must first "wipe the slate clean" and approach the question with the understanding that one does not know the answer. Only then will one discover what the Torah is telling us, instead of imposing one's own ideas and assumptions on the Torah. Once the body of one's assumptions

are taken from Torah, one's very way of looking at the world has been transformed into a Torah one: this is *Daas Torah*.

This approach is required not only with regard to the macro-assumptions of life, but with regard to the micro-analyses of individual pieces of Torah as well. One must let go of the assumptions we cherish about what *Chazal* mean to say, and examine Torah again and again, constantly seeking to correctly discover what it is that the Torah is telling us. This is what *Chazal* mean when they say that Torah must be "*bechol yom be'einecha kechadashos*- like new every day"; we must never accept something just because we always thought it so.

His emphasis of this approach explained how he could speak about the same *halacha* in the *Rambam* every year on Rosh Hashana before *tekiyas shofar*, and every year have a new insight into the same words. It left us not surprised at all when he told us a fundamental *chiddush* in the *Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah*, and then said that he only recently had come to that understanding - after having learned *Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah* over two hundred times!

It seems to this writer that this approach was the touchstone to his extraordinary ability to field almost any question on basics in *hashkafa* - regarding *yesodos haTorah*, *darkei hahashgacha*, *de'os*, and the like - succinctly and convincingly. He had so thought through the corpus of *hashkafa* that its concepts were as vivid in his mind as two-plus-two equals-four to the rest of us. He understood these concepts so thoroughly and integrated them so seamlessly that, of course, he could immediately spot the flaws in the questioner's line of reasoning.

His Derech Halimud

The most prominent feature of his *derech halimud* - his approach to learning - was an exacting fidelity to the words of *Chazal* and *Rishonim* (early commentators, circa 12th - 15th centuries), and even more to the words of the *Chumash*, so that he was *medayek* (fastidious in reading) very carefully as to why each statement had to be made, and what we are being told by each phrase. Inevitably, he would discover extraordinary insights that others simply missed.

I once asked him from where he got this unique ability, but phrased the question poorly, "From where did the *Rosh Hayeshiva* get his *derech (approach)*?" He retorted sharply, "I don't know what you mean. I don't have a *derech*. I simply read the words." (This method, by the way, was another of his secrets to success with the not-so-frum. He would say a *shiur* by simply reading the *Chumash* - in English! - and showing how his conclusions and those of *Chazal* were drawn from the text without any need for interpretation as such, but from simply reading the words carefully and taking its phrasing seriously.)

Some time later, I tried again, and asked him how he achieved his mastery in learning. His answer: "I used to be terrific in *pilpul*, until I realized that with such an approach I could reach any conclusion I wanted, and therefore know nothing with certainty. I decided that if I wished to actually know what the Torah was telling me, I must simply go with what the words say, and no more."

Very often, he would ask a *kushya* and answer it in two steps. First, he would show that the question itself forced us to recognize a certain fact. "This much is *muchrach* (compellingly evident)," he would say. Then he would proceed to explain that fact. But he was very careful to distinguish that which he had shown the Torah to be saying from his own conjectural explanation thereof. "I am speculating, that is all. Others are entitled to speculate differently. But whether you like my rationale or not, the fact that we are discussing is *muchrach*."

He would stress that each *Rishon* must be read differently and "learned" on its own terms. The *Rosh HaYeshiva* very clearly was *medayek* differently in each *Rishon*. In some cases, he was *medayek* words and in some cases only phrases, based on an understanding of how each one wrote. One could even occasionally discern a difference in how he analyzed the *Ramban* and how he analyzed the *Rashba!* M.W.

The essence of a *Godol* - Selflessness

by Rabbi Avi Shafran

The unaffiliated Jewish woman attended three of the rabbi's lectures in the 1950s, visibly intrigued by the ideas he put forth, about the historicity of the Jewish religious tradition. Then she abruptly stopped coming.

Another woman who had also attended the lecture series tracked her down and asked why she was no longer showing up. The first woman answered straightforwardly: "He was convincing me. If I continue to listen to this man, I will have to change my life."

What a remarkably honest person. (I like to imagine that she came, in time, to pursue what she then fled.)

And what a remarkable man was the rabbi who delivered the lectures. He was Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, of blessed memory, whose tenth *yahrtzeit*, or death-anniversary, will be marked on the fast day of *Shiva Asar BiTammuz* (July 9). He later became the Rosh Yeshiva, or Dean, of the Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore. He was my rebbe.

As an 18-year-old studying in the Baltimore yeshiva in 1972, I watched him from afar. His father-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, of blessed memory, was the Rosh Yeshiva then; Rabbi Weinberg headed the Kollel, or graduate student program, and also delivered general Talmudic lectures. The depth of his knowledge, the power of his critical analyses of both Talmudic and worldly topics, his eloquence and his knowledge of history and the sciences all impressed me deeply.

But what I came to realize was that his brilliance and erudition were mere tools with which he was gifted. His essence was his dedication to truth, to Torah and to his students – indeed, to all Jews – and his humility.

When I think back on the many times I telephoned Rabbi Weinberg from wherever I was living at the time to ask him a question about Jewish law or philosophy, or for his advice, I am struck by something I never gave much thought to at those times: He was always available. And, I have discovered over the years, not only to me. As I came to recognize all the others – among them greatly accomplished Torah scholars, congregational rabbis and community leaders today – who had also enjoyed a student-rebbe relationship with Rabbi Weinberg, I marveled. In my youthful self-centeredness, I had imagined him as my rebbe alone. Who knew?

And his ongoing interactions with his students somehow didn't prevent him from travelling wherever his services were needed. A sought-after speaker and arbitrator for individuals and communities alike, he somehow found time and energy for it all.

More telling, he felt responsible to undertake it all. He (and, may she be well, his wife, Rebbetzin Chana Weinberg) gave so very much to others (as the Rebbetzin continues to do). That, I long ago concluded, is the defining characteristic of true *Gedolim*, literally "great ones" – the term reserved for the most knowledgeable and pious Torah leaders of each generation: selflessness.

How painfully ironic, I sometimes think, that small, spiteful minds try to portray *Gedolim* oppositely. Then again, as the weekly Torah-portion of Korach recently read in synagogue reminds us, no less a *Godol* than Moses – the “most humble of all men” – was also spoken of cynically by some in his day. Plus ça change...

It wasn't just in his public life, in his service to students and communities that Rabbi Weinberg's self-effacement was evident. It was in little things too.

In the early 1980s, he was asked to temporarily take the helm of a small yeshiva in Northern California that had fallen on hard times. Although not a young man, he agreed to leave his home and position in Baltimore and become interim dean.

My wife and I and our three daughters lived in the community; I taught in the yeshiva and served as principal of the local Jewish girls' high school. And so I was fortunate to have ample opportunity to work with Rabbi Weinberg, and to witness much that I will always remember. One small episode, though, remains particularly poignant.

Rabbi Weinberg was housed in a bedroom of a rented house. In the house's other bedroom lived the yeshiva's cooks – a middle-aged couple, recently immigrated from the Soviet Union.

Though Northern California has a wonderful climate, its winters can be a bit chilly, and the house's heating system was not working. The yeshiva administrator made sure that extra blankets were supplied to the house's residents, and an electric heater was procured for Rabbi Weinberg (the cooks, it was figured, had been toughened by a truly cold climate).

After a week or two of cold, rainy weather, it was evident that Rabbi Weinberg had caught a bad cold. Suspecting that perhaps the electric heater was not working, someone went to his room to check it. It wasn't there.

Where it was, it turned out, was in the cooks' room. Confronted with the discovery, Rabbi Weinberg sheepishly admitted to having relocated the heater. “I thought they would be cold,” was all he said.

Another heater was bought. And a lesson, once again, learned, about the essence of a *Godol*.

Talmidim from outside the Yeshiva

A Tribute to Our Rebbe, Our Spiritual Father, Rav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg, zt'l

by Dennis Berman

It is said that a parent brings one into olam hazeh (this world), and a rebbe brings one into olam haba (the next world). It is also said that he who teaches one Torah is as if he had given birth to him. This is why we say that Rav Yaakov, as we affectionately called him, was, and is, our rebbe and our spiritual father. He found the two of us to be products of a generally assimilated background, and yet searching for our roots, eager to find a spiritual mentor who could relate to us, understand and respect our achievements in the secular world, and engage with us at a level commensurate with our intellectual and emotional capabilities. Prior to meeting Rav Yaakov, we had spoken with numerous rabbis of various leanings, and had not found the teacher we were seeking. After our initial meeting with Rav Yaakov, it was clear to us that we had met a most extraordinary individual, and although we knew virtually nothing of Torah in those days, it was patently clear to us that he was a man of tremendous learning. Over the ensuing 20 years, we would discover that he was a gadol of incredible magnitude in learning and in application. He had an incredible sense of people and a depth of feeling and sensitivity that touched the lives of thousands of people worldwide.

In the last 20 years, we have faced numerous serious challenges in our lives. In every case, Rav Yaakov was there for us in every possible way; as a guide in terms of halacha, as an enormous emotional support, spurring us on to grow with every challenge, to push ourselves in learning, in taking on mitzvot, in educating our children in Torah, in dealing with our family and professional “baal teshuva” issues. When the time and finances were in place, he encouraged us to purchase a home in Israel, and he told us that this would be one of the greatest actions that we could take to develop our family’s connection to Torah, to Israel, and to klal Yisrael, all of which have been borne out to every possible extent.

He gave us the halachic guidelines and hashkafic points of view regarding tzedaka that have formed the bedrock and bulwark for our activities in this realm.

He helped us through numerous issues of chinuch with our children. Demonstrating an ability to relate to each child, he taught us very well the dictum of “educate the child according to his way, and he will not depart from the path.”

All of the above speaks to Rav Yaakov as “rebbe.” As for the aspect of “spiritual father,” he was kind and warm; he had the most incredible twinkly eyes, and a warm, sweet, and ready smile. He was an “ish emes,” a man of truth, both as rebbe and as “father.” If he thought we were off in our thinking, he did not hesitate to say so, but always in a kind way. He also had a wonderful sense of humor. He loved to laugh, and he liked to hear us laugh. Even though he had herculean responsibilities, he was able to take pleasure in the small things. He judged himself more stringently than he judged others. He hated keeping people waiting, including his students. He always made himself available to others in every possible way, large and small.

As father and rebbe, he loved, loved, loved! to tell stories! He was a real maggid; he loved to use drama and change his voice for the effect that he could have on his listeners. He was fascinated by human nature and enjoyed sharing his observations about the greatness and the foibles of mankind in their search for G-d. He spanned the Old World and the new one in terms of his experience, breadth of knowledge, and openness to ideas. A tremendous admirer of

Rambam, he also appreciated how crucial knowledge of the natural world is to the appreciation of the Creator. He was not afraid to encourage people to engage in such studies, understanding that greater knowledge could add to yirat (awe of) and ahavat (love of) Hashem (G-d). Yet it was always completely clear that Torah must be the framework for any other study, the absolute Truth that is the reality through which everything else must be viewed.

These words begin to express what our rebbe was and is to us. To say that we were blessed beyond measure to have had him in our lives for 20 years is no exaggeration. To say that we have missed him so much since his passing does not begin to address our sense of loss. Yet we feel his presence in our lives – both in the spiritual sense and in the sense of what we gained from our years of relating to him, since there is not one day in our lives, or the lives of our children which is not affected by our rebbe. He is present in every bracha that we make, in every word of lashon hara that we don't utter, in every discussion of all things Jewish, in our choices of where we go and where we don't go, in our communal endeavors, and in our individual journeys in learning, middot, and devekut Hashem.

This is what it is to have a rebbe, a spiritual father.

Personal encounters with Rabbi Weinberg

by **Rabbi Yakov Palatnik**

The way to happiness

Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, of blessed memory, the Dean of Ner Israel Yeshiva in Baltimore, was a tremendous Torah scholar and spiritual giant. He passed away 14 years ago on the 17th of Tammuz. I would like to share with you some personal encounters I had with him and some wisdom that I learned from him.

Over 30 years ago I heard that Rabbi Weinberg would be speaking at the the Telshe Yeshiva in Chicago where I was visiting my parents. Having heard that Rabbi Weinberg was a special person, I eagerly headed for the event, looking forward to the talk. I was very disappointed. He spoke entirely in Yiddish (the appropriate language for the audience at Telshe) and I understood nothing. I went to the podium after the talk, as Rav Yaakov kindly greeted people and politely shook hands with well-wishers. I was newly religious, very curious, and not shy so I maneuvered to the front of the line and approached Rav Yaakov with my best philosophical question: 'How can a person be truly happy?'

He looked at me straight in the eye. "I don't know you so I can't give you the answer that's right for you. There are three aspects to happiness. The first is you must appreciate and take pleasure in all the gifts you have. Your eyes, ears, and intelligence are great gifts, enjoy them and take pleasure.

"Are you married?" he asked me.

"Not yet," I replied.

"The second aspect to happiness is to learn to be a giver, to really care for other people and love them. Men have a hard time with this until they are married. Do your best, be a giving person. You will flourish when you really do this."

"The third aspect," he continued, his voice changing from a loving father to someone communicating the Fear of Heaven, "do you believe in *Olam Haba*, the World to Come and the eternity of the soul?"

"Yes," I managed to squeak out in a high pitched, frightened voice.

"You have to make it real," Rav Yaakov thundered, "that every day of your life you are building your eternity! You are living for something Ultimate. Each day. But I don't know you, so I don't know which is most important for you in life right now."

This was clearly a man with thought out ideas.

The Man who can Answer Everything

In a very different setting I heard Rav Yaakov speak in St. Louis at Washington University, in early 1980s. It was an Aish HaTorah event in the Gargoyle, a popular campus hangout. We were excited that the great rabbi would be speaking to college students, but in our enthusiasm, we erred in promoting the event. We billed it as "The Man Who Can Answer Any Question" and Rav Yaakov did not think that was appropriate. Even worse, we titled the talk "The Jewish Messiah" with Rabbi Weinberg's picture directly below the title on all the posters. We inadvertently made it look like he was the Jewish messiah.

The tension in that room was very thick. It was dispelled by the second question of the evening when a college student asked, "Why does Jewish lineage follow the mother?" and Rav Yaakov replied, "I don't know." So much for the man who can answer any question!

That night was very lively, especially when a Jewish student who had converted to Christianity chose to argue publicly with Rabbi Weinberg. "God broke the covenant with the Jews because of your sins! The Jews did all sorts of horrible things!" the young man emotionally cried out. "It's in the book of Isaiah, that the Jews are rejected!"

Rav Yaakov was calm and measured in his response. "Do you have the book? Let's learn it together and see if it says what you are claiming."

"I don't have the book," the student replied.

Rav Yaakov calmly answered, "Allow me to read it to you ..." and he started reciting the opening chapter of Isaiah, in Hebrew, with a line-by-line translation for the audience. All by heart with no book near him. He explained to all the young man's confusion. "'Come let us reason together' is the prophet's call to the Jewish nation to repair its mistakes. It is not a rejection but a call to come home to one's Creator." Most of the attending students were astonished. His explanations were so clear, his reasoning so plain and he seemed to know the entire Bible by heart in Hebrew! There were people in that room who changed their relationship to Judaism and Torah by hearing that one talk.

Many questions in Jewish law were brought to Rabbi Weinberg by Jews around the world who valued his deep wisdom and commitment to take responsibility. If it was a tough question, in any area of life, he could wisely give guidance.

Master Teacher

I arranged for Rabbi Weinberg to speak to a group of businessmen in Toronto on the topic, "What happens after we die." I wanted to make sure that Rav Yaakov was prepared for the skeptical audience he was about to face. Jewish people rarely respond to fire and brimstone, and I feared that if someone asked him about '*gehinnom*,' the Jewish view of Hell and punishment in the afterworld, that people might actually walk out if his answer was not "nuanced" enough. 'If people bring up this topic,' I asked him, "what will the Rav answer?"

"They will absolutely love to hear all about it," he said to me. "You have nothing to worry about."

“Rosh Hayeshiva, we are talking about Hell! Why would anyone love hearing about this?”

“Do you have modern hospitals here in Toronto? Of course. Do they offer chemotherapy, radiation treatment for those who need it? Yes they do. So tell me,” Rav Yaakov asked, “you are certainly grateful that such facilities exist. How often would you like to use their services? The chemo and radiation? We are happy that it is there for those who need it, but we hope we will never spend one second there. *Gehinom* (Hell) is a facility for a soul that could not fix his or her mistakes in this world but still hopes to be cured. Of course it’s better to never have to check in, but if you need it, you’re glad it’s there. Fix your mistakes here and now. But for those that don’t, we have a hospital for the soul. They will be happy to hear about it.”

Rabbi Weinberg gave his students a new way of thinking; he truly raised up many students.

He answered so many questions in Torah by focusing on what exactly the Torah says. Every word of the Torah is important. The deep answers people seek are hiding in plain view. Just read and learn the text carefully, with humility, and wisdom will follow. I am thankful to be one of his students.

From the Family

His distinctive feature - *Emes*

By Rabbi Emanuel Feldman

I first met my *mechutan*, Rav Yaakov Weinberg, long before he was the famous Rav Yaakov. I was a boy of 15, and he was a few years older. I had come from Baltimore to Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin in New York for a year of high school, and Rav Hutner, the Rosh Hayeshiva, had assigned the young Yaakov Weinberg to be my mentor for a short while. Neither of us had any idea, of course, that many years later, he would become the husband of Chana Ruderman and ultimately the Rosh Hayeshiva of Ner Israel in Baltimore, and that I would become rabbi in Atlanta. And of course, the thought that some day our children would be married to one another, and that we would become *mechutanim*, could not have entered our minds.

It is from the perspective of a *mechutan* that I write these lines in his memory.

Who was Rav Yaakov Weinberg? That is not a question easily addressed, for his was a complex and variegated persona. What the world saw was a tall, handsome, articulate Rosh Yeshiva, pious and scholarly, possessed of an incisive mind, a mastery of the Written and Oral Torah, and a unique ability to inspire and uplift his disciples.

He was all these, but he was much more. This prodigious intellect, who was a ease in the company of the great minds of his generation, was also at ease in the company of little children. He was able to switch gears from the most complex and subtle Talmudic discussions to the telling of stories to his grandchildren – and to excel both in the role of world class Torah teacher and world class *zeide*. He had the rare ability to get down on the floor with his grandchildren, putting his mellifluous voice to good use as he dramatized the bedtime stories – and doing it all in a totally unselfconscious way. When he was with the children, he was not playing the role of I-am-the-famous-rosh-yeshiva-now-playing-with-his-grandchildren; rather, he was being himself – natural and unpretentious. When he played games with them, he was not playing games about himself; he was simply being himself.

This is what I most cherish about him: his unpretentiousness, his refusal to pose. Here was a man who was genuine and unadorned. His distinctive feature was honesty – with others and, even more difficult – with himself. Gaavah, conceit, ego, flatter, and artificiality were not part of his lexicon. His ability to play with his grandchildren was not just a charming trait; it was a manifestation of a personality that had no admixture of self-importance or artificiality.

This genuineness suffused everything he did. Just as his self disappeared when he was teaching a complicated gemara, so did his self disappear when he spoke with the numerous individuals who came to him for advice and counsel about their personal problems. His was a life in search of the emes – the truth – that lay imbedded in the text, whether that text was part of the Torah or part of the people – young and old – with whom he had contact.

He was gentle and sympathetic by nature, but he was intolerant of shoddy thinking. He was an understanding and kind human being, but his was a lifelong struggle against intellectual laziness and religious shallowness. Emes was the key to his life.

Little children know emes instinctively. It is only later, as they mature, that their instinctive emes becomes diluted. When I would see the joy in Rav Yaakov's eyes as he played with his grandchildren, it occurred to me that perhaps what most invigorated him about them was their instinctive emes, their lack of guile and cunning, their transparency and straightforwardness. He identified with these qualities, because they were a reflection on his own essential being

Yehi zichro baruch.

“The Power of His Mind, the Softness of His Heart”

By Rebbetzin Dr. Aviva Weisbord

It was the first day of shiva. Three local rabbis came in and asked us, “How did your father raise you? We need to hear as much as possible!” That question was repeated throughout the shiva, and I began to realize that the true question was, “What was it like to have a gadol for a father?”

The answer to that is quite simple: It was exactly the same as having a gadol for a rebbi, a guide and advisor – only more so. My father was a servant of Hashem and a man of truth, and these qualities permeated every aspect of his life and of our lives with him. This means that there was a rare consistency to his existence, with no difference between his outside and home worlds. We lived with the same relentless search for truth and for ratzon Hashem (G-d's will) that all his students experienced, the same gentleness and attentiveness that he displayed to everyone – children, students, Jew and non-Jew alike. That's why there were no surprises during shiva; all the stories had similar themes and paralleled our own experiences. The sheer volume of individuals and communities whose lives my father touched took us aback, but everything else matched what we knew of this unique individual.

It's hard to say which persona was predominant in our upbringing, the truth-seeker or the one whose love was so all-encompassing. My father's pursuit of truth was legendary. As a child, he decided to learn the fundamental purpose of this world and what G-d wanted from His people. He was determined to set aside all preconceived notions, all the stories and interpretations he had heard and to find the objective truth of Torah. His way of life would follow the path set out in the words of the Creator and in the actions of His servants.

One thing he knew from his studies was that example was far more powerful than talk. Because of this, my father never lectured to us – or at us; we were to absorb his approach through observing his conduct. At the same time, he

encouraged and even demanded questions from us. And there was never a question undeserving of serious consideration. He listened intently, with great concentration and patience. Of course, he was always quick to gently point out any weakness in the question – “Think again how that question could be much stronger” – or any flawed assumptions underlying it – “That would be a beautiful question, if your premise were correct.”

Knowing that even our silliest questions would be heard and judiciously analyzed provided the foundation of our self-concept. After all, if this great man, busy with the affairs of the Jewish nation throughout the world, thought our existence was worthwhile, then surely we had worth in the eyes of the Ribono Shel Olam (G-d). For years, one of my sisters was convinced that Hashem looked like our father, possibly with a longer beard! Our early picture of Hashem as a loving, caring Being came from this identification of Him with our father.

When I was 18 and had all the answers, I queried my father about an interaction he had just had with a younger sibling. “I don’t want to judge you...” I began. He quickly interrupted me: “Of course you should judge me. You need to observe and ask about what you see. Then you’ll decide if that’s how you want to live your life. That’s the way you learn.”

“That’s the way you learn.” Perhaps that was the most powerful lesson he taught: Think, always think. Think honestly, think fearlessly, think without worrying about what others will say or think about you. That’s how to serve G-d, how to discover what He wants from you.

It was not necessarily easy to grow up with this! My father was incapable of evading or sugarcoating the truth. He was also very sparing with his words, unless he saw that the listener needed an elaboration to truly grasp the point. One couple told us that they received a halachic decision from my father that was exceedingly difficult to live with. “He had done his job,” the husband said. “He gave us the decision. But your father sat with us for over an hour, giving us the strength to carry out the halacha. It was an incredible example of the power of his mind combined with the softness of his heart.”

My siblings and I sensed that my father’s method of teaching bore a striking resemblance to Rashi’s description of Moshe and Aharon in Exodus (7:2): “Moshe transmitted exactly as he heard it from Hashem and then Aharon would present it in a more palatable fashion to Pharaoh”: He presented the unvarnished truth, but he was able to convey it in a manner that could readily be understood and acted upon.

For example, I remember walking out of the neighborhood grocery as a nine-year-old, having spent a nickel for an ice cream cone. I was joyously licking it when I met my father walking home from the yeshiva. He took one look at me, smiled, and said, “Ha’ochel bashuk domeh lekelev (Eating in the street is canine behavior).” I heard the love and gentle humor and accepted the rebuke. From then on, I took my chances on the ice cream arriving somewhat melted, when I could eat it in the privacy of my home.

With one short sentence, this master teacher could accomplish months’ worth of growth in his children or a re-ordering of our priorities. Although sometimes it was not pleasant or inviting to contemplate change, we were able to accept his words with complete trust, knowing that he always spoke truth and that whatever our father said was a reflection of G-d’s will and came from pure love. When vinyl tops were first introduced on cars back in the late 60s, I saw one of the newer models as we were walking. I commented to my father, “Wow! Now that’s something to aim for!”

“Look how the American culture has rubbed off on you,” he responded. Thirty years later, that comment still helps me maintain my focus.

I’m not the only one whose perspective was changed with a small comment or an aside from my father. His talmidim (students), as well as strangers who heard him speak, or people who went to him for advice have mentioned to me again and again how a single comment turned around their thinking and even redirected their lives.

One young man in his 20s told me he was caught in a relationship dilemma and had been immobilized for months. “The Rosh Hayeshiva told me that while it’s true that I’m obligated to be sensitive to the other person, there is no obligation to commit suicide. At that instant, I understood that my current behavior was killing me. Those ten minutes with him saved my life.”

There was never any burden too heavy for him to lift off of our shoulders or our hearts. There was never a request that went unanswered or an hour that was too late to offer comfort, solace, and advice. Our parents went on a weekly four-hour, round-trip drive to teach in a small community of unaffiliated Jews. Many times they didn’t get home until 2:00 in the morning, but if my father found a note on his pillow, he would meet us at 6:30 a.m. to help us with our homework.

Ironically, as accessible as he was to family, talmidim, and total strangers, my father was such a complex person that it was difficult to fully know him. We used to say that only two people truly understood my father: Rav Yitzchok Hutner, zt”l, and my mother. Theirs was a rare partnership, spanning 54 years of building, working, and reaching out to others as an Avraham and Sarah team.

Most of the time, my father waited for us to approach him with our questions, problems, or issues. However, if he saw something that needed improvement or redirection, he made sure to let us know. It was the same way in the world of the yeshiva. He never imposed his will but was there to make an impact when a student was ready for it. But if he saw a need, whether in an individual or the klal, he took the initiative to meet it. That’s why he took a strong stand in the late 50s to start the Mechina (preparatory) program at Ner Israel. Even my grandfather, Rav Ruderman, zt”l, who had so courageously founded the yeshiva with his rebbetzin in the hostile American climate of the 1930s, hesitated to commit the yeshiva to this kind of expansion. It meant extra classrooms, salaries and tremendous financial risk. But he trusted my father’s vision and went ahead with the plans.

The same thing happened in the early ’60s: My father saw the need for a kollel and understood the impact it would have on the yeshiva. Opposition was quite strong, but he was tenacious about anything that was necessary for the strengthening of Torah. Once again, time proved him right. Before the establishment of the kollel, any newly married couple committed to full-time Torah learning had to leave Baltimore. Today the city reflects the influence of the kollel in its vast numbers of Torah scholars, lectures, and shuls. As one eulogizer pointed out, my father dealt with each issue not only in the here and now, but with a view towards the future, years away.

Doing whatever needed to be done for Torah was paramount in his life. There were many times he accepted a speaking engagement somewhere, even knowing that he would not be treated with proper respect. We used to argue with him, asking, “Why are you giving of yourself to those who won’t give you your due?” The reply, invariably, was, “There are people there who need to hear what I have to say. What difference does it make how I’m treated?” We never succeeded in answering that question to his satisfaction.

In my father's concept of avodas Hashem, it was obvious that we are obliged to bring Torah to every Jew and not to rest until the entire world, Jew and non-Jew, recognizes the existence of our Creator and His direct involvement in our lives.

There were two major outgrowths of this understanding. The first encompassed his outreach efforts, starting in the early 1940s in New York, when he walked from the Lower East Side to Brownsville every Shabbos to speak. Lieutenant Birnbaum was there in those years and described him as "a maggid – at age 19."

While many were opposed to my father's willingness to speak to and teach secular and non-Orthodox groups, he persevered in his efforts, as well as in guiding those involved in outreach. His most ardent disciple in this area was his younger brother, Reb Noach Weinberg, founder and rosh hayeshiva of Aish HaTorah. Reb Noach was dismissed as "the meshugener" for his resolute labors; he remained steadfast with the constant encouragement and direction of his brother.

Today, of course, outreach has become mainstream and is viewed as every yeshiva's responsibility. Interestingly, the same process occurred with Project SEED, the summer program in which yeshiva students establish a beis medrash in small cities that have no institutions of higher Torah learning. When Rabbi Gavriel Ginsberg first proposed this innovative idea, it was greeted with horror. My father was the one who forcefully convinced the roshei yeshiva to approve a trial run. Once again, my father's notions were labeled "outrageous" and "radical"; once again, the revolutionary became mundane and every yeshiva was vying to send students on this important mission.

We never heard my father voice any satisfaction at the turn of the tide, but we wouldn't expect that: There was always more to accomplish, and that's what he concentrated on. This attitude came to the fore at a rally to counter chilul Shabbos in Baltimore three years before. There was an air of satisfaction at the large turnout. My father punctured the self-congratulatory tone by remarking, "Yes, we have 3,000 people here today, and that is truly wonderful." Then, in a thundering voice, he continued, "But what about the other 95,000 Jews in our city who know nothing about Shabbos? What are we doing for them?"

The second outgrowth of my father's sense of obligation to bring Torah to all was his articulate presentation of what Torah and Torah study are all about. As one of the first American-born roshei yeshiva, my father was able to give the secular world an idea of the high level of scholarship involved in Talmudic research, the complexity of thought and depth of understanding required to navigate the rivers of Torah shebe'al peh. This became crucial at a time when yeshiva attendance was frowned upon as a burdensome delay in a young man's pursuit of a profession.

My father made it far more difficult to depreciate the academic value of yeshivah studies. Now it was possible for secular institutions of higher learning to recognize the unique process of yeshivah education. This recognition, in turn, led to the founding of AARTS, the Association of Advanced Rabbinic and Talmudic Schools, a national agency of accreditation for post-high school yeshivos. Today we take it for granted that a qualified yeshiva student can attend yeshiva full-time and have his Torah learning recognized by even the most prestigious colleges and universities. My father's painstaking work was a major factor in this process.

I knew on some level that there were people who found my father intimidating, but I never really understood that response to him. Now I realize that his towering intellect combined with his fierce defense of the truth could indeed be daunting. He had an unapologetic fidelity to the spirit of the Torah, even if it meant taking a stance that was unpopular.

To us, his children, it meant we could ask him anything – any Torah verse, any concept, any subject – astronomy, calculus, history, nuclear physics, the nature of volcanoes, or the properties of water. The greatest thrill was to actually stump him. But he took far more pride in those rare occasions than we did and proceeded happily to look up the answer.

It was much harder for me to grasp a person's failure to see the warmth and sweetness that could never be obscured by the intellectual genius. Perhaps, as one who eulogized him explained, people understood that listening to him meant that they had to change; his mere presence obliged one to think and act differently. And yet, of all the qualities enumerated at the shiva or in letters, faxes, and phone calls by the hundreds, my father's warmth topped the list.

It will take time to assess fully his impact as a rebbi, but already it's clear that his concern for his talmidim and availability to them were the foundations of their relationship with him. Then came his specific approach to learning, the training in critical thinking and the demand and expectation to care for and serve klal Yisrael. The totality of their experiences with him left his students feeling invigorated, alive to the possibilities of Torah and their place in it.

My father understood the centrality of ahavas Yisrael (love for fellow Jews) even as a young child. In his parents' household, he was the child sent to ask any sheilos (halachic questions) about chickens. In those days, the person asking the sheila put a quarter down for the rabbi before showing the chicken. There was one rav who answered the sheila with or without the quarter: Rav Moshe Feinstein. As a six-year-old boy, my father walked an extra 20 minutes each way to ask Rav Moshe his sheilos. As he explained it, he put down the quarter anyway and he trusted all the local rabbis; but he wanted his sheilos answered by someone who displayed such ahavas Yisrael.

More than the genius, greater than the encyclopedic knowledge, beyond the prodigious output of original thought, there was the love: the all-encompassing, totally accepting, completely non-judgmental love for us and for every single Jew. It was a love that could give us a sense of what Hashem's love is like for His children, so to speak. One erev Rosh Hashanah, my sister called my father to express her fears of the Day of Judgment. He asked her, "Do you know I love you?"

"Of course," she answered.

"And if you did the absolutely worst thing possible, would you still know I love you?"

"One hundred percent."

"Then listen carefully: Hashem loves you a billion times more. Don't be afraid of Him: turn to Him."

We can listen to tapes of his speeches, we can share memories. We can keep bits and pieces of my father in our lives. But we can never fill the hole created by the absence of the security and warmth of that incredible love.

Zeide

by Yehuda Weisbord

When I think of my grandfather Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l, there are so many things that come to mind. His character traits, my childhood memories, conversations we had, concepts he taught – all intertwine to form the sense that I have of him. I don't have a picture of him; a picture is limited to visual stimuli. Rather, I have a nebulous feeling, a "sense" I get when I think of him. It combines all these ways in which we related, and inevitably, it evokes a warm

feeling in me. In fact, this warmth is primary in my memory; because, first and foremost, I was always aware that Zeide loved his grandchildren. That was what I knew as a young child, before I could begin to understand his wisdom, his Torah learning, his yiras Shamayim, or his devotion to the klal. And that is what was always present in every interaction that we had until the very end.

I remember how he was completely unself-conscious about this love. He, together with Bubby, ybcl"c, used to take me and my siblings or cousins on trips in the summer. I remember him meeting a talmid (student) in a park, and I noticed that he was just as comfortable as if they were in yeshiva. He did not feel that it was beneath his dignity to be taking us on those trips.

I remember the barbecues he and Bubby would make in the summer, in the house on Fallstaff Road. I remember the love in his expression when he gave us a Chanukah or birthday gift. I remember the patience he exhibited when he had to explain a mishna to me yet again, when I couldn't quite get something.

I also remember how this love wasn't limited to me or even to the rest of our family. I remember the warmth with which he greeted anyone who came to speak to him, and especially a talmid whom he hadn't seen in a while. I remember the concern he had for the tzibur. Once, we were about to go somewhere – he was literally walking out the door - when the phone rang. He went back into the house and answered it, saying that maybe it was someone with a sheila. I remember the tza'ar (grief) in his voice when he heard bad news about another Yid. I have seen and heard numerous stories about how he was able to comfort people in their times of distress, simply because of the depth of warmth he communicated by his presence, his voice, and his words.

The next thing that comes to mind when I think of Zeide is his incredible way of thinking. Obviously there are talmidim more fit than I to discuss this, but as I was growing up, it gave me a tremendous sense of trust. I knew that he knew what he was doing, and that he would always make sense. I learned in many yeshivos over the years, and had many excellent rebbeim. Some of them had stances on issues that did not fit in with the ideas I had heard at home. Inevitably, I always came back to this fact: Zeide made sense. He always had a unique approach, but it was always completely, solidly grounded. In fact, he himself would distinguish between what part of a thought he held was absolutely true, and what part was conjecture.

It was this completely uncompromising and utterly reliable logic that was the basis for his life. I remember him often being critical of various translations of davening or of the Torah. Many people didn't understand why he made such a big deal out of it, but to me it made perfect sense. He based his life on his understanding of the Torah. He wasn't frum simply because he was brought up frum. He was frum because of his understanding of the mesorah of Torah. That's why he couldn't bear to see anything misrepresented or misunderstood, because if Torah was distorted, then the basis for life wasn't the same. His learning wasn't theoretical – it was reality. I remember many occasions where he paskened (ruled on) a shaila and explained to me later that it was based on the unique way he learned a particular sugya. His lomdus (learning) wasn't theoretical either. He lived by his understanding.

I was fortunate to spend a number of years hearing his shmuessen, shiurim, and chaburos in yeshiva. Only after his petira (passing) did I fully realize the degree to which my ideas were shaped by his teachings. Countless times, in chaburos that I was giving, his ideas came up. I find myself quoting him regularly, even now, five years since his petira. I have accepted as given so many concepts that I heard him repeat over the years. I enjoyed hearing him explain

things in different contexts, to different people, simply to hear the clarity of his thoughts, and to deepen the understanding that I already had. I am grateful for the time I had with him after chaburos, or driving him places, to be able to ask and clarify ideas that I didn't grasp. It was so wonderful to be able to turn to him with personal questions of what I should do or where I should go, and to know that his answer would give me the confidence to follow a given path.

I miss Zeide. But I know that I carry parts of him inside of me, because he has shaped me in so many wonderful ways. Most of all, I carry his love, which gives me the confidence to keep moving forward. And I carry the sense I have of him, which is both a comfort and a guide. I strive for some degree of his pashtus (simplicity), of his ability to separate the important from the trivial, and of his avdus to Hashem. With his zechus, may we all merit continued growth and the coming of the Mashiach, bb"a.

דברים ישרים - A taste of his *Hashkafa* (Torah outlook)

He Used to Say...

By Rabbi Mordechai Plaut

It is important not only to give a sense of who he was, but also, in memoriam, to try to give over some of the important lessons that he taught. Certainly all of his students carry these ideas with them in everything they do, but this is an appropriate venue to set them down so that they will be more widely available. Especially in view of the fact that he left so few written works, is it important to try to record and publish some of the valuable insights he taught.

Many of these teachings were so important to him that they could be prefaced with the introduction of so many *mishnayos* of *Pirkei Ovos: Hu hoyo omeir* . . . Almost everyone who had significant contact with him has heard them. Others, however, were not as widely known. All are nonetheless part of an integrated, consistent, coherent approach to his life's task of being an *eved Hashem*.

Two Stories

There is a story told about Vilna of more than 200 years ago. In those days it was often difficult to get *arba minim* for Succos, which had to be imported over long distances from other climes.

One year, it was almost impossible to get an *esrog* in Vilna. In fact, there was only one. The Vilna Gaon was the unquestioned *godol hador* and even he did not have an *esrog* for Succos. His *talmidim* did their best to secure the *esrog* for their master. They offered the possessor of the single Vilna *esrog* that year large sums of money -- but he turned them down. He did, however, make them a counteroffer: He would give the Gaon his *esrog*, if the reward for the Gaon's fulfillment of the mitzvo went to him, instead of to the Gaon!

It was a steep price and a very unusual one. The *talmidim* were not sure how their master would react. When they told him of the price for the *esrog*, he accepted immediately and radiated great joy, exclaiming, "Now I will be able to fulfill this mitzvo completely *lishmo!*"

Another, similar, story is told about a great Chassidic Rebbe. One time he announced to his followers that it was decreed in Heaven that they had, for one reason or another, lost all chance of any reward in *Olom Haboh*. The Rebbe declared his happiness about this state of affairs to all of his followers, for the reason that henceforth he could worship Hashem purely *lishmo*.

The Rosh Yeshiva would explain that he has no historical information about either of them, but based on the content of the stories the first is proper and correct, but he could not accept the second as valid.

Hashem created the world in order to give us reward, he explained. This is the purpose of His Creation, and this purpose must be fulfilled. But *Kaviyochol* had no particular person in mind when creating the world, and it makes no difference for His purpose who receives the *sechar*. Thus, it serves Hashem's purpose just as well if the original owner of the *esrog* receives the reward for a mitzva as if the Vilna Gaon himself receives the reward. Nothing is lost; the mitzva is fulfilled and Hashem gives someone the reward for that mitzva. The Gaon, who was only concerned with what Hashem wants without any concern for himself, could properly rejoice that he could do the mitzva purely *lishmo*, as long as someone was getting the reward.

If the reward is lost entirely, if no one gets it as in the second story, then Hashem's purpose in Creation of giving out *sechar* is not brought to fruition. If the reward for the good deeds is simply lost, then this is occasion for mourning not rejoicing, since Hashem's purpose has been frustrated, not fulfilled.

Sechar is Our Relationship

Since the desire to reward us is the basis of Creation, its nature and procedures are important. The Rosh Yeshiva insisted that the reward that we get for the good things that we do is not a "mechanical" sort of built-in response to our deeds, but rather a reflection of the consequent nature of our relationship to the *Ribono Shel Olom* after we have done what He bid us do.

Some say that the world is simply set up in such a way that there is an automatic response, in the spiritual realms, to our deeds. When we do what Hashem wants us to do, we are showered with the reward for their performance. The Ramban, however, says that the reward that we get for mitzvos is really a *neiss*.

The Rosh Yeshiva taught and explained that when we do Hashem's will, it enhances our relationship with Him. The reward that we get comes from this enhanced relationship.

The reward is there, and we must strive toward it. Yet we strive for it not in order for us to have it, but in order that the *Ribono Shel Olom* can give it to us, as we know that he wishes to do. When the Vilna Gaon fulfilled the mitzva of *arba minim* he knew that there was an attached reward and that Hashem wanted to give this reward. Yet it was not important to him that he be the recipient of the reward.

This is a complex idea, but the Rosh Yeshiva once illustrated it himself beautifully.

For the Sechar or Because of the Sechar?

A *talmid* once asked him about the *posuk* in *parshas Vayeiro* (*Bereishis 18, 19*) in which Hashem says of Avrohom Ovinu: "For I know of him that he will command his children and his household after him, that they will keep the *derech Hashem* to do *tzedokoh* and *mishpot* in order that Hashem can bring upon Avrohom all that he has spoken about."

This *posuk*, the *talmid* wondered, seems to fly in the face of the well-known principle that we should serve Hashem as slaves who work without thought of reward. Hashem commends Avrohom Ovinu because He knows that Avrohom Ovinu will send his children along the *derech Hashem* so that they will get rewarded. How is that reconciled with the charge to serve Hashem as an *eved* who serves without wanting any reward?

HaRav Weinberg explained it by analogy. He goes to visit his mother in Williamsburg, and whenever he comes, she insists on feeding him and obviously takes great pleasure in doing so. At first he protested. "Mother, why do you insist on serving me? I've already eaten enough."

"Do you think I want to feed you just because you are my son?" she asked rhetorically. "Not at all! I want to give you to eat because you are a *talmid chochom!*"

"If my mother were only interested in feeding me because I am her son, then if I have had enough to eat, she would have no interest in feeding me. It is all the same to her, as long as if I have enough to eat. However, since she wants to feed me in order to give pleasure to a *talmid chochom*, then *she* must be the one to feed me. I must eat *her* food.

"Since then," he told the *talmid*, "I make sure to finish every morsel of food. I am eating because it brings my mother pleasure for me to eat her food, but I am not eating for the pleasure of the good food." (Heard from HaRav Eliyohu Baumwolspiner)

Chazal say that the relationship between parents and children is analogous to the relationship between people and Hashem, and that is what we are trying to exploit here. We must serve Hashem in order that Hashem may give us the reward that He has promised, but we do not serve for the reward itself but in order to fulfill the will of Hashem which is that we receive the reward.

On the Subject of Sechar . . .

In the third *perek* of *Hilchos Teshuvah* the Rambam discusses the fact that everyone has *zechiyos* and *avonos*, and the way these are weighted and counted against each other, so that an individual and a country and the whole world are either *tzadikim* -- if they have more *zechiyos* -- or *reshoim* -- if they have more *avonos*.

In the third *halocho* the Rambam writes: "Whoever regrets the mitzvos that he did, and waives the *zechiyos* and says to himself, 'What have I benefited in that I did them? Would that I had not done them,' has lost them all, and they do not mention for him any merit in the world, as it says, 'The righteousness of the *tzaddik* will not save him on the day of his *rish'o'*' (*Yechezkel* 33) -- this must be referring to none other than one who regrets his earlier actions."

What could this mean? Chazal always say what a great *chiddush* it is that *teshuvah* erases the sin, but here we apparently see that it applies to mitzvos as well. Moreover, generally *Hakodosh Boruch Hu's* consideration of good deeds is greater than His punishment for bad deeds (*middo tovoh merubo*). So how can it be that simply regretting one's mitzvos will fully cancel them out?

Consistent with his understanding of *sechar* as being of fundamental importance in the Creation, the Rosh Yeshiva learned here that the Rambam does not mean to say that the person loses the *sechar* of his good deeds if he regrets them, only that in such a case they are not taken into account when reckoning his status as a *tzaddik* or a *rosho*. The original *sechar* is preserved for him and will be given to him in one form or another, but once he rejects his earlier acts they are no longer included in the balance of all his deeds.

This is in fact evident from a closer reading of the Rambam. He writes: ". . . and they do not mention for him any merit . . ." This "mentioning" refers to the accounting that is done for each person, to determine whether he is a *tzaddik* or a *rosho*. Also, the *posuk* refers to "the day of his *rish'o'*" which is consistent with this interpretation, meaning the day on which he is judged a *rosho*, the day on which an accounting is made of his *zechiyos* and *avonos*, and he is found *arosh* since he loses those *zechiyos* that he regrets. (Heard from HaRav Simcha Cook.)

What is the Mitzva of Emunah?

The Rambam counts the mitzva of *emunah* as the first of the 613 mitzvos. As the Ramban explains, the *gemora* seems to imply this in saying that the two mitzvos we heard from the *Ribono Shel Olom* (and not Moshe Rabbenu who told us 611) were *Onochi* and *Lo yihiyeh*. The Bahag, however, does not count this mitzvo as one of the 613. The Ramban explains that this is because it is the presupposition of all mitzvos. How can there be a mitzvo without a *metzave*? Thus it cannot be an individual mitzva by itself.

What does Rambam hold?

The Rosh Yeshiva said that the *emunah* that is presupposed by all the mitzvos is not the content of this mitzva. Rather that *emunah* is presupposed by this mitzva as it is by all other mitzvos. This first mitzva however, is to make our *emunah* stronger and stronger. To work on our *emunah* and to develop it. This is something that can be done without limit. (Heard from HaRav Moshe Hochman)

The Rosh Yeshiva in particular worked very hard on the Rambam in all the *halochos* in *Sefer Maddo* among which the mitzva of *emunoh* certainly occupies a prominent position.

Emunoh Temima

He worked on *emunoh* but it was within Torah and *bederech HaTorah* and not relying on any outside tools.

He once commented to a *talmid* that there are many people who are *temimusdik* in their approach to *emunoh*. They simply have *emunoh peshuta* and do not ask any questions. They simply are *mevateil da'as* to the *Ribono Shel Olom*. This approach we can understand.

But someone like the Chazon Ish, he explained, is amazing. He knew all the questions and worked on them, but still came out after all that with such a perfect and wholesome *emunoh*. This is truly remarkable. (Heard from HaRav Nochum Lansky)

On competition in the classroom

By M.W.

We live in a society that motivates by competition, and that therefore preaches the need to teach our children how to compete and how to compete well. Unfortunately, even the *chadorim* have adopted competition as a means of motivation, complete with student-comparison- charts on the wall and Bees to determine who knows the material the best. And therein lies the problem. The focus has shifted from, "Who knows things well?" to "Who knows things best!" No longer is accomplishment valued relative to one's own abilities and previous accomplishments or even relative to an absolute standard of possibilities, but relative to what other individuals accomplish. Greatness is not understood as being the best I can be, but as being better than others. Torah has a term for that: Miskabed *bekalon chaveiro*, gaining respect through another's disgrace, and the *halacha* is that such conduct causes one to lose one's share in *Olam Habba* (*Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 3: 14*).

Such corruption naturally has deleterious effects. If all I need to do to be successful is to beat you, isn't it easier to cause you to do worse than me, than to get myself to do better than you? Sure enough, who hasn't heard of university students sabotaging each others' experiments or pouring ink over each other's notes? And if I can accomplish simply by doing better than you, all I need to do is marginally better than you - often I will have little motivation to push myself to truly excel. Moreover, what will happen to the poorer students in the class, who know that they will never actually win the competition; what is to drive them to do their best? Does it really make sense to reward the brightest students more for easily winning than the slower ones for trying their hardest?

Most fundamentally of all, what does such a system teach our children about the definition of success and what may be done to attain such success? Watch them when they play at sports - do they play for the exercise or even for the development of skills, or do they play in order to win? When they "choose up" sides, do they try to even up the teams so they will have a good competition, or do they seek to each get the best team, so they will win the game? Are they

thus not guilty of being *malbin p'nei chaveiro berabbim*, of humiliating the last one picked (another way of losing one's share in the *Olam Habba* - *ibid.*), the one whom nobody wanted because they didn't want to - horror of horrors - be the loser?

Titein Emes LeYaakov: Yesodos and Hashkafa from Moreinu HaRav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg, z"l

Rabbi Abba Zvi Naiman

Moreinu the Rosh HaYeshivah, z"l was instrumental in my personal growth and in directing me to establish our Bais HaMidrash. With the Rosh HaYeshivah's twentieth *yahrzeit* this past year, I would like to share my thoughts about this Torah giant.

Having a relationship with the Rosh HaYeshivah for over thirty years in *chaburos*,² *blatt shiur*,³ *shiur kelali*, and *shmuzin*, the thing that stands out most in my mind is his focus on teaching the *emes* without concern that the common way of thinking might be different. As he would often say, "You know this has to be the correct *pshat*/way of looking at it."

I will share with you some *yesodos* I have applied time and again since his *petirah*. This, then, is not a comprehensive list of everything I learned from him, and certainly not of everything that he taught. Nor is it a list of what I think are the most important things he taught. Rather, it is as stated, *yesodos* that have had a personal, profound impact on how I view and react with the world.

Hashem, the Creator. Hashem is not spiritual. Hashem created *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus*, but He is neither. That is what is meant by Hashem creating *shamayim va'aretz*. *Shamayim* is *ruchniyus*, and *aretz* is *gashmiyus*. These are both creations. Hashem is *Elakus*.

The Rambam's Ikkarim. The Rosh HaYeshivah said that many people misunderstand what the *Rambam* was doing with his thirteen *Ikarei HaEmunah*. Of course, if someone denies even one letter of the Torah, he is an *apikoress*. What is the difference between these thirteen and the rest of Torah?

The Rosh HaYeshivah said that people who ask this question are not reading the *Rambam* well. The *Rambam* did not say that these are more important than other mitzvos. He was saying that if someone does not know these thirteen

² The first *chaburah* I heard from the Rosh HaYeshivah was in the *Rambam's Hil. Talmud Torah*. I was in *shiur aleph* when Rav Shraga Neuberger arranged for some of us to have this *chaburah* with the Rosh HaYeshivah. I immediately saw his *gadlus* in analyzing every word of the *Rambam*. His *chidushim* on this section of the *Rambam* have just been published with the expert precision of Rav Eliezer Lachman, *shlita*.

This *chaburah* transitioned into a general *hashkafah chaburah* where we would take turns asking the Rosh HaYeshivah a question. Without any prior preparation, he would launch into a half-hour talk answering every aspect of the issue. I remember one week when it was my turn to pose a question, I asked why there are so many mitzvos that are *zecher leyetzias Mitzrayim*. He took the first part of the *chaburah* to explain why that was not a good question because we do not have the right to ask about *Kaviyocheh's* reason for giving a mitzvah. The proper way to phrase the question is why remembering *yetzias Mitzrayim* is mentioned in so many mitzvos. He then went on to explain the importance of the role of *yetzias Mitzrayim* in our Torah life.

³ I was *zocheh* to be in his *blatt shiur* during one of the few years he took over the *shiur* of HaGaon HaRav Dovid Kronglass z"l after his *petirah*. I attribute the sharpness in *pshat* I learned in this *shiur* to my success in contributing to the Schottenstein Gemara series of ArtScroll. (I of course have to express my deep *hakaras hatov* to the Mashgiach, HaRav Moshe Eisemann, *shlit"a*, for recommending me for this position.)

principles, it is not possible for him to keep the Torah properly. If someone does not know one of the other mitzvos in the Torah, he can still keep the rest if he knows these principles.

Reward for Mitzvos. The Mishnah in *Avos* says that we should not do mitzvos in order to get a reward. But we find that the *Ramchal* in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesarim* says that a person has to know what his goal is, and that goal is to receive pleasure from *deveikus* with Hashem. How can the *Ramchal* say this when the Mishnah in *Avos* seems to contradict him? He asked further regarding Hashem's reason for revealing to Avraham His plans for Sodom – "Avraham was going to command his children to keep the way of Hashem, so that Hashem would give Avraham what He had promised him." And *Rashi* explains that Avraham would command his children to keep the way of Hashem, so that Hashem will give Avraham his just reward. But again, why was Avraham mentioning a reward?

The Rosh HaYeshivah explained that we are not supposed to do mitzvos because we enjoy the reward that will come from them. We are supposed to do them because Hashem wants to give us the reward. That is His goal in creation: to bestow His goodness upon us. We don't want the reward because we like ice cream. We want it because we want our Father to have the pleasure of giving us the ice cream.

Our Goal. He often said that our goal is not to be a Torah learner or a mitzvah doer. The goal is to be an *oveid* Hashem.

Bechirah. Some people ask what Avraham Avinu's *nisayon* was by the *Akeidah*. Hashem told him to do it; of course, he was going to do it. The Rosh HaYeshivah was vehement in opposing an answer that said the *nisayon* was in Avraham thinking that maybe he did not understand the *nevuah* properly, and Hashem had actually meant to say something else. The Rosh HaYeshivah said that if this is so, what right did Avraham have to kill Yitzchak when he was unsure that Hashem had told him to do so? Of course, there had to be no question about the accuracy of the *nevuah*. So back to the question: what was Avraham's *nisayon* if Hashem clearly told him to carry out this act? The answer the Rosh HaYeshivah gave was that people have the *bechirah* to defy Hashem. He gave the example of Kayin, to whom Hashem said, do *teshuvah* and everything will be good. The very next *pasuk* says that Kayin killed his brother Hevel. Kayin knew what Hashem had told him, and he did not want to listen.

It's not enough just to know intellectually that something is true.

Malachim. He held very strongly that the consensus of our *mesorah* is that *malachim* do not have *bechirah*. Praying to a *malach* is *avodah zarah*. Therefore, the *piutim* and *selichos* that seem to ascribe *bechirah* to *malachim* are just *derech melitzah*, not to be taken literally. We can, however, ask a person to do something for us that is under his control, since he has *bechirah*. For example, we can ask a person not to hurt us; but we would not ask that of a lion since it has no *bechirah*.

Behind this is an important principle he tried to teach us. Just like there is a *mesorah* in how to *pasken* a *halachah she'eilah*, there is a *mesorah* in *inyanei hashkafah* as well.

The Times of Mashiach. One Shavuos night I asked the Rosh HaYeshivah how we can daven for the era of Mashiach when the Gemara⁴ calls them שנים שאין בהם חפץ.⁵ He answered that the Gemara is not talking about

⁴ *Shabbos* 151b.

when Mashiach will first come. Even when he comes and we know the *emes* clearly, we will still have an *avodah* to break old habits and act properly.⁶

I have used this *yesod* over the years in understanding many sections of the *Ramchal* when he describes the *iluyim* of the times of Mashiach into *Olam HaBa*. In short, I think that when *techias hameisim* occurs somewhere into the era of Mashiach, we will be at the level of Adam HaRishon if he had not eaten the *Etz HaDaas*. At that point, we will no longer be able to make mistakes that would necessitate an *avodah*.

The Chinuch System. Many times, we have complaints about how *mosdos hachinuch* are run. I find understanding in the situation from the Rosh HaYeshiva's explanation of the *takanah* of R' Yehoshua ben Gamla, who organized universal education for children since the orphans did not have anyone to teach them. The Rosh HaYeshivah asked why R' Yehoshua ben Gamla had to find this reason to organize a school system. Isn't that an obvious need for any society?

The Rosh HaYeshivah answered that this was a gigantic *yeridah* in education. Instead of a child being taught by his father based on his unique talents and intellect, now twenty children were being thrown in a class with the teacher giving the same instruction to all of them as if they were the same. Also, since the father was involved in teaching his son(s) Torah, the whole family was impacted. It was an entire-family project. Sending the child to school took away this opportunity.

It was only because of the needs of the orphans that R' Yehoshua ben Gamla felt that it was necessary to take this step.⁷

Awareness. While on the topic of *takanos*, I will relate another *yesod* the Rosh HaYeshivah taught us about them, and what he learned from one particular *takanah*. He asked, as an example, why was it that Shlomo HaMelech had to institute the *takanah* of *netilas yadayim* because our hands might have touched an unclean place? Isn't that something the Torah should have required?

He answered that *takanos* are always the result of some change in the status of *Klal Yisrael*. For example, in this case, before Shlomo HaMelech's times, everyone was aware of what he was doing. There was no such issue of "possibly" touching an unclean place without being aware of it. When Shlomo HaMelech saw that people were no longer aware of what they were doing, he had to institute the *takanah* of *netilas yadayim*.

The Rosh HaYeshivah was an ultimate example of being aware of everything he did and said.

⁵ My question was based on his vehement disagreement with those who tell stories about how a certain *gadol* was so happy when he was able to do mitzvos without receiving any reward in *Olam HaBa*. If Hashem put us here to give us reward, how could anyone say that we want to do the mitzvos without receiving a reward? See also previous piece.

⁶ I don't remember if he gave this *mashal*, but I now give the example of someone whose doctor told him that he has to stop eating certain foods, smoking, etc. Even though he now knows the truth of the harm it causes, it is not so easy to simply stop.

⁷ When we feel that a school is not connecting with our child at best, or at worst our child is under the control of an incompetent or burnt-out teacher or administrator, we have to realize that this is the *bedieved* situation because of the need for the *takanah*. In the 5776 issue of our *kuntress*, I suggested various ideas on how to navigate the chinuch system in less-than-ideal situations. It is available at <https://www.zichronyaakoveliyahu.org/publications.html>.

Discrimination. He taught us to be discriminating in what we read in a *sefer*, any *sefer*. Just because it's printed doesn't mean it's true.⁸ But of course, when it came to Chazal or the Rishonim, he taught us not to put our thoughts into their words. He would say, "Hear the words of the Gemara."

How to learn Aggadata. One time he walked into a *chaburah* and told us a question he had just been asked. We know that before giving the Torah at Sinai, Hashem went to the other nations to offer them the Torah. When they refused it,⁹ Hashem then gave it to us. This person asked what would happen to someone from another nation who wanted to accept the Torah. Why should he lose out?

The Rosh HaYeshivah said, "Do you think Hashem put signs around the town, saying He was going to announce a special offer?" The Rosh HaYeshivah explained how this Aggadah is not to be taken literally. It means that because the other nations were certainly not fit to keep the Torah, it was given only to *Klal Yisrael*. This is how we should approach Aggadah. Each word is important, but not necessarily literal.

Churban Europa. The Rosh HaYeshivah did not think that a *kinah* should be added to the Tishah B'Av *kinos* for *Churban Europa*. He held that the *Churban* was a *Tanach'dike* event that requires a *Navi* or *Chazal* to decide how to deal with it as a separate commemoration. But once the Gedolim said to include it, he said we have to go along with them.¹⁰

Public Speaking. Regarding saying a *vort*, he would say that if you can't say it in 5-6 minutes, it's not worth saying. I remember that he once gave a longer *hashkafah shiur* in town. When I asked him the next day if he was going to continue, he said that he wasn't what they wanted. "They need an entertainer."

It's a Shaaruria! There was a rumor going around that the Rosh HaYeshivah had recommended that husbands and wives should sit together at the Yeshivah banquet. When I asked him if this was true, he said "It's a *shaaruria* (*Yirmiyah* 18:13 et al.) for men and women to sit together. I just said that if a couple will not come if they can't sit together, we should let them."

Over the many years there were personal *hadrachah* questions I asked the Rosh HaYeshivah. I will share some of his responses, including those where he was *mochi'ach* me.

In our times, there is an industry in publicizing *hashgachah pratis* events. They always have a positive outcome. But in truth there is *hashgachah pratis* for everything that happens to us. If we don't understand why something happened, we need someone to go to. The Rosh HaYeshivah was that person.

⁸ For many years we had a *chaburah* with the Rosh HaYeshivah in *Yad Malachi*. When I started working for ArtScroll, I asked if he could give a *chaburah* in *Halichos Olam*, so I could learn the principles of Gemara. The Rosh HaYeshivah suggested that *Yad Malachi* would be a better idea. We saw how he analyzed every idea, not taking anything for granted.

⁹ He would say the "refusal" was their very question of *ma kasuv bah* (what's written in it?), not when they said they could not keep *retzichah*, *arayos*, etc. The essence of Torah is to accept it without question.

¹⁰ In the same vein, we know how he was vehemently opposed to assigning *middah keneged middah* to the various atrocities of the *churban*.

When I was going to Eretz Yisrael for the first time, I asked the Rosh HaYeshivah how I should prepare for it. He answered, “Eretz Yisrael is a *metzius*. You don’t need any preparation to feel it.”¹¹

The Rosh HaYeshivah was insistent on the davening at yeshivah being what he called “a *tefillah sheleimah*,” with the ability to say every part of the tefillah properly. One time I mentioned to him that if more *yungeleit* would come to davening, it would make it stronger. And I said that there had been only ten (or maybe it was some other relatively low number) *talleisim* there that morning for Shacharis.

He responded with a sharp *tochachah*. “If there was one more person there than you said, you have said *lashon hara* about him. We have to be careful about saying *kategoria* about *Klal Yisrael*.”

That exchange has remained with me ever since whenever I think of making a general statement that might be too negative.

When I was about to speak at the *bris* of our first son, Shmuel Chaim, I told the Rosh HaYeshivah that I felt nervous. He responded, “You feel nervous about the pain of the *rach hanimo*?”

The Rosh HaYeshivah knew how to give a compliment and when to do so. When I hesitantly showed him my first sefer for his opinion, he surprised me when he said that it had the sharpness of HaRav Hutner, *z”l*. I replied that if this was true, it was because I learned from HaRav Hutner’s *talmid*, the Rosh HaYeshivah.

For longer than I would have expected I was what nowadays is called a “single.” The Rosh HaYeshivah was very supportive of me during this *tekufah*. Once when I asked him if I was doing anything wrong, he said, “I was afraid it would get to you,” and he then gave me *chizuk* to put me back on track.¹²

One time I was driving with him, and he told me that he heard I had just broken up with a *shiduch*. He said that he was surprised it had taken me so long to give it up because “it’s not for you.” On the other hand, I spoke to him after a few dates with my wife-to-be. Hearing my description, he said, “It’s time to make a *lechaim*.”

Finally, the Rosh HaYeshivah’s role in my move into town. He held that it was time for me to establish a Bais Medrash, and as long as I could count on 80% of my living expenses from my work at ArtScroll, we could have *bitachon* that we would be provided with the rest.

This process took several months, and at one point I told him that I didn’t think that I had the 80%. He answered “So you can go into business.”¹³

The few times I spoke to him during the year I moved when his health was declining, he would always ask how the shul was going. This went on until the last time I saw him shortly before his *petirah*.

¹¹ This reminds me of a question he told us the brother of the *Maharal* (*Sefer HaChaim*) asked. The Gemara has a debate about what someone should do if he is in a desert and doesn’t know what day Shabbos is. One opinion says that he should count six weekdays and the seventh is Shabbos; the other opinion holds that the first day should be Shabbos, followed by six weekdays. The *Maharal*’s brother asked why the Gemara debates what a *rasha* should do. Every normal person should be able to *feel* which day is the real Shabbos!

¹² See my *zichronos* of Maran HaRosh HaYeshivah, the *Avodas Levi*, in the 5778 edition of our *kuntress*. He was similarly encouraging.

¹³ When I told my Rebbi, HaRav Nachum Lansky, *shlita*, about this exchange, he said he was glad to hear that the Rosh HaYeshivah would still give his sharp *tochachah*.

I think of the Rosh HaYeshivah often during *Shemoneh Esrei*, when Davening והסר ממנו יגון ואנחה ...השיבה שופטיו. Most of our problems and issues could be solved if we had a true *shofeit* who could tell us the *emes*. The Rosh HaYeshivah is no longer here for me to be able to address my challenges to him. As his Rebbetzin, *a"h*, said to me during the *shivah*, "He was too *emesdik* for this world."

May the Rosh HaYeshivah, *z"l*, be a *meilitz yosher* for all his *talmidim* and for those who strove to be his *talmidim*.