



RAV MENDEL
WEINBACH

זצ"ל

Remembering

RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt"l

On the First Yahrzeit

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*The following pages represent our humble attempt
to pay tribute to our beloved Rosh Hayeshiva,
Hagaon HaRav Mendel Weinbach zt”l.
Rav Weinbach wasn’t just our Rosh Hayeshiva.
He was our father, mentor, advisor, friend,
comrade and teacher.*

*This volume is an opportunity for rabbis, staff,
students, alumni and friends to share their
memories and thoughts about a man who
successfully dedicated his entire life to educating
his fellow Jew. We hope this will give us an
understanding of who Rav Weinbach zt”l was
and what he meant to all who had the merit
to know him and interact with him.*

*One year has passed. We have come to an even
greater awareness how immeasurable our loss is.
But our consolation will be in fulfilling the
continuity of his legacy of reaching out to our
fellow Jews and bringing them closer to Torah.*

Yehi Zichro Baruch.

Chavrusah

BY RAV NOTA SCHILLER *Shlit'a*

Editor's Note:

The memorial kennes was running late. As the Rosh Hayeshiva, HaRav Schiller ascended the steps and approached the microphone he "heard" Rav Weinbach whisper in his ear 'Nota, it's keday to be mekatzer.'

If one is made to forget the Torah that is learned with the Malach prior to entering this world so as to be a challenge, why learn it to begin with? It is understood that once having learned it positions the seeming new learner in a déjà vu mode - what appears as first time is yet actually recall. Similarly there are those that explain the phenomenon of the chemistry of certain kinships in that manner i.e. one stood closer to that other neshama at Sinai and however new the relationship, it is yet rediscovering that initial connection. Thus we meet someone with whom we have apparently had no contact, and yet feel we are entering into the middle of a discussion, an already existing relationship.

Each of us can testify to meeting people that the immediacy of the level of comfort in communication was by far more advanced than could be explained by the empirical data. When that happens the inner voice feels a sense of destiny to be fulfilled, of potential to be actualized through that mystical mutuality.

Fifty years have burst by – so many dreams, visions and such shared *Siyata Dishmaya* in seeing so much actually realized. Along that road, climbing those peaks, coming down to those valleys and re-ascending, *together*. I am still accompanied, escorted reinforced by that *Chavrusah*.

For years I had the question that Yitzchok Avinu would seem the least likely of the Avot to have his name

correlated with laughter. Then one day it occurred to me that only the consummate *Yorei Shomayim* can laugh at everything else: his fear of G-d is such that it excludes any possibility of being intimidated by any other person or situation. He then laughs at everything else (it was pointed out later to me the *Sfas Emes* makes this point). As I write these words I picture Reb Mendel *zt"l* throwing his head back in laughter at some instance of wit or absurdity. Because he was so totally earnest, replete in every fiber of his being with *Yiras Shomayim*, his gifted intellect intercepted all that was synthetic, superficial, inappropriate and he pierced the balloon of any such inflation with that sharpened incisiveness.

The *yarhzeit* this year falls on Parshas Miketz. The

brothers of Yosef came “בתוך הבאים” and a complicated *hekish* is derived to tell us there were ten of them – Yosef was in Mizrayim and Binyomin was home - from which the Yerushalmi learns the prerequisite for a Minyan for any prayer of sanctity. (The Mishna in Megillah uses a different *hekish*). Yet Rashi comments that the brothers entered into Mizrayim through different gates so as not to arouse suspicion – Reuven ben Yaakov, Shimon ben Yaakov, etc. The question must then be posed if the *hekish* cited above is used to instruct the ten-ness of a Minyan as necessary for certain recitations, yet if they entered through separate gates how were they together?

It would seem that there is yet togetherness even while entering through separate gates. Reb Mendel *zt”l* understood that so deeply and performed accordingly. Always, the balancing act between being part of a *ציבור*, yet leaving breathing space and room for individual expression for originality, the essential fulfillment of *ותן חלקנו בתורתך*.

As mentioned at the *Azkara*, for half a century of that kinship I watched him continue to grow in every facet of his *avodah*, *askanut* and learning and that empowered him to put a claim on others to grow. With all his talents and achievements, since he was committed to grow, that endowed him with the unique blend of confidence and humility that made him the perfect paragon for his colleagues and his disciples to reach, and grow, and grow. And perhaps most of all, the tangible pleasure and *nachas* he demonstrated, expressed his empathy and joy at the growth of others.

In a very special way he was a living fulfillment of the *posuk* “וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך” While his quick grasp of complicated concepts and acuity in calculating were ever manifest, there was yet at work a deeper internalization and integration of every idea that he processed into his personality.

When I once asked another *Chavrusah* of mine, Reb Yossel Tzenvirt *zt”l*, how the word “שכוי” could be used for rooster and yet in the Book of Iyov for “heart”, he explained that the specialness of the rooster that we admire is his ability to anticipate the dawn before it is visible. That then, is also the virtue of the “heart”; it anticipates a truth before it can be measured, validated, i.e. intuition. That answered another question I had. Why does the *posuk* say *והשבות*, to return – since one does not return something to a place that it has never been? But if we posit the initial intuition as a *gifted sensitivity*, that also cautions us, since intuition can easily lead astray as well. Only after being filtered through *וידעת* can there be a spiritually healthy *אל לבבך*.

Over so many years watching Reb Mendel *zt”l* so closely, stimulated by his vigorous embracing of seeming paradoxes, and his resolute commitment to the Halachic dynamic and its *mesoros*, ever demanding, ever inspirational.

The Drashot HaRama explains our practice of noting Rav Poppa and his ten sons at the *siyum* of a *mesechet* owes to Rav Poppa’s custom to make a festive *seudah* to share and celebrate a *siyum*. Because of initiating that practice he merited his progeny being *talmidei chachomim* and our continuing commemoration of his innovation.

Rav Shimon Shkop in his introduction to Shaarei Yosher compares the *talmid chacham* to a wealthy man who has an obligation to tithe from his bounty. Comparably the wealth of the *talmid chacham* is his knowledge and he is equally responsible to tithe. That is why explains Rav Shimon, *Chazal* teach *מתלמידי יותר מכולם*. Just as giving *ma’aser* is rewarded many times over, so giving of one’s learning is also rewarded with increased knowledge and understanding.

Thus, we could attribute Reb Mendel *zt”l*’s continued growth pattern throughout his life to his selfless joyous tithing of his learning and life experience to and for others; in his viewing Ohr Somayach as an ongoing series of *seudot* of *siyumim* of any and every milestone, every talmid, in every and any shiur, in every and any branch throughout the world ending one *mesechta* and beginning the next.

Chazal teach that if one is present at the *petirah* of a Jew, that witnessing of a soul departing its body is comparable to a Sefer Torah being burnt. One position has it that the comparison is the loss of all the Torah

that might have been learned with that Sefer Torah – by that *neshomah*. Reb Mendel *zt”l* was driven to retrieve such potential living Sifrei Torah from the fires of assimilation. He pursued the nitty gritty, the details of applying that ongoing educational challenge: to take the novice to literate to *ben torah* to *talmid chacham* with stunning perseverance.

And those *siyumim* are *continuing*, will continue אי”ה in his illustrious immediate family and extended family – תלמידים הרי הם כבנים.

In Orach Chaim סימן תרע”ג we are taught that even oils and wicks of lesser standard than olive oil may be used for Chanukah lighting. In today’s battle with Hellenism Reb Mendel related Chanukah-*dik* to every new candle-cum-student that we could ignite. Torah itself, a pure pristine oil (זך), could yet be celebrated and reached by people along their way. When we would speak of the miracle of our times, the emergence of a Torah community that had been decimated in the Holocaust, tears would come to his eyes. I have thought that, as the Maharal teaches, the miracle of the oil is a commentary on the text of the wars – as those wars to build Torah in the modern world might have been explained naturally, however improbable, they yet might have happened. The Chanukah miracle of the lighting of the oil demonstrated beyond any skepticism that Providence was at work. We both knew that Torah Vodaas, Chaim Berlin, Ner Yisroel, Mir and Lakewood had to be in place before there could be an Ohr Somayach. Yet Ohr Somayach so closely bordering on *nes nigla* serves to inform us of the *nes nistar* of the re-emergence of the Torah world in our time.

And so, Reb Mendel’s *petirah* on ז”ך בסלו תשע”ג can be understood as סימן תרע”ג plus פך equals תשע”ג. הנרות הללו, lit these, the Ohr Somayach talmidim in a manner so that their light will continue. We were committed to Ohr Somayach being an integral part of that Torah world; so many battles and wars in the trenches together.

I still hear Reb Mendel *zt”l*. Regularly. As that other favored *darshan* of mine, I stop to listen for and to, that encouraging, instructive, inspirational whisper.



A Found Generation

By Rebetzin Sheindel Weinbach

I don't believe they cried and I'm not sure if they didn't laugh, even in the midst of an intensive mourning gathering, but many in the audience must have hid a chuckle in their beards at the broken English spoken from a broken heart.

Certainly so, those who remember Aviku Weinbach as a two-and-a-half-year-old, pony tail flying, hurtling down a steep incline in the early days of Kiryat Mattersdorf, with an (abandoned) Egged bus stop sign affixed to his bicycle.

Today, forty-something years later, a Daf Yomi *maggid shiur*, *active gabbai* of a *bnei Torah shul*, *mashgiach kashrus* and administrator in a famous free-loan *gemach* who **also** spends half a day learning in Mir, my oldest son Avraham has sublimated his hyperactive childhood energies to very productive channels.

The Weinbach family was gathered in the Ohr Somayach Beis Medrash on that Tuesday to hear the *hespedim* of the staff at the end of the *shiva* of my late husband, HaRav Mendel Weinbach, the rosh yeshiva and founder of this yeshiva-cum world movement spanning continents and generations.

My boys are hardly familiar with English. The heartfelt, poignant and impeccable language of the Ohr Somayach *maspidim* surely went over their heads but they understood the language of the heart. My son, in particular, wished to express his feelings in English and explain why English was not even a stepmother tongue in our home.

He rehearsed his *hesped* before the family and we approved.

He described how “my Zeidy left Europe when my father was four and came to America.” The poverty in Europe was dreadful, but in America, not much better, if you had to support a family and keep Shabbos. The family settled in a slum neighborhood in Pittsburg and the four boys were almost the only whites throughout their school years. The father supported the family by peddling wares to outlying villages, just like in many Old Country stories, so that he could keep Shabbos.

Whenever an immigrant from the Old Country came, the father used to use his hard-earned money to employ him as a *melamed* for the boys after school, so that even during the week, the boys had very little contact with outside friends.

The original Jewish residents were moving out to middle class neighborhoods where the local Jewish community center offered movies on Shabbos, co-ed social activities and packaged assimilation.

“When my Zeidy was not so poor any more” and could afford a better standard of living,” my *fadder* and his *bruders* begged him to move to a different country [sic] where other Jews were living,” but he was steadfast. He already saw the younger generation being *mechallel Shabbos*, becoming assimilated, leaving Yiddishkeit in favor of American culture. “They became doctors and lawyers, and many times married *shiksas*.”

Regretfully, I cannot capture the sincerity and pathos of my son's broken English and his endearing mistakes, but I am sure the message came through. All of my father-in-law's children became Bnei Torah, got *semicha* and produced wonderful children going in the ways of Hashem, no mean feat at all for those times and places.

The struggle to preserve authentic Yiddishkeit in his teenage sons became too much for the father, and my husband (and his brothers respectively) were sent off to New York, a very homesick twelve-year-old (remember that his childhood had been very home-centered), with no phone contact, coming home only twice a year.

It was this strong grounding, this dedication and sacrifice, this rejection of American glitter and materialism in

favor of Jewish values, which became an integral part of my husband's essence. And this is why he decided to move to Eretz Yisrael where he could raise his generation of Torah-true Jews so far removed from that culture that they couldn't even speak English.

When my son Avi got up to speak in his charming broken English, I had a very weird feeling of déjà vue, rather déjà entendue (heard). His accent was so reminiscent of the 'greener' generation of new immigrants from Europe, and when he mentioned 'my Zeidy', whom he never even met, and mistakenly talked about "moving to a nudder country" [instead of 'neighborhood'] it struck a very familiar chord.

We remember him in our home, a budding *baal teshuva* who came seeking, strumming on his guitar, renowned for his country-style songs and poignant lyrics. I think that student, today a veteran staff member, captured the Ohr Somayach saga best in the song I was permitted to use as the grand finale of this eulogy.

I, too, am trying to capture the heartbreaking pathos of that lost generation. Yes, there was a lost generation in between, but one or two generations later, it was found, and the sorrow and pain became happy again through the Happy Light of Ohr Somayach.

I can see all those thousands upon thousands of Zeidys, led by Yechezkel Shrage Weinbach, proudly escorting my husband, Rav Mendel, to a seat of honor in the Mizrach wall of the Ohr Somayach *Yeshiva shel Maala*. They must have been waiting there patiently to thank him for his incredible achievements, for the thousands of souls he brought back to the 'Old Country', our true heritage and homeland.

He passed away on the third day of Chanuka, and I am sure that if he were here still, he would smile humbly and paraphrase his own *heilige Zeidy*, the Bnei Yissoschor, that it wasn't really his credit. It was a *hisorerus di'leilah*, a Divine arousal when the time was ripe.

But he isn't here, so we don't have to let him get away with it. Success does not come so easily. The family personally knows how hard he worked, how much he loved, how fervently he prayed for every soul, and for the yeshiva and the Jewish people as a whole.

“Back in the Old Country”

*In 1909 it was June or July
My family and I left the motherland
We traveled the seas in a boat named Louise
We were children in search of another land
We made our way to the US of A
We only had room for a suitcase or two
At Ellis Island they herded us through
Crying “giddy up yiddy, dirty old Jew”
Wandering New York streets
Americans stare non-discreetly
At my old Russian clothes
They were all that I had
And my big crooked nose
I was a sensitive lad
But it never looked that bad to me
Back in the old country
My son was a soldier in the Second World War
Pushing and pulling at Germany's door
Hitler had fallen the Nazis were crawling
And all that was left was the dirty work
When he reached Dachau the killers had fled
And there were the skeletons living and dead
Buckets of ashes were all that were left
And the fires of insanity whispered of death*

*My son is a happy man
He lives near the shores of Chicago
Of his family and home
He is certainly proud
And though religious he's not
Still he thinks there's a G-d
But he'll never forget what he'd seen
Back in the old country
My grandson was twenty when he had his say
To travel the world in the popular way
With all his possessions strapped tight on his back
He flew the Atlantic to Amsterdam
Countries and cities he came and he went
Photographs taken his money all spent
But Israel called him to witness her glow
And Jerusalem grabbed him and never let go
Where is my grandson now?
He's casting his eyes to the heavens
And he's binding his heart
To the heart of the Jews
And he's doing all the things
That I used to do
Oh but I left it all behind me
Back in the old country*

A Memorial Message

BY RABBI YECHEZKEL SHRAGE WEINBACH
Son of the Rosh HaYeshiva

Dear Ohr Somayach Family,

This title which my father, *Avi Mori zt"l*, used at all of our family celebrations which took place in the yeshiva, defined and highlighted the close connection we all felt between the family and the yeshiva. I shall attempt to focus here on the bond felt by our family and the broader meaning of this phrase which is so well expressed in the marvelous tapestry-tractate of the Rosh Yeshiva and the Rosh Hamishpacha – the dual role of head of Ohr Somayach and of the Weinbach family.

The Torah compares the parallel relationship of *rav-talmid* and father-son in many places. We ourselves testify to it twice daily through our Kriyas Shema, in the loving but obligatory relationship of “*veshinantem levaneicha* – and you shall inculcate it in your sons.” Say the commentaries: These are your students. We find this poignantly highlighted when Eliyahu departs this world and his disciple, Elisha, cries out, “My father, my father! Chariot of and its horsemen!”

Rashi here quotes the words of Chazal in Sifri, as follows: “ ‘To your sons’: these are the disciples. We find that in every place, students are called sons, as it says, ‘Sons are you unto Hashem your G-d.’ And elsewhere, ‘The sons of the prophets who were in Beis El.’ Similarly, by Chizkiyahu who taught Torah to all of and referred to them as sons, as it says, ‘My sons, do not be negligent...’ (Divrei Hayomim II 29:11). Just like *talmidim* are referred to as sons, so is the master called a father, as is written, “My father, my father! Chariot of Israel and its horsemen!”

From these words of our Sages we learn of the double student-offspring relationship on the part of the receiver, and the teacher-father rapport of the senior giver. They noted a separate source for each one to teach us that these two relationships are two discrete matters.

The relationship of students as sons stems from the reality that a true *talmid* imbibes all of his vitality and growth from his master-teacher. The student is built up by his teacher (built from the joint root of *ben-boneh*) which is more than just being taught. He tries to understand his master (*lehavin*) and to examine his deeds and ways with introspection (*lehisbonen* – a reflexive form of the same root) in order to emulate them, and

therefore is called a *ben* – son, from the root of *binah* – understanding and wisdom. This is the role of student as the Torah views it.

Then there is the paternal role of a Rav, as the Torah delineates it: “If the Rav resembles an angel – let them seek Torah from his mouth.” Just like an angel does not undertake two missions simultaneously because his very essence is single-purposed, his very *raison d’être*, in the same manner does a Rav regard his life as a sole purpose to create new angels, to build his *talmidim* and generate within them the power of growth, and to devote himself boundlessly to them. This is a real Rav, and as such, he is worthy of bearing the title ‘father’. Elisha, who at the moment of Eliyahu’s departure received ‘double his spirit’ and saw the tremendous power of paternity imbedded in that Rav who bequeaths to his disciple his whole life and engenders in him the capacity to *receive* double of what he possesses, this Elisha was able to cry out, “*Avi, Avi, my father, my father!*”

We need not elaborate on the year which has transpired, during which we cried out many a time, “*Avi, Avi!*” It was a year where we felt the lack and the loss, and understood it. *Talmidim* as sons, and sons as *talmidim*, deeply felt the severance from the source of life and growth. We continue to feel the loss of that life-wisdom, the understanding, the counsel and the example. We learned how to experience the crises of life in a seaworthy vessel, how to grapple with every problem with open eyes and always live with faith and hope. How we miss that radiant visage which accompanied us in every *simcha* and, alternately, in times of trouble. We are fatherless orphans; without a Rav, without an Av, who shall instruct and guide us?

And yet we have a glorious past to look back upon, the father-figure and Rav representation, a figure of absolute devotion and sacrifice to every student, descending to the most negligible details, a Rav who was a father and grandfather to those very students he bore spiritually, seeing that his ‘grandchildren’ enter the best *chadorim* and the ‘daughters’, the best seminaries, a Rav who carried thousands of students in his heart together with their families, their challenges and their problems, a Rav who never said ‘no’ to a *talmid’s* request for help or good counsel, a Rav who ‘lived’ the yeshiva for most of the years of his life, served it with his sinews and devoted his life-blood through all his vessels. It was his very essence and being, and he steered it through strife, struggle and success.

Thousands of students have expressed their pain at his loss and the gap it left, for the father who left and the Rav who left them bereft. We all shared the great privilege of being able to lean upon him for reassurance and support, secure in his definitive authority regarding every question and doubt; we enjoyed the privilege of learning a *weltanschauung* from his clear-cut view and overview on life, of how to accept setbacks with love. He was truly a wellspring of wisdom, a role model of toil-in-Torah, of alacrity and zeal, of straight thinking, of truthfulness and integrity, a man of his word and a man of pure heart.

Chazal say that eventually, the (pain of the) dead is forgotten from the heart, but the life that he infused in us, his biological and spiritual children, will not be forgotten or phased out but will continue to breed in our hearts a love and awe of Hashem to do His will and serve Him with a whole heart. The many souls which he set aright in his lifetime are his best memorial, a beautiful *iluy nishmaso*, an eternal credit to him.

We trust that Yeshivas Ohr Somayach, to which he dedicated his ‘all’, shall continue to flourish, expand and follow along the path he blazed, with his fire, for it.

Translated from the Hebrew by Rebbetzin S. Weinbach

Rabbi Mendel Weinbach *zt”l* & THE MALBIM

By Rabbi Nosson Scherman

Foreword to *The Essential Malbim* volume three published by Artscroll / Mesorah

This work was inspired by and reviewed by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach *z”l*, one of the most sparkling, dedicated and productive people of our time. He had a special feeling for the *Malbim*. His first *sefer* was *Turnabout*, an English-language treatment of the *Malbim’s* commentary on Megillas Esther. The title, of course, is based on *venahafoch hu* of the Megillah, which says pithily that the genocidal plans of Haman and his cohorts were turned topsy-turvy — there was a “turnabout” — when Mordechai and Esther emerged as the protectors of our people, and the Jews were transformed from helpless victims and enabled to turn against their Amelekite enemies.

In a sense, Reb Mendel’s life was a turnabout. He grew up in Pittsburgh, at a time when there were few yeshivos in America and the lure of modern society was virtually irresistible, especially to parents who had emigrated from Eastern Europe and wanted to give their children a good life in the *goldeneh medinah*. It is impossible for younger people today to understand how difficult it was for Jewish immigrants in those years to cling to Sabbath observance and to avoid sending their children to public schools. Outside of a few neighborhoods in New York, it was almost unthinkable for Old World parents to send their children to a yeshivah — there weren’t any yeshivos in the vast majority of American Jewish communities — especially since it meant leaving home at a young age and living in a dormitory for months at a time. I still remember women telling my mother incredulously (in Yiddish, of course), “Your sending him to yeshivah? You want to make him a rabbi?” The Weinbachs bucked the trend and sent Mendel to Mesivta Torah Vodaath, where he and I became classmates and fast friends.

He was intellectually brilliant, with a phenomenal memory, a quick and deep grasp of the Gemara and *shiurim*, a strong desire to excel, and a sparkling sense of humor. He was a leader, an independent, original thinker, and a loyal friend. These were traits that stayed with him throughout life, and made it possible for him to blaze new trails in spreading Torah.

In 1952, Rabbi Simcha Wasserman *z”l* set out to found a yeshivah in Los Angeles, which would have been the first yeshivah west of the Mississippi. He asked Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr *z”l*, *menahel* of Torah Vodaath, to give him a small cadre of talmidim. Reb Mendel was one of the chosen few. Among the others were Nisson Wolpin, Meier Weinberg, and Aryeh Kaplan, all of whom went on to distinguished careers in the service of Klal Yisrael. Today’s Los Angeles Torah community is a far cry from the bad old days, and much of the credit is due to Rabbi Wasserman. Less well known is that Reb Mendel was one of the pioneers who helped Reb Simcha plant the seeds. From Los Angeles Reb Mendel went to Beth Medrosh Elyon in Monsey, which was one of the very few elite advanced Torah

institutions in those years. His next step was to become the first head of the Torah Vodaath alumni organization, where he was instrumental in founding the Torah Vodaath Kollel, which thrives to this day. Already then he was a prolific columnist under the pseudonym Michael Vine. He was one of the first to articulate *daas Torah* in the popular press.

After his marriage to Shaindel Lamm, a mate who complemented his enterprising spirit and desire to build Torah life, he and Mrs. Weinbach made *aliyah*. Those were the days before the Six-Day War. It had not yet become fashionable for Americans to learn in Eretz Yisrael, and certainly not to settle there. The rest of us were surprised, but we had no doubt that Reb Mendel would continue to make his mark and elevate Torah life one way or another. We were right.

With Rabbi Nota Schiller and Rabbi Noach Weinberg *z"l*, Reb Mendel became one of the founders of Ohr Somayach. He grew and Ohr Somayach grew with him. He became a national figure, as a public speaker and as a participant in deliberations for the benefit of the country's growing Torah *yishuv*. Resisting the temptation to become primarily a "public figure," Reb Mendel maintained his first commitment to Ohr Somayach — or, better said, to the talmidim of Ohr Somayach. The institution became a magnet for accomplished young university graduates and it attracted a stellar faculty. Although he was surrounded by brilliant colleagues and students, Reb Mendel was not overshadowed. Not that he sought the limelight. Far from it. The Alter of Slabodka *z"l* once said about the teen-aged Rabbi Aharon Kotler *z"l*, "He doesn't want to be famous, but he will not succeed." The same could be said about Reb Mendel. He didn't want to be a public figure; he failed. He wanted to develop talmidim and raise the level of Torah life in the world; he succeeded.

He once told me that Ohr Somayach talmidim expected their rebbeim to be available to them day and night. They felt that it was owed to them because they had given up, or taken, a leave of absence from careers, and, in many cases, had become estranged from their families for the sake of Torah study and Orthodox life. Reb Mendel and his wife accepted that obligation cheerfully. He once invited me to lunch with him at Ohr Somayach, and our reunion was constantly interrupted by *bachurim* coming in with questions or requests. Never did he betray impatience or annoyance at the intrusions on his privacy, and my admiration grew with each new visitor.

To him, Torah was the key to *teshuvah*. A newcomer to Ohr Somayach wanted to have a discussion about the existence of God. Reb Mendel responded in his typical way of combining seriousness with humor, "I don't care if you believe in God. Just keep the *sedarim*." It was a twentieth-century way of expressing the dictum of the Sages that the study of Torah will bring Jews back to the service of Hashem. That inquisitive student of philosophy kept the *sedarim* and became a *talmid chacham* — and a believer.

Upon reflection, it seems natural that Reb Mendel was drawn to the *Malbim*. Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim was a Talmudic genius. His commentary on Torah, *Nevi'im*, and *Kesuvim* is brilliant and original, and it was also a response to the need of the time. It was an age of Haskalah and so-called Bible criticism. *Torah she'al Peh* was the target of self-styled scholars who derided what they saw as "flimsy grounds" for the expositions of the Sages. In that age, Malbim fought back. His commentary shed light on the authenticity of the Oral Law, and proved the authenticity of the traditional understanding of the Sages. His analysis of the language of *Tanach* and explanation of the events shed a new light on the Torah. As a community *rav*, Malbim was fearless and uncompromising in his struggles against the spokesmen for heretical beliefs, who constantly tried to undermine him and even to have him dismissed from his positions because of his loyalty to the Torah. When the struggling Orthodox community in New York needed a strong, highly respected chief rabbi who would rein in abusers of kashrus and elevate the level of observance and *chinuch*, they offered the position to the Malbim. He was ready to accept the challenge, but he was then in his 70s, and his family dissuaded him.

In this series of the *Malbim on Chumash*, Rabbi Reuven Subar does justice to the Malbim and to Reb Mendel, who inspired him to undertake this project, and who reviewed it with dedication.

It is one of my many regrets that I allowed the passing years, distance, and responsibilities to erode my relationship with Rabbi Mendel Weinbach. It was my loss. But Klal Yisrael was enriched by his presence, his devotion, his brilliance, and his zeal to let nothing stand in the way of his availability to talmidim and anyone who needed him. His accomplishments will continue to grow through those who grew from the seeds he planted and nurtured.

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Memories From a Boyhood Chaburah

By Rabbi Nisson Wolpin

Harav Chuna Menachem Mendel Weinbach, *zt”l*, was an extraordinary human being — both in terms of his achievements and his personal makeup of skills, intelligence and character, vision and insight, creativity and profound sense of mission. I knew him from after my arrival in Mesivta Torah Vodaath, in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, where I joined my two older brothers in September 1948.

Reb Mendel, who was born in Poland in 1933, was brought up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania by his parents. He joined me in Torah Vodaath for Elul several weeks after I had arrived and we became the closest of friends for seven or eight years, remaining in contact over the decades. Thus, I was invited to share my impressions of those special years of closeness with *Hamodia* readers.

When I arrived in Torah Vodaath, I was not yet 16. I was placed in a class scheduled for promotion to second-year mesivta and assigned a *chavrusa*. When Mendel joined us a few weeks later, he was taken aback by the *chavrusa* situation. He approached Nosson Scherman, who was a year younger — a top student, he had been given a weaker *bachur* to learn with — and Mendel devised a Master Plan whereby many of us would be learning with *chavrusos* of equal stature. The class was generally very excited and positively responsive, except for several boys who refused to cooperate: “Who are you to tell me who to learn with!” And so, the status quo remained.

I mention this as an example of his unusual sense of initiative and what became, for me, the beginning of a life-long friendship with two of my closest friends. There was never any doubt that he was invariably the first to grasp a new piece of *Gemara*, or that he was considered among the most capable in comprehending a *lomdishe shiur*, through *beis medrash*. In fact, he was skipped into the Torah Vodaath *beis medrash* by Harav Gedalia Schorr, *zt”l*, in mid-term — a rare occurrence in those days.

During his years in Torah Vodaath, he was exposed to much analytical *lomdus*, as well as to the weekly *shmuessen* of Hagaon Harav Yaakov Kamenetsky, *zt”l*, drawing from Slabodka *mussar*, with his own unique perspective. In addition, Hagaon Harav Gedalia Schorr, *zt”l*, taught *Chumash* with *Ramban*, plus much more every morning, gave original *shmuessen* at the yeshivah’s *shalosh seudos*, and included Reb Mendel, along with Rabbi Nosson Scherman, Harav Meir Weinberg (a *Rosh Yeshivah* in Torah Vodaath), and the author of these lines, among a select *minyán*, in special half-hour-plus sessions on the *sefarim* of Harav Tzadok Hakohen.

Reb Mendel was later selected by Harav Schorr to join Harav Simcha Wasserman, *zt”l*, in his venture in January 1953, to be part of the 10 *bachurim* who would accompany Harav Simcha to Los Angeles, where he planned to open the first *mesivta* high school west of the Mississippi. Reb Simcha anticipated that the 10 accomplished young men would serve as a model of what the Los Angeles Mesivta would eventually produce. Reb Simcha noted to the author (who was also one of the 10) that on the one hand, Mendel was something of a nonconformist, but at the same time, he was admired by the prospective parent body of the *mesivta*.

Harav Simcha’s Los Angeles venture was followed by a summer day camp with a younger group serving as counselors, and the high school *mesivta* opened that September. Reb Mendel and his companions return to the East Coast, with most of us entering Bais Medrash Elyon in Monsey, New York, in Elul. Bais Medrash Elyon (BME), Torah Vodaath’s advanced *beis medrash* and *kollel*, and Bais Medrash Govoha in Lakewood were, at that time, twin institutions. Hagaon Harav Reuven Grozovsky, *zt”l*, had been *Rosh Yeshivah* in BME as well as in Torah Vodaath, but was incapacitated by a stroke in 1952, and was succeeded by Harav Gedalia Schorr.

In our year, over 20 *bachurim* joined BME, many of them with an eye to the future as *yungeleit* in the BME Kollel, but that could not happen on anything approaching that scale. There was a ten-member ceiling on the *kollel* enrollment, except for one or two who had independent sources of support. As a result, when the time for marriage approached, we had to devise alternative modes of somehow continuing to be involved in learning, if even only part time. (Upon my engagement, I became supervisor of the dormitory in Torah Vodaath, leaving me afternoon hours for learning.)

Reb Mendel left BME several years later. One of his positions was to head the Alumni Organization of Torah Vodaath. He had an incredible power of persuasion, and enlisted fellow alumni members to undertake an unprecedented project: to create a Torah Vodaath *kollel* within the yeshivah's *beis medrash* in Brooklyn. No other yeshivah at that time had a formal *kollel* on its premises. Our *chaveirim* who were of age and ability, but would have been forced to wait several years for available space in BME, joined the Torah Vodaath *kollel*.

Another of Harav Mendel's special talents was mastery of written and spoken language. While still a *bachur*, he authored a regular column in the only English-language Orthodox weekly, *The Jewish Press*, under the pen name Mike Vine. One of his columns commented on the historic breakthrough of America's successful launching of a space capsule rotating the earth — a full six years after the Soviet Union had put their Sputnik into space. He wrote of a *ben Torah* who had returned home after a day's work and greeted his children with a tantalizing question: "Guess what important event took place today?" The response: "Yankel (their ten-year-old brother) started learning *Gemara* today!" The wise father left it at that, and Reb Mendel commented in his column: "To a Jewish family, a son embarking on a lifetime of learning *Gemara* is far more earth-shattering and noteworthy than launching a capsule in outer space."

I must add that his command of language and compelling eloquence in both written and spoken media made deep impressions wherever he wrote and spoke. In fact, during my years (1970-2009) as editor of *The Jewish Observer*, Agudath Israel of America's monthly journal of thought and opinion, we proudly featured penetrating articles by Reb Mendel. After marriage, he and his Rebbetzin, the former Shaindel Lamm, moved to Eretz Yisrael and he continued his growth in learning and taking creative initiatives until his last days.

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A young Rav Weinbach (second from right) with Rav Simcha Wasserman (left) and the group of Torah Vodaath talmidim on their way to Los Angeles. In the center is Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, author of this article.

Because It Hurts:

Still Crying for Harav Mendel Weinbach, zt”l

By Mordechai Schiller

How do you measure the impact of one person? And what if that person is a husband, a father, a grandfather, a neighbor, a friend... and also happened to be an eminent author and *Rosh Yeshivah*? Do you keep a running total of *talmidim*? Like the incessantly ticking World Population Clock?

And let’s not forget to factor in how many of those *talmidim* now have *talmidim* of their own. And that’s not even counting the families — and extended families — of those *talmidim* and their *talmidim*. And what do you do with the unknown quantity and quality of those *talmidim* getting their first introduction to Torah by that *Rosh Yeshivah* and his colleagues? I’ll leave the quantum mechanics of *talmidim* to others. You can’t paint a picture of Harav Mendel Weinbach by the numbers.

The Kavod Conundrum

Reb Mendel was indifferent to *kavod*. He embodied the attitude to *kavod* of the Kotzker Rebbe, zt”l. A chassid once asked the Kotzker why we say that if someone runs away from *kavod*, the *kavod* chases after him and he gets honored. That makes it sound like the honor is a reward for his humility. But what if someone really doesn’t want *kavod*? What if he hates *kavod*? Why should the *kavod* chase after him and catch him? He would feel like that was a punishment! The Kotzker said, “If someone hates *kavod* and runs away from it, that tells me the *kavod* means something to him. The right attitude to *kavod* should be that it’s irrelevant. Getting honored, or getting slapped in the face, should all be the same. Both should leave no impression.” Harav Yitzchak Hutner, zt”l, once quipped about a great scholar, “He will never become a *talmid chacham*... because he’s too busy learning.” While Harav Hutner was talking about the need to stop and digest one’s learning, the image somehow reminded me of Reb Mendel’s constant state of motion. He lived by Harav Yitzchak of Vorka’s interpretation of the *passuk*: “*Eretz ocheles yoshveha* — a land that consumes its inhabitants.” It means that Eretz Yisrael “eats up” people who are stuck in one place and don’t grow.

Reb Mendel may be recognized as a *Gadol*, but whether he was or wasn’t recognized, the *kavod* was irrelevant to him. He was too busy learning, teaching and spreading Torah. He was too busy caring for each and every one of his *talmidim* — their learning, their success in *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus* — to care what people thought of him. He didn’t stop while running the bases to check his standing on the scoreboard.

More Than a Partner

Maybe the real measure of a leader is how he inspires other leaders. My brother, ybl”c, Harav Nota Schiller, learned in Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin and later went to Ner Israel Yeshivah in Baltimore, where he became a close

talmid of Harav Yaakov Weinberg, *zt"l*. Harav Weinberg had also learned in Chaim Berlin. Once, my brother asked Harav Weinberg what he had gotten from Harav Hutner, *zt"l*. The answer came as a shock. “I got *everything* from him.” “How is that possible? If you got everything from Harav Hutner, how can it be that I never heard you quote him?” “I don’t need to quote him. Every time I give a *shiur*; every time I speak with a *talmid*... I measure my words by one thing: What would Harav Hutner think? He shapes everything I do.” Trying to encapsulate four decades of partnership — working hand in hand as *Roshei Yeshivah* with Reb Mendel — my brother, *ybl"c*, told me, “We were more than partners or friends. For 41 years, we shared everything. Even when we weren’t together, every success I had, I thought about how Reb Mendel would have *nachas*; every frustration I had, I thought about how Reb Mendel and I would find the humor in it, and be able to laugh at it together. Everything I did was by the light of Reb Mendel.”

I Join the Team

I still have letters I got from Reb Mendel after he was my *rebbe* in a small yeshivah in Yerushalayim in 1967. He wrote in longhand on aerogrammes — those lightweight origami/foldalong- dotted-lines air letters post offices used to sell. He filled every flap of the letter with advice, encouragement, and always with questions — specific questions about what I was doing and how I was doing. The letters only stopped when I got married and moved back to Eretz Yisrael, and we spoke regularly. After a short time in a *kollel*, I was hired by the budding Yeshivas Ohr Somayach to run their office. The *bachurim* were learning in the *beis medrash* of Yeshivah Bais Yoseph Novardok on Shmuel Hanavi Street in Yerushalayim. The building had no available room for an office, so Reb Mendel arranged to share the P’eylim office in the Geula section, a short walk away. Reb Mendel walked into the office as I was setting up, shook his head and went looking for a “*sponja*” squeegee stick and rag (the Israeli version of a mop, specially designed for washing stone floors). Seconds later, he was mopping the floor. I tried to grab the stick from him, but he was too wiry and fast for me. “Reb Mendel, please... let me do that!” “Get out of here! I have eight kids. You think I can’t do this better than you can?” At that time, my wife was expecting our first child. When my daughter was born, I called Reb Mendel to give him the news. He was delighted and wished me *mazel tov*. Then he added, in a dark, ominous tone that seemed to clash with his habitual impish smile: “When the crunch comes... we’re going to need numbers!”

Mopping the floor was vintage Reb Mendel. His *modus operandi* was thought in action. Years later, as Ohr Somayach grew, I still shared office space, but with the *hanhalah*. By then, there was an administrative staff and I was running publications and public relations. As bat boy, I had a dugout seat during team discussions. One day, Harav Nachman Bulman, *zt"l*, walked in, chuckling even more than he usually did. With perfect timing, he waited until his mischievous smile nailed everyone’s attention. Then he said, “We think these boys are not so sophisticated because they never learned in yeshivah, but let me tell you something... I just spoke with a boy who is here for three weeks. And he told me this observation: “From what I can see,’ the boy said, ‘if you want to understand something, you go to Rabbi Bulman. If you want an *eitzah*, you go to Rabbi [Nota] Schiller [*ybl"c*]. And if you want to get something done, you go to Rabbi Weinbach...”

As oversimplifications go, there was a lot to this one. Reb Mendel was always on the move. Once he confided to me, “I can tell I’m getting old... I can still tell — from the sound of the way the ball hits the bat — which way the ball is going to go. But my legs don’t take me there anymore.”

Anything Worth Doing...

The preeminent pragmatist, Reb Mendel had no patience for perfectionists. Years before Nike sneakers would proclaim “Just Do It!” Reb Mendel threw this enigmatic epigram at me: “Anything worth doing is worth doing lousy!” This was too much. Even for a devoted devotee. “What does that mean? That doesn’t make sense. How can it possibly be worthwhile to do something lousy?” But I was no match for the master. “If you wait to do something perfectly, you’ll never do anything!” Only once did I challenge Reb Mendel. One of my projects was editing the celebrated, but sadly short-lived magazine, *Shma Yisrael*. One assignment was to write an ad for Ohr Somayach for

the back cover of the magazine. I came up with the headline “Recycle Your Mind!” Reb Mendel read it and shook his head. “You can’t say that!” “Why not?” “Essentially, you’re telling people their mind is garbage.” I saw his point, but still liked the concept, so I conducted an informal focus group. I went around the yeshivah and asked guys what they thought of the headline. Everyone liked it. No one was offended. Recycling had become cool. Reb Mendel withdrew his opposition.

That was before my direct marketing days, so I never measured the results of that campaign, but I can tell you I am still close friends with three fellows who came to Ohr Somayach through *Shma Yisrael* magazine, and one of them came precisely in response to that ad. He told me that when he saw it, he said, “Yeah, that’s what I have to do. I have to recycle my mind!”

Years later, Reb Mendel got the last word on a marketing question. I was working as an independent consultant and he asked me to come to the yeshivah to discuss a PR (public relations) campaign. I started telling him, “You need a road show...” He stopped me and said, “I love these PR guys. You bring them in to promote your product, and they tell you you need a new product!” Then he leaned in to my face and said, “Listen, Mordechai. This is a *yeshivah!* Get it?”

I got it.

The Talmid Chacham Behind the Curtain

Reb Mendel’s indifference to *kavod* was more than a stance. He just wasn’t interested. Maybe that is why so few people knew the breadth and depth of his learning. One former *talmid* told me how the curtains parted one day, and Reb Mendel’s *gadlus* in learning was revealed. In the early days of the yeshivah, there were already serious *talmidei chachamim* on the faculty. Two, in particular, were held in awe by the *bachurim*. One day, the two Torah titans locked horns over an interpretation. As the battle raged, the *bachurim* — most of whom had never witnessed such an epic conflict of ideas — stood in a semicircle... at a safe distance. Enter Reb Mendel. He had a phone message for one of the *bachurim* and strolled into the *beis medrash*, oblivious to the battle. All at once, the two titans turned toward him... and each made his case. Still looking for the boy, to deliver his message, Reb Mendel nonchalantly called back an answer over his shoulder. Both of the titans stopped and said the Yiddish equivalent of, “Oh... So that’s it!” and quietly went back to their seats. The spectators dropped their collective jaws. Who was this Reb Mendel really? He never displayed his prodigious learning, always hiding it. “Pay no attention to that *talmid chacham* behind the curtain.” But his secret was out, and it was too late.

Because It Hurts

Reb Mendel often quoted the Brisker Rav, Harav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, who explained the *middah k’negged middah* for Pharaoh’s three key advisors. Pharaoh had consulted them to ask about his plan to drown all male Jewish children. Bilaam told Pharaoh, go for it. Kill them. For advocating the killing of Jewish children, Bilaam was killed. Yisro ran away in protest. His descendants sat with the *Sanhedrin* in the Beis Hamikdash. Iyov stayed silent rather than protest and flee. He thought that Pharaoh’s mind was made up and that any outcry would be an exercise in futility. Hashem meted out justice to Iyov with severe boils all over his body. What did Iyov learn from his punishment? When a person suffers pain, he cries out, even though his outcry does not heal him. So, too, when a person sees murder being planned, he must cry out, because there is still the possibility that it just may help. And, even if not, he should cry out, not because it helps, but because it hurts.

We’re still crying, Reb Mendel. Not because it helps, but because it hurts.

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Remembering RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt”l

by Yonason Rosenblum

As I was leaving Ohr Somayach after my most recent visit about a month ago, one of the veteran rebbeim mentioned to me that Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, zt”l, had been in the office that morning. I quickly ran back to the office hoping to catch a few minutes with Rav Mendel.

The last time I had seen him was a few months earlier, when he gave the opening address at the English-language Siyum HaShas. He was barely recognizable at the time, as a consequence of the treatments he was undergoing. But the voice was every bit as powerful and impassioned as I remembered from my days in Ohr Somayach 33 years ago.

Though I knew that Rav Mendel had been battling the dreaded disease for some years, it was evident that night, despite the power of his speech, that he was very sick. So it was with some urgency that I ran back to Ohr Somayach. But the secretary told me that Rav Mendel had left for the day. I made a note to call the next day, but never did.

How many reminders do we need before we learn one of life’s most important lessons: If you owe someone *hako-ras hatov*, tell them; you may not have another chance?

I do not claim to have been one of Rav Mendel’s closest *talmidim*. Yet when my wife called with the news that he had passed away, I was astounded by the wealth of memories that rushed to the fore. In an odd way, my memories of Rav Mendel go back almost sixty years. He was best friends as a *bochur* in Torah Vodaas with two of my mentors, Rabbi Nisson Wolpin and Rabbi Nosson Scherman, and they often speak of him in those days with the smile of one savoring a particularly treasured memory.

The check marks in my Ramban on Chumash are taken from the parasha sheets that Rav Mendel prepared. No Chanukah ever passes without my repeating his insight (in a *Tisha B’Av drasha*) about Channah’s words to the youngest of her seven sons: When you get to *Shomayim*, tell father Avraham, “You built one Altar, and in the end you did not bring your son on the Altar. But I built seven Altars and brought seven sons.”

“Is that all that Channah could think about as she was about to lose her seventh son in one day – bragging rights on Avraham Avinu?” Rav Mendel asked. No, he explained, Channah was singing Avraham Avinu’s praises: Your *mesiras nefesh* at *Akeidas Yitzchak*, left its mark on *Klal Yisrael’s* spiritual gene pool. Because of what you did then a simple Jewish woman two thousand years later was able to offer her seven sons in a single day.

His descriptions in a *Yom Atzmaut drasha* of his own IDF service as a medic, and of life in the still new Mattersdorf neighborhood on the Jordanian border in the 1967 War still ring in my ear.

I did not fully appreciate Reb Mendel in my two years in Ohr Somayach. Nor could I have. My Torah learning was not at a level to begin to evaluate his mastery of *Shas* and *poskim*, though it was something I often heard about from my rabbis at Ohr Somayach. He was in a sense the *rebbei* of the *rebbeim* – many of whom had been *chavrusas* with him over the years. And until I first took on a public role as editor of the English *Yated Ne’eman*, nearly a

decade after leaving Ohr Somayach, I had no occasion to benefit from his unfailingly incisive analysis of the Torah community and its various subcultures.

In recent years, however, he was the person to whom I turned whenever I felt the need to address a potentially controversial subject. I would fax him my pieces, and receive his responses in a matter of minutes. If the piece passed muster with him, I knew I was on safe ground. If not, I knew that I'd better go back to the drawing board.

I do not think I have ever met another person to whom the term *geshicht* was more applicable. He did so many things well. With other excellent speakers, one can tell whether they have prepared. Not with Reb Mendel. He could be counted on for any occasion, and without any advanced notice, to have the perfect *dvar Torah* ready. It was said of his beloved Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Gedaliah Schorr, that he could shake pearls out of his sleeve. The same could be said for Reb Mendel.

And he wrote the same way. For decades, he wrote four or five columns a week for the *Jewish Press*, under various pseudonyms or on behalf of others. On more than one occasion, I watched him dash off ready for print material in a half an hour or less.

Because he did so many things so effortlessly it was easy to miss just how talented he was. That was most true of his Torah learning. Everything was instantly at his fingertips. He would rattle off Torah sources, as easily as he did, *lehavdil*, the roster of the 1927 Yankees. (A storehouse of baseball trivia can be a valuable asset for the Rosh Yeshiva of a ba'al teshuva yeshiva.)

As gifted as he was, I have never met anyone with less need to make others aware of those gifts. Most writers of my acquaintance would sooner write for free than take their name off a column. Not Rav Mendel.

His air was always casual and unassuming. He rode the buses and made his own way back and forth to the *sma-chos* of his *talmidim*. Leaning far back in the chair in his office as he offered his wry observations, the twinkle of a smile on his lips, he seemed to resist being addressed in the third person.

That ability to leave his ego out of the picture made him a superb *ba'al eitzah*. He had a keen sense of the difference between the ideal and what could be realistically achieved in any given situation, and provided astute guidance on how to navigate an imperfect reality without losing sight of the ideal.

He was one of the few *Amerikaners* to fully integrate into the institutional life of Israeli chareidi society. His was recognized by all as a *kluge Yid*, and he became a leading player in many communal initiatives outside of Ohr Somayach

The same lack of ego made him the perfect partner. Sitting together with him and his partner in Ohr Somayach of more than forty years, Rabbi Nota Schiller, in the latter's large office, one always sensed the easy rapport and mutual respect between the two. There was never the slightest hint of friction. They complemented one another perfectly.

Never was Rav Mendel's ability to take himself out of the calculation more evident than that horrible moment, around twenty years ago, when he was called to identify the body of his son Shimmy, who had been struck by a car while bicycling in the Jerusalem forest. On his way to the hospital, Rav Mendel thought to himself: Should I hope that it's not my son? But if it's not my son, it is someone else's son. How many of us would have had the question?

Rav Mendel's lack of need to impress did not derive any lack of sense of self. Just the opposite. He was so at ease with himself he did not need the approval or admiration of others. Rabbi Simcha Wasserman noted that he was an "individualist," who knew his own mind, during the *zman* that Reb Mendel and nine other Torah Vodaas *bochurim* spent in Los Angeles to help Reb Simcha start a yeshiva high school. (A photograph of that group, which was headed by Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky, hung in Rav Mendel's office.)

Perhaps his independent streak made it possible for him to be one of the first to imagine a yeshiva for young adults with no learning experience and enabled him to be so comfortable with those from very different backgrounds.

My greatest debt to Reb Mendel can never be repaid. He founded and guided a yeshiva in which rank beginners like myself could learn Torah with some of the greatest scholars of our time – Rabbi Dov Schwartzman, zt"l, Rabbi Moshe Shapira (both before my time), and Rabbi Aharon Feldman, and be exposed to the rich tapestry of Torah

thought by Rabbi Nachman Bulman, zt”l.

No less important was the constant message that our late start did not have to be a bar to reaching a high level in Torah learning. The highest shiur in the yeshiva today is given by a former *talmid*, and many former *talmidim* play prominent roles in Ohr Somayach, by virtue of their Torah learning, not their alumni status. Former Ohr Somayach *talmidim* occupy positions as rabbis and *maggidei shiur* around the world.

Rav Mendel was a dramatic, but not emotional, speaker. The one time I remember him being overcome by emotion was at the *levaya* for Rabbi Dovid Speyer, zt”l. Rabbi Speyer began his Torah learning in Ohr Somayach, before studying under Rabbi Abba Berman, zt”l, for a decade. He then returned to “give back” as the Mashgiach at Ohr Somayach for seventeen years, during which time he forged intense bonds of love with hundreds of *talmidim*. After his passing, Reb Mendel could not speak of him without tears.

The evening after Reb Mendel’s *levaya*, Rabbi Speyer’s son was married, an emotional ending to the day for many Ohr Somayach *talmidim*, who were reminded of being twice orphaned in little more than a year.

I was outside of Jerusalem, relating the story of my religious journey to a group of secular Australian high school students, when the loudspeakers announcing the *levaya* went around. But my sons in Jerusalem knew, without being told, to go to the *levaya*.

I’m pleased that they understood what they owed to Rav Mendel. And even more so that they feel no disconnect between their status as *talmidim* in Jerusalem’s most famous yeshivos and their father’s start in Ohr Somayach – rather it is a point of pride for them.

Thank you, Rav Mendel for everything you made possible.

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Rav Weinbach, *zt"l*

by Rabbi Dovid Kaplan

Each person has a list of people to whom he is indebted. To some he owes a little and to others he owes a lot. And then there are those few to whom he basically owes his life. For me, the most prominent in this last category was Harav Weinbach, *zt"l*. He was my Rebbe, my mentor and my advisor, as he was for hundreds of others.

I knew him as a *talmid* and worked together with him as a staff member, one of a handful who have done both. I was actually tickled silly to be privileged to have the constant access to him that the staff members had. I never took it for granted. As a matter of fact, the longer I was around him, the more remarkable he became. He was so personable and laughed easily and heartily, but I always had a sense of awe in his presence. There was a certain *atzilus* about him, a type of dignity. More impressive was the sense that he didn't care a lick about personal *kavod*, and he deserved it more than most. One of the beginner students in the Yeshiva once said to me, "Your colleague Rabbi Weinbach said in a talk today..." I wanted to throttle the guy. He was *not* my colleague. A Rebbe is not a colleague. Common purpose? Yes. Colleague? Never! In speaking to each other we referred to him as "Reb Mendel", but in person he was always "Rav Weinbach" or "The Rosh Yeshiva". Due to his approachability there were underlings who referred to him in person as "Reb Mendel", but I always cringed when I heard it. He treated us as colleagues and communicated the idea that while he is in charge and makes the decisions, we share a common purpose. I once spent about an hour and a half counseling one of the boys who was going through a traumatic family experience. I was emotionally spent and physically rung out. Just then Rav Weinbach walked past and grasped immediately what had been going on. "No one ever told me about this when I signed up" I joked. He gave an understanding chuckle and said, "No one told *us* when *we* signed up, either".

When I arrived as a student at Ohr Somayach our personal contact was pretty much limited to hearing his talks in the Beis Midrash. However, anyone who ever heard him speak can readily understand that for that alone it would have been worthwhile to have come to the Yeshiva. For a struggling unsuccessful former Yeshiva high-schooler it was priceless inspiration. Each time he spoke, there was a reinforcement of my decision to give learning another chance. It wasn't exactly charisma and it wasn't exactly charm — though he certainly had both — but there was some undefined quality about him and the way he said things that left me and all the others charged up. Over the years I came to realize that he was the "*rosh hamedabrim b'kol makom*". He was a peerless orator and always hit on the key point at any occasion. He spoke at countless *vorts* and always zeroed in on the target flawlessly, leaving the *chassan* and *kalla* feeling great. I remember one occasion, after he spoke one of the *hanhala* members leaned over and said to me, "The man keeps hitting home runs."

We would play baseball in the park across from the yeshiva at the lunch break. There was one time he came out to play with us. He batted and played the field and could certainly hold his own. But when not batting he didn't stand around and watch like the rest of us. He sat with a *gemara* and learned, until it was his turn to bat again. I realized that that was the real reason he came out. He wanted to teach us how one plays. You can enjoy yourself as a Torah Jew – but there's never a reason to sit around doing nothing.

I knew he loved to learn, and he was constantly doing so. But not seeing him off campus, I had no way of knowing how he spent his time. I figured that having so much on his plate, his hours away from the yeshiva were spent running and planning programs and changing peoples' lives. It was only when a couple of the boys who had spent *bein hazmanim* in Mattersdorf told me, "Every time we went into the local *beis midrash* Rav Weinbach was there learning" that it really sunk in that this is a man who is totally into Torah. And somehow he still ran programs and changed peoples' lives.

The outside world knew him as pioneer in kiruv and life-changer of many. I saw him as an immense *talmid chacham* whose life was learning. As the years went on I realized more and more just how much he loved it. Any time I had a question on a *gemara* or a *passuk* or in any other area of Torah, all I had to do was knock on his office door and enter with an open *sefer*. Whether in the middle of writing or speaking to someone or a meeting – he would be drawn to that *sefer* like metal to a magnet. Proper etiquette may have called for him to tell me to come back later, but he couldn't. He just couldn't. He would stop what he was doing, hear the question and then give an answer. It was always a hands-on lesson that Torah learning reigns supreme. I must confess that a few times over the years I intentionally went in to "ask" a question because I enjoyed so much seeing how attracted he was to Torah. They say that if you want to know who a person really is and what is really important to him, look at his children. Yes, just look at Rav Weinbach's children. Sons and sons-in-law who are all *talmidei chachamim*. Serious, no-nonsense *talmidei chachamim*. That was the man.

Rav Weinbach did not go for any of the gimmickry so widespread (and ineffective) today in the world of kiruv. He taught through word and deed that the way to bring Jews closer is to teach them Torah. As he once told us at a staff meeting, "We may call certain classes in the Yeshiva by certain names for the sake of packaging, but the bottom line is that they are all *Torah*."

His efficiency was legendary. Everything he did was done with *zerizus* of mind and body. How else could he have accomplished as much as he did? His desk was clear at the end of the day – a sign that he had completed the various tasks he assigned himself at the beginning of the morning. Speaking to him was the same. In all the years of being at the yeshiva and dozens of conversations, I don't remember him ever telling me to come back the next day. When I'd ask to speak to him it was always, "Come back in ten minutes" or "Just wait outside, we're almost finished." And one never left his office with any ambiguity. You received a decisive answer to any question. Whether it was in asking advice or in asking permission to embark on a project – it was inevitably a clear yes or a clear no. And in a poignant lesson to our generation, his efficiency was without the aid of a cell phone. He detested those instruments, as he did all of the modern technology which has brought so much vulgarity into the world.

The range of what he could be asked about was mind-boggling. I personally asked him halachic *shailos* that arose in the yeshiva, personal advice, guidance for dealing with *talmidim*, and general Torah questions. And there was often a phone call or two where someone else was calling to ask a question. I, and so many others, would walk out of that office with our dilemmas resolved. He had a particularly clear grasp on the tricky Israel scene, ranging from the secular public on one extreme to the Neturei Karta on the other. I would also come to him to get a direction for putting together public talks, and he always came through. He would give ideas for topics to discuss and, possibly more important, what topics to avoid.

The *gemara* says that when Rabbi Chanina was *niftar*, Rabbi Yochanan tore thirteen garments and cried, "The man I feared is gone." We didn't fear Reb Mendel in the purest sense of the word, but he was definitely the man who kept us in line. Any sort of deviation from pure Torah *hashkafa*, whether in action or in deed, would be pointed out. On the other hand, he was effusive in his praise for a job well done or a talk well delivered, and there was very little that felt better.

In the course of visiting various cities around the world, I have found that one phenomenon keeps on repeating itself. Whether a kiruv center in the U.K. or a shul in Australia, or an outreach operation in Denver, Rav Mendel was somehow involved. Policy decisions, halachic obstacle courses, the direction a community should take – the long reach of his wisdom had come into play. I came to realize how big he had really become and how large segments of Klal Yisrael were so dependant upon him. So many of his small physical actions had huge communal ef-

fects. A letter of *haskama* in a book or *sefer* affected countless people. Advice to a communal rabbi affected the many members of that given community. A phone conversation with a kiruv center director carried ramifications for who knows how many. And these sorts of thing took place every single day, numerous times a day. How many lives were touched, changed, and saved by one person simply can not be measured or fathomed. And when I say “one person” I obviously mean the Rebbetzin too. The two of them were clearly one. There is simply no way a man could do so much without the encouragement, support, and yes, the advice and counsel of his wife. All of his, and therefore ours, is most certainly hers.

There was no shock at the *petira*, as we all knew the end was near. But we are numb. So many feel that they have lost the guide of their life. When Rav Moshe Feinstein was *niftar*, one of my Rebbeim said, “It was a world *with* Reb Moshe and now it’s a world *without* Reb Moshe”. That is the way I – and I’m sure countless others — feel right now. It was a world *with* and now it’s a world *without* Reb Mendel. The Yeshiva will continue and his *talmidim* will carry on. But it won’t be the same. It will never ever be the same. The heavens cried with us at the *levaya* as the rain poured down, much the same as my tears pour down with the writing of these words, and the realization that things will never be the same. On a personal level, I knew that he had *nachas* from me, and that knowledge was priceless, much the same as a child who knows his father is proud of him. Many other *talmidim* who are now involved in spreading Torah surely feel the same. How could one possibly get that back? Oy, Reb Mendel, we’re going to miss you so much. So very much.

The grand welcome Reb Mendel received in *Shamayim* cannot be imagined. The *malachim* created by his Torah, his *mitzvos*, the Torah of his family and *talmidim*, his *chessed*, and so much more, were probably laughing and dancing. Instead of him standing up and speaking, he was the one spoken about. And then there’s the tally of all the accomplishments. All that he put into motion will continue eternally to be added to his account and placed onto his desk. Only this time, his desk will never be cleared. The pile will only grow higher and higher.

• *The above essay was written during the week of shiva.*



A Time to Cry

(Ecclesiastes 3:4)

Our Son's Bar Mitzvah without Rav Weinbach, zt"l

By Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Over thirty years ago I was privileged to find myself in a shiur given by the Rosh Yeshivah of Ohr Somayach, Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Rav Mendel Weinbach, zatzal. It was a shiur on the Parsha and there was one week – it was Parshat Noach – that I actually asked a question. I do not remember the question at all but the reaction of the Rosh Yeshivah is indelibly etched on my soul. The most enormous smile appeared on his face and he danced a few steps of joy and told me that he didn't know the answer. I was a little confused at the time (being rather young and inexperienced) and I couldn't understand what there was to be so happy about. But the Rosh Yeshivah was filled with a spiritual thrill since he now needed to seek an answer and reveal more layers of Torah understanding.

The Rosh Yeshivah was one of the most focused people I ever had the privilege to be exposed to. His passion was to be able to reach out further and further to the affiliated and the unaffiliated alike and to show them the beauty and the majesty of the Torah and of Judaism. But he was also one of the most multi-faceted and talented people that I knew. He was a man of intense passion – when he spoke his audience was swept up and transported to spiritual realms that would have remained inaccessible to them otherwise. But despite his passionate approach to anything Jewish he was nearly always in control of his emotions. I, personally, can remember the Rosh Yeshivah crying tears only twice. The first time was at the Bar Mitzvah of one of my sons. My thirteen year old son made a Siyum on the entire six Orders of the Mishnah, and the Rosh Yeshivah was so overwhelmed with such pure joy at his achievement that he cried. The second time that I witnessed him crying was in my home when another family member made his first Siyum on the whole Babylonian Talmud and, again, he cried tears – tears of such happiness because of the spiritual achievements of others.

At the funeral I also cried and I am still crying.

Not — to my intense sorrow — tears of joy, but bitter tears because I will never again witness that look of absolute joy when he heard a Torah thought that he approved of. I am crying because I am no longer able to speak with one of the preeminent educators of our generation. So many times over the years that I was privileged to have almost daily access to the Rosh Yeshivah, I would often take a thorny and seemingly impossible problem to him after having invested much time in trying to solve it myself, and within a few moments he would touch on the very essence of the problem. More often than not, by identifying the real core of the issue he would come up with the solution in a seemingly effortless fashion. I am crying because that intense clarity that was his is no longer. But, most of all, I am crying because I will no longer merit to see the tears of the Rosh Yeshivah – the tears of untarnished joy as more and more Torah is learnt throughout the world.

This Shabbat is my dear son's Bar Mitzvah. Throughout the last nine years (since our last Bar Mitzvah) it has been one of my greatest hopes that the Rosh Yeshivah would be able to join together with us as he did in the past – to inspire my children and all of us with his fiery words of Torah and to inspire us with his tears as my son joins his older brothers and makes a Siyum on the entire Mishnah in honor of his Bar Mitzvah. The Rosh Yeshivah's invitation is still sitting forlornly on my desk and I cannot bring myself to put it away.

I have no doubts whatsoever that we will all be thrilled and inspired when my son makes his Siyum and I am sure that many tears of true happiness will be shed. But I also know that my tears will be tinted with an intense sorrow that one of the most important personalities in my life is no longer together with us in this physical world. My source of solace is that the Rosh Yeshivah's part in what my children have achieved and what they continue to achieve is immeasurable.

It is my greatest hope and desire that I will be able to cry many, many tears in the future – tears of pure, unadulterated spiritual joy. Tears that reflect the intense yearning that was the Rosh Yeshivah's – to reveal more and more of G-d's Majesty in the world until we are all able to greet the Mashiach together in Jerusalem. May his memory be blessed.

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Shemen Zais Zach

By Rabbi Pinchas Kantrowitz

A true story heard “first hand” from “the brother.” The incredulous mother asked her son again. “Did you say that you wouldn’t attend your sister’s wedding because she is marrying a Gentile?” Yes, Mom, I’m sorry but I don’t think that I am permitted to go, as intermarriage is clearly forbidden by the *Torah*.” “I don’t believe that any reasonable and responsible rabbi would tell you that you cannot attend your sister’s wedding.” “That’s an idea, let’s ask the *Rosh Yeshiva*, I saw him come in to the building a few minutes ago, I’ll see if we can ask him this.” The young man returns a few minutes later and says that the *Rosh Yeshiva* can see them now. “Rabbi, thank you for taking the time to see us, my son tells me that he thinks that he will not be able to attend his own sister’s wedding, because she is marrying a Gentile. Is that true? It sounds absurd to me.” “Yes, that is correct, Ma’am. I am sorry, as I know it must be painful. But we cannot sanction national suicide.” The mother, looking a bit stunned, thanked the rabbi and left his office with her son. She was mumbling “national suicide,” over and over as they walked out of the *Yeshiva*.

Not long after this discussion the mother got on the phone with the daughter and said, “I love you very much, and I think that it is important for you to come here and see the heritage and beautiful lifestyle that you are forsaking, before you do so.” The daughter, a bit taken aback by the mother’s forthright manner, listened and soon got on a plane to Israel. Her brother brought her to classes at *Neve Yerushalayim*, which she loved. She ended up calling off the wedding with the Gentile, moving to Israel, marrying a Jew, and raising a family. The brother told me that, looking back, he attributes the *Rosh Yeshiva*’s “empathic straightness” as one of the prime factors leading to this “miracle.” The brother thought that the *Rosh Yeshiva*’s frank yet feeling approach got through to the mother so powerfully that she was inspired to utilize a similar and equally effective approach with her daughter. The *Rosh Yeshiva HaRav HaGoan* Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, *zt”l*, inspired many of these “miracles” with his “empathic straightness.”

As the other *Rosh Yeshiva* Rabbi Nota Schiller, *lhbch”l*, eulogized his colleague of over 50 years, it was “*matim*” that the day of the *Rosh Yeshiva*’s passing should have been the 27th of Kislev, the third light of *Chanukah*, as the letters of the Hebrew date spell נז, referring to the “*shemen zais zach*” which is the preferred oil to use for the *mitzvah* of lighting the *Chanukah Menora*. The *Rosh Yeshiva*’s attitudes, beliefs, and behavior were “pure,” unadulterated by the “need to accommodate in a modern world.” It was as if to say, *Hashem*’s Will does not change over the generations, the Truth of His Will is eternal.

Yet, at the same time, the empathy always shined through; when the love is felt, the Truth is easier to accept.

As a *talmid* of 4 years in *Ohr Somayach*, my first and most essential and formative 4 years of learning *Torah* and keeping *mitzvot*, I had many opportunities to witness the exemplary *midos*, the depth

and breadth of *Torah* knowledge that a neophyte could only observe from afar in awe, the *yiras shamayim* that inspired each on his own level to strengthen himself in this vital aspect of *avodas Hashem*.

Later, as a rebbe in *Ohr Somayach* for 7 years I grew to appreciate the *Rosh Yeshiva's* multi-faceted greatness even more. Living in Mattesdorf, I invited the *Rosh Yeshiva* to speak at a *Shabbaton* we were hosting for a group of about 18 beginning students. The *Rosh Yeshiva* told of a famous novel called *Faust* by an 18th-19th Century German author named Johann Goethe, in which the protagonist "makes a deal" with the *Satan* that he can live forever if he chooses the moment that he would like to make eternal. Faust can't find the "perfect moment," fails to choose, hence loses the challenge, and surrenders his soul to the *Satan*. Rabbi Weinbach said something like, "I would never get into such a conversion or such a deal, but if I had to make such a choice, do you know what moment I would choose?" Every face was riveted toward the *Rosh Yeshiva's*, one could feel the suspense in the air, as we awaited the *Rosh Yeshiva's* response, and the finale of this fascinating *d'var Torah*. "I would choose this very moment," the *Rosh Yeshiva* said with emphasis and obvious emotion that accompanied his famous broad smile, "a *Shabbaton* in Mattesdorf, a wonderful group of *talmidim*, a rebbe in our *Yeshiva* who began as a *talmid*, what *nachas* for me, what a beautiful moment!" I (and everyone, I am confident, who heard the *Rosh Yeshiva's* beautiful words that evening), were deeply moved, so deeply moved that I recall the incident clearly decades later.

Only, there was something that bothered me a bit about the *Rosh Yeshiva's Vort*. Why *that* moment? What about the moments when the *Rosh Yeshiva* was leading a *Shabbos Seudah* with his beloved family, or when the *Rosh Yeshiva* was delivering one of his deep, eloquent, and vital *shmuzzin* to the entire *Yeshiva* or to any other of the numerous groups that the *Rosh Yeshiva* was so frequently invited to address, or when engrossed in his learning of *Shas* and *poskim* that was so precious and indispensable as to truly be deemed "*ki hem chayanu v'aruch yamanu*," or when ensconced in *tefillah* with his Creator in which he appeared to have left this world, or ... ? The list could go on and on. Then the answer to my query struck me. It was true that the *Rosh Yeshiva* felt that moment of the *Shabbaton* truly a unique moment in his life, or an *Ish Emes* like the *Rosh Yeshiva* would never have said it; it surely was not an empty compliment to make us feel good. Rather, *adaraba*, the *Rosh Yeshiva* was the polar opposite of this fictional Faust figure. Rather than not being able to make *any* moment eternal, the *Rosh Yeshiva* lived in such a way as to make *every* moment eternal! The *Rosh Yeshiva* lived with such joy, such intensity, such *mesiras nefesh* for *Hashem*, His *Torah*, *mitzvoth*, and holy nation that *every* moment could have been chosen to make eternal!

I am proud and deeply grateful to have spent the first four vital and indispensable years of my development as a *Torah Jew*, under the wise guidance and loving inspiration of the *Rosh Yeshiva*. I am proud and deeply grateful to have spent the first seven vital and indispensable years of my development as a *rebbe* and counselor of other searching Jews, under the wise guidance and loving inspiration of the *Rosh Yeshiva*. I am proud and deeply grateful that the *Rosh Yeshiva* was the *sandek* at the *bris* of one of our sons, read our *kesuba* at our *chasuna*, and spoke so beautifully at our *Vort*. (I saw the *Rosh Yeshiva* at a *vort* several years hence on the same *parsha*, and asked him what precisely he had said at our *vort*. Looking surprised he retorted with a chuckle, "I don't recall, but it seems to have worked!") I am saddened that he suffered at the end, and that he did not reach even the years of *gevuros*, but am strengthened by the thought that perhaps he didn't need the extra years as every year was lived with such *gevura*, and he did so much in so many ways in the time that he was allotted.

The *Rosh Yeshiva* will be sorely missed, truly irreplaceable at the helm of the beloved *Yeshiva*, *Ohr Somayach*, that occupied so much of his time, energy and concern. Yet, the light that he spread during his blessed lifetime, the "light of happiness," the light of "pure olive oil," will continue to burn in the hearts and minds of generations of his beloved natural family and generations of his beloved "adopted" family! *Yehi Zichro Baruch*

Letter from a Talmid

Dear Rebbetzin Weinbach, children and family and the whole Ohr Somayach Family,

They call me “Rabbi Kraines”. At my 10th year High School graduation at Fairfax High School in LA it was announced that I had become a rabbi. I am told that everyone laughed – I had won a “least-likely-to-succeed” kudos as a religious scholar!

But, as I showed up for a class one morning in the summer of ‘73 in my tee-shirt, cut-off jeans and Dylan wannabe mop-top, Reb Mendel believed I was “most-likely-to-succeed”. He only saw in front of him a budding Ben Yeshiva, who would raise a Torah family and use his talents to teach and inspire others. Multiply my story by the thousands of *talmidim* who have built Torah lives because of Reb Mendel’s vision; then multiply again by the myriads of children and *talmidim* of those *talmidim* and you will begin to get a glimpse of the immense impact he had on the future of Klal Yisroel.

There were not many students in those early days. The rabbis of Ohr Somayach were like fathers to us and their families became ours. In my case, the analogy was very real, as I had lost my father at the tender age of 8, and I will always honor Reb Mendel, together with my other early mentors, as true parents who put me on my feet in every sense.

Though I have absorbed many of Reb Mendel’s teachings and quote him often, my main precious memories are the many life insights that I picked up in the informal settings that I was privileged to share with him in those intimate years. Your Shabbos table was a Beis Midrash of Torah life for me. I learned that a Jewish home is a warm and loving space – and lots of fun too. I learned that a Jewish father is accessible to his wife and children and actively involved in their lives.

I learned that a Shabbos table is elevated through *zemiros*. In fact, as I sing his *zemiros niggunim* at my table even now, I can hear Reb Mendel’s smiling voice reverberating with mine. As I write, I can see in my mind’s eye the times he came to the Yeshiva to ‘fir tisch’ at a Melava Malka and taught us... “Moishe a Rebbe...Avrohom a Zaida....Al tira avdi Yaakov”. Such was the glow from his Chassidic family background that developed our *yiddishe* hearts together with our *gemara* minds.

I remember how everyone was included. Even your youngest children stood on chairs to say their *dvar Torah*. And I had my chance too. Reb Mendel always encouraged me to hone my skills in public speaking. He even organized that the *bochurim* would take turns speaking from the *bima* of the Yeshiva on Friday nights. Many of us are now rabbis, *mechanchim* and *maggidei shiur* today. We got our jump-start from those opportunities. For he was a molder of men and understood which skills we would need in our toolbox of life.

He encouraged me in writing as well. He felt it was important for us to utilize the talents and skills that we developed in our secular schooling. He himself remarked to me several times that he owed his zest for writing to his English teacher back in the Pittsburgh of his youth.

This healthy relationship to his own American past was in itself an important model for me. I came to understand that my “*teshuvah process*” was not to be a rejection of the whole of my past life – baby with the bath water. But, rather, I was inspired to conceive of it as a breathtakingly exciting positive journey – an integration of my persona with the Torah ideal. Though he would often highlight in his fiery *shmoozen* the growing emptiness of a world devoid of Torah values, he was very much in touch with the realities of modernity and could deal articulately with all types of people and situations.

During his *shiva*, his amazing scholarship has surely been lauded. He once commented to me that, with all his involvements, he strove “to keep his fingertips on Shas”. But, to me, what was even more amazing was the spontaneity

and naturalness of his personality and his approach to life, which he never lost even as he became a revered Rosh Yeshiva. We, idealistic *ba'alei teshuva*, have a tendency to go off the deep end; Reb Mendel's ebullient blend of Torah devotion and *joie de vivre* gave us our balance and perspective. Moreover, his self-confident mastery of halacha steered us away from unfounded extremes of behavior.

In *bein hazmanim* we hiked with him in the hills above Akko as he effortlessly switched between *midrashic* insights, halacha, politics, human nature and the Jewish scene. He took us to the beach and relaxed with us in Givat Ada and Zichron Yaakov, regaling his and us with stories of Torah Voda'as and many other experiences. As we returned from these excursions, he would open up a *daf gemara* and say it over to us smoothly and with the infectious enjoyment that animated all his teaching.

As a child of the 60s, I came to Yeshiva all afire with revolutionary spirit, ignited by my *de rigueur* involvement in anti-war, civil rights protests and political activism. Reb Mendel's impassioned vision of a Ba'al Teshuva "movement" and the "coming revolution" of all of Klal Yisroel coming home to Hashem and Torah fanned my flame and harnessed its volatility. That passion fuels my engines even today.

He was a relentless activist for Torah. As one of the founders of the Ba'al Teshuva movement he played a manifold role in defining its educational program and improvising creative programs to adapt to new scenarios as the decades rolled along. We in South Africa recall with gratitude his pivotal role in establishing Ohr Somayach (which now boasts seven branches!) and laying the groundwork for what has become a flagship Torah community of international fame. As a pathfinder, he was an independent thinker and encouraged us to not follow the herd — indeed, he produced a generation of leaders. And yet, he never swerved from the purity of his original vision and the inviolability of *mesorah*.

A child needs a father, partly because he needs someone to swell with pride and *nachas* when he brings home an award or reaches a milestone of achievement. Reb Mendel was a father for me in that very real sense as well. I am uplifted today by the knowledge that he kept my *chiddushei* Torah on a special shelf together with the works of his many *talmidim*. I am uplifted today by the knowledge that my own branch of Ohr Somayach Sandton and my *harbatzas* Torah as Principal of Shaarei Torah School in Johannesburg are my small part as a foot soldier of the revolution sparked by my beloved Rebbe, of blessed memory.

May his winning smile shine on, in the *lichtege Gan Eden* he so deserves for his historic role in rebuilding the House of Israel!

May we all be comforted among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines
Johannesburg, South Africa



A Personal Tribute to

By Rabbi Zev Kahn

RAV MENDEL WEINBACH *zt'l*

Talmidim of HaRav Mendel Weinbach zt'l, Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Somayach gathered on Asara b'Teves to hear close talmidim relate their interactions with, and lessons learned from their great teacher. Speakers included Rabbi Mordechai Perlman, Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Rabbi Avrohom Rockmill, Rabbi Avrohom Connack, Rabbi Shlomo Weiner and Rabbi Zev Kahn. Below are remarks delivered by Rabbi Zev Kahn, Director JET – Jewish Education Team, Chicago.

Birshus the Rosh Yeshiva, Rebbetzin Weinbach and mishpacha, Ohr Somayach Rebbeim and talmidim, it is a *nechama* that I am here today. I knew that Rav Weinbach was not well. But I knew that I was coming to Yerushalayim this week [for the Ohr Somayach JLE Mentor's Mission]. I was hoping to see him again. Unfortunately, he was *niftar* last week and I missed the *levaya* and *shiva*. It was extremely hard hearing the news so far away from Ohr Somayach and not being able to be consoled and console by being here with you. Since I arrived a few days ago, I have been speaking to people who knew Rav Weinbach, sharing stories. Within the walls of Ohr Somayach, I have been comforted. My earliest memory of Rav Weinbach was hearing him give a schmooze to the whole yeshiva here in the beis medrash over twenty years ago when I was in Rabbi Geffen's beginner's program. He spoke very powerfully and I admit I felt a little intimidated by his strongly delivered message. I feel that feeling now standing here, for the very first time, in the same place Rav Weinbach delivered that schmooze, in front of all of you.

One of the most important lessons, Rav Weinbach taught me was in Ohr Lagolah. He taught us about public speaking. He told us two things: Always know who your audience is and what the purpose of your talk is. For example, if you're speaking at a *vort* (an engagement party), you are there to express the Simcha everyone feels for the new chasan and kallah to be and to give them a bracha. You're not there to give a shiur. Secondly, he told us to choose one message and stick to it. Keep it clear and simple. In the dozens and dozens of times I heard Rav Weinbach speak, he was the perfect role model of those two lessons.

I want to share a few experiences of and lessons from Rav Weinbach. I'm speaking as a talmid of Ohr Somayach, on behalf of former talmidim and to all the talmidim of Ohr Somayach especially in *chutz l'aretz* who still feel a *kesher* to Ohr Somayach and Rav Weinbach. Not alumni. As Rav Chaim Dov Keller, my son's Rosh Yeshiva at Telz in Chicago, said: If you're a true talmid of a yeshiva, you will always be a talmid.

Over the 20 years, my relationship with Rav Weinbach changed and grew as I changed and grew. What I thought would be a 6 month stay turned into 6 years. I moved from the beginner's program to the beis medrash. I got married and did the Ohr Lagolah program, staying an extra year as an assistant to Rabbi Lazerus. I then moved to Chicago to work for the Lakewood Kollel and seven years ago, I started a kiruv organization called JET. Over the last five years, I've been bringing students from Chicago on the JLE Mentors Mission.

I was in his *bekiyus shiur* in the beis medrash program. He was always on time. He gave us weekly *bechinat*,

written out by hand. At that time the **Ohrnet** weekly Torah magazine had just started and Rav Weinbach wrote a number of articles for that too. He obviously had many, many other responsibilities. It is only now, when I have so much to do, that I appreciate more and more the absolute focus and clarity he had to have to do all he did every day.

One time in his office, I don't remember what I was asking his advice about, he told me: "*Al titnadev, v'al tisarev.*" Don't volunteer, but don't refuse a request. Also, when I was involved in a conflict with someone that required a back and forth communication, he advised me: Try as best you can to avoid putting anything down on paper. Avoid a 'paper trail' as he called it. "You never know where it will end up." Yet two things he put on paper are my two most powerful memories.

My favorite memory was when I left the Lakewood Kollel after 7 years to start my own kiruv organization. It was the summer of 2005 and I didn't have a name for it yet. I had an idea I ran by him. He rejected it and explained why. He took out one of his trademark thin yellow strips of paper, thought for a few seconds, then wrote down Jewish Education, paused again, then wrote Workshop. JEW. Then he said, "No, that won't work. Let's start the other way." He wrote down the word JET. It had a certain ring to it he thought would appeal to college students. Again he wrote Jewish Education and paused. I suggest Team (maybe because of my sporting background). He liked it. He gave me a bracha. I still have that strip of paper somewhere and his bracha, I am certain, is a big reason for our Hatzlacha and growth over the years.

There is very, very little I can say or do to repay all Ohr Somayach and especially Rav Weinbach have done for me. But I could give him nachas. Every time I came on a JLE trip, *baruch Hashem*, every six months, the last five years or so, I would look forward to sitting in his office and telling him how well JET was doing. His eyes would light up as I told him how many students from Chicago were on the JLE or in the Center. I would always try introduce them to him. One time I brought my two older boys, Yisrael Tzvi and Meir Simcha, on a JLE trip. Both were born here and had their *brissim* in Ohr Somayach. I told him how well they were doing. He had such nachas. That was all I could give back.

He always asked about my family. Shortly after my family moved to Chicago, we were struck with a very serious illness. My wife and I were devastated, confused, afraid. Chicago has a wonderful community and they helped enormously. We went for *eytzah*, for support. The news spread to Eretz Yisrael and to Ohr Somayach quickly. Tehillim were said around the world.

A few days later, perhaps the next day, I received a fax from Rav Weinbach. In it he quoted a *chazal* about Avraham Avinu and *Akeidas Yitzchak*, that Hashem never gives a *nisayon* to a person that he cannot overcome. He gave my wife and I *chizuk* that we too could overcome this *nisayon*. I read that fax many, many times. I still have it, and it helps me now as it helped me then.

When I first heard of his illness, when I would come to talk to him in his office, probably because of my experience, he would discuss his illness and how he was dealing with it. That gave me *chizuk*. The last time I saw Rav Weinbach was six months ago. He looked a little weaker, his beard was thinner. I needed encouragement so I asked him: "How do you avoid burnout, running a kiruv organization. Kiruv is hard work. How can I carry on?" Who better to ask than Rav Weinbach. He just said. "Just keep on going. One day at a time."

I used to call Rav Weinbach before Rosh Hashanah to say *shalom Aleichem* and to wish him and his rebbetzin and *mishpacha* a good Yom Tov, a healthy, happy year. Because of the time difference between Chicago and Yerushalayim, often it would be close to Yomtov and the Rebbetzin would answer and I would ask her to relay the message. A week before he was niftar, Yisrael Booth, from Ohr Somayach, called Mitch Rose, a mutual friend in Chicago, and told him the situation was very bad. Mitch told me and the next day I called the house. The Rebbetzin answered and not expecting to speak to Rav Weinbach, I asked her to pass on a message to him. She said, "He is right here. You can speak to him." I told Rav Weinbach that I was davening for him, I wished him a *refuah shlaimah* and that I looked forward to seeing him soon. He said: "Thank you. Keep up the good work."

I won't hear those words ever again and yet, I'll hear them every day of my life.

Yehi zichroh baruch.

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Memories of Rav Mendel Weinbach *zt"l*

By Rabbi Binyomin Schonblum

The thousands upon thousands of members of the Ohr Somayach family have been thrown into mourning with the passing of our beloved *rosh yeshiva*, father and guide, Rav Chuna Menachem Mendel Weinbach *zt"l*. For more than forty years, he cared and nurtured his *talmidim* as if they were his own children, encouraging, motivating, teaching, guiding and loving each one like a father. Although I only had the *zechus* of meeting the *rosh hayeshiva* one time on the Ohr Somayach Mentors Mission this past July, that one encounter gave me a small glimpse into the greatness of Rav Weinbach. Before departing to Eretz Yisroel for the Mentors Mission, I was speaking to a *choshuve rosh yeshiva* here in America. When he heard that I was going to be spending time at Ohr Somayach, he related an episode that happened with himself and Rav Weinbach more than fifty years ago. This *rosh yeshiva* had been learning in a *chassidische mosad* in Williamsburg where Rav Weinbach was on the staff. Although Rav Weinbach wasn't his *rebbe*, Rav Weinbach was so in tune to the needs of all the *talmidim* that he sensed that this *rosh yeshiva* would do much better in a *Litvishe yeshiva*. Unbeknownst to this *rosh yeshiva* at the time, Rav Weinbach spent a lot of time convincing the father to send his son to a different *yeshiva*. The end result was that the father sent his son to the Philadelphia Yeshiva and he became an extremely *choshuve marbitz Torah* and *rebbe* to hundreds of *talmidim*. I told this *rosh yeshiva* that I'd send his regards to Rav Weinbach when I see him. He told me that I can, but he added that Rav Weinbach probably won't remember him, as the incident happened more than fifty years ago and was not a major event. When I saw Rav Weinbach at the opening banquet of the Mentors Mission this past July, he was already very weak, but his face still radiated with a shine and it was obvious that his zest for his lifelong mission was as alive as ever. He spoke passionately at the opening banquet and then made his way towards the exit. I caught up to him in the hallway and introduced myself and then sent him regards from the *rosh yeshiva* in America. Right away, he got so excited and recalled the incident as if it had just occurred yesterday. Clearly, the care and concern that Rav Weinbach had for every *talmid* was not something that started when he had his own *yeshiva*. Rather, it was part of his essence. Now that the *rosh yeshiva* has left us, we are bereft, as we've lost his love and care for all *Yidden*.

This past *Shabbos*, my brother-in-law, R' Moshe Zakheim told me that he was involved in a complicated case of someone who was in the process of becoming a *baal teshuvah* and was married to a non-Jew. There were obviously many complicated issues that had to be dealt with. My brother-in-law was learning in Eretz Yisroel at the time and asked his *rosh yeshiva* what to do. His *rosh yeshiva* told him to go to Rav Mendel Weinbach, as he is the *posek* on these matters. Now that the *rosh yeshiva* has left us, we are bereft, as we have lost his wisdom and advice.

A few months ago, I was speaking with Rav Nota Schiller, Rav Weinbach's great *shutuf* for close to fifty years. Rav Schiller had a letter in his pocket. On the envelope it said "*Yeshivas Ohr Somayach*." I believe the contents of the letter provide a living testament to the *rosh yeshiva zt"l* and to his tremendous *hatzlachah* in bringing *Yidden* back to their roots, implanting in them *Torah* and *mitzvos* so that they could grow and blossom into *bnei Torah*.

The letter reads as follows:

Lichvod Harav Weinbach shlit”a, Rav Schiller shlit”a and the rest of my rabbeim at Ohr Somayach shlit”a,

I am writing to try to express the appreciation and gratitude I feel concerning the recent Siyum Hashas. I was part of the tzibbur at the recent Siyum Hashas held at Binyanei Hauma. Harav Weinbach was one of the speakers and reminded me of the important and powerful shmuessen he used to give at the yeshiva. He mentioned the powerful vort about Rabi Akiva and the daf that he rode to shore on. I was in the crowd and I felt like calling out, “Rav Weinbach, do you know that I just finished the cycle?” My simcha then and now can’t be expressed. Similarly, my hakoras hatov to Ohr Somayach can’t be truly expressed. The thought that I might never have known what Daf Yomi is, and instead I was zocheh to be among the mesaymei haShas, leaves me speechless. But it also leaves me with the chiyuv of expressing my thanks to the roshei hayeshiva who made this opportunity possible. I should add that the hashkafah and chinuch we received at Ohr Somayach that we have to become lomdei Torah and talmidei chachomim is the yesod upon which my personal Siyum Hashas is built.

I also should mention that Rav Weinbach’s sefer was helpful and provided essential insights. More importantly, just picking up the sefer made me feel as if I was being told, “Veiter in Shas.” Iy”H, I hope to start again with greater amkus and havanah as the yeshiva taught us to do. May Hakadosh Boruch Hu give all the roshei hayeshiva and all the rabbonim continued siyata diShmaya in harbotzas haTorah.

*With thanks mei’umkah dilibi,
(Name Withheld)*

There are many more letters that have actually been written down on paper and sent to the *rosh hayeshiva*, but there are thousands more that are forever forged on the hearts and ingrained in the minds of the *rosh hayeshiva*’s loving *talmidim*. May he be a *meilitz yosher* for his biological family, his spiritual family, and all of *Klal Yisroel*. *Umacha Hashem dimah mei’al kol ponim*.

*Rabbi Binyomin Schonblum is Director of the Mentor Missions of Ohr Somayach based in Lakewood, NJ
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Memories

from Rabbis, Staff, Students and Alumni

It is known that there are two approaches of *tzadikim* in the service of Hashem.

There are those who are totally attached to Hashem as individuals, such as the early Chassidim mentioned in Gemara Berachos who spent nine hours a day davening.

Other *tzadikim* were totally involved in teaching others, as the Torah says about Avraham Avinu. Rav Mendel, *zt'l*, was a perfect combination of both of these approaches, which is very unusual. He was a great *masmid*, sitting daily for hours on end in the Mattersdorf Shul for almost fifty years. At the same time he was totally available for other people.

When he said a *hesped* in Ohr Somayach for his Rosh Yeshiva Rav Gedaliah Schor, *zt'l*, he mentioned that a good Rosh Yeshiva is *hefker* for the *tzibur*. Rav Mendel followed this example. Whenever he was asked for advice, to speak at public gatherings or invited to *simchahs* of *talmidim* and friends, Rav Mendel answered *Hineni*. He was there. All this in addition to his acting as Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Somayach for 40 years.

One personal experience that I remember was my daughter's *chasuna*. On the invitation it said *chuppah* at a certain time and *kabbolos panim* with dancing a few hours later. Rav Mendel left after the *chuppah* and came back again for the *kabbolos panim*.

A person like Rav Mendel is irreplaceable. *Yehi Zichro Boruch*.

• Rabbi Yehuda Samet

Two memories of Rav Mendel, *zt'l*:

1. He used his vast Torah knowledge in his inspiring oratory. Never did he bend a source to fit his message. The *pshat* was always *emes*, and that made the application to his message an integral continuation of the *mesora*.

2. He was a master of wise *eitza*. When I asked him if I should participate in debates with biology professors and such, he answered no. A debate is based upon stirring emotions of competition, winning and losing. It is not a venue for careful thinking. We need the latter.

• Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb

My relationship with Rav Weinbach, *zt'l*, began in 1966. At that time I was a *talmid* in a Yeshiva that he started together with Rav Nota Schiller, *shilta*. I became very close to Rav Weinbach and became like a member of his family.

Rav Weinbach was instrumental in helping me find my wife and building a Torah home. He always treated me like a son and showed me fatherly love in my *simchas* and in times of sadness.

On a particular occasion, when a family member required surgery, I was sitting in the hospital waiting room saying Tehillim when suddenly Rav Weinbach arrived. His first question was whether I had eaten breakfast. After confirming his suspicion that I had in fact skipped breakfast, he said to me that first of all I must eat something in order to have strength to deal with the situation. Secondly he said, "You are saying Tehillim in a state of panic

and desperation and that is not good. You have to pray with trust in Hashem. Go get something to eat and I will stay here to say Tehillim for you.”

He was my father and mentor for 46 years and I find myself lost without his wonderful advice. I strive to live and teach according to the guidelines he gave me over the years. I hope this will be in some small way an elevation to his holy *neshamah*.

• *Rabbi Mordechai Perlman*

Many years ago Rav and Rebbitzin Weinbach suffered a tragic calamity. A 16 year-old dear son was riding his bicycle one *erev* Shabbos afternoon and was hit by a car turning the corner and killed.

The boy had no identification on his person so the police made an announcement asking for someone who could identify the boy by describing who was hit.

When I came to be “*menachem avel*” Rav Weinbach, *zt”l*, related the following story. He was learning *erev* Shabbos and heard a strange announcement on the radio outside. The police were asking for help identifying a young boy who had been hit while riding his bike. He had dark trousers and a white shirt, looks *chareidi*. Rav Weinbach, *zt”l*, noticed his son was not yet home so he decided to go with trepidation and check out the story. He said, “The Rebbitzin had not heard the announcement and I didn’t want to alarm her for something that I hoped was really nothing. So I went alone. On the way in a taxi I started to say please Hashem don’t let it be my son — but before I could utter the words I realized that if it wasn’t my son then it would be someone else’s son, so I didn’t say anything. Of course when I got there I faced a horrific personal tragedy.”

Anyone there could not help being awed by Rav Weinbach’s selfless concern for another Jew at a time when most people would be going out of their minds. And that is how he was in all the situations and in all the years that I had the privilege of sharing with him.

May his memory be a blessing for the Rebbetzin and his family and all of the greater Ohr Somayach and Klal Yisrael family to whom he dedicated his life with true *yiras Shamayim* and *ahavas Yisrael*.

• *Rabbi Moshe Lazerus*

A few brief thoughts...

Everyone who knew Rav Mendel Weinbach knew that he was a genius in virtually every aspect of life: in learning Torah, in teaching Torah, in teaching others how to teach Torah, in setting an example of how a person dedicates a life entirely to do *ratzon* Hashem, in advice that always gave a new and clear Torah perspective on the matter, in caring for each person as if that person was his child or *mishpacha*, in countless and unequalled public *divrei* Torah “speeches” that inspired us all to live Torah lives. In short, he taught us how to live in this world and merit the next one.

Rav Mendel could do everything in the yeshiva better than anyone else, and, nevertheless, he let us have a share in the *avodas hakodesh* that he and — *yibadel l’chaim aruchim*— Rav Nota Schiller, *shlita*, conceived and nourished through decades of total and selfless dedication to Hashem, the Torah and Klal Yisrael.

My personal *hakaras hatov* to Rav Mendel for his *chelek* in my personal and professional life cannot be expressed in words. He was my Rebbe, “friend” and “father”. I have always felt only love, awe and *kavod* for him. It is still very difficult to remember that it is no longer possible to sit across from him in his modest office and speak about everything and anything. I would sit there, unaware and uncaring about the passage of time or about anything occurring in the world that existed outside of those *daled amos*. I don’t ever recall leaving him without feeling that I had received a boost of “life”. He was one of the most “alive” people I have ever known. And I am certain he still is...

• *Rabbi Moshe Newman*

“There’s a lot you can learn from the lifetime of a person, especially on the *yahrtzeit*. Special memories come flooding back to the mind and to the heart.”

Rav Weinbach made this statement in an Ohr Lagolah *shiur*, Parshas Toldos 5754 when he dedicated the last ten minutes of the class to talk about his father on the occasion of his *yahrtzeit*. Sharing childhood memories, Rav Weinbach described the challenges his father faced in relocating to the States and, in particular, bringing up his family in Pittsburgh. Talking about his father’s decision to remain in an area of Pittsburgh where they initially settled and not to relocate to a more prosperous area of town with the rest of the Jewish community, Rav Weinbach commented that: “Sometimes you don’t appreciate a person in their lifetime. Sometimes this takes *chochma* which comes in hindsight.”

I have had the privilege of knowing Rav Weinbach for just under twenty years — almost half of the lifespan of Ohr Somayach — in a number of different ways: while I was a student leader, as a *talmid* in yeshiva, managing the JLE (Ohr Somayach Branch) in London, running the Ohr Lagolah Rabbinic Training Institute in Jerusalem, and most recently, over the last thirteen months (eleven of them since his *petirah*) working on a *sefer* / audio collection of his Ohr Lagolah *shiurim* (iy”H to be published in early 2014).

I thought that I had an appreciation of the Rosh Yeshiva during his lifetime, but I was wrong. It is only over the last year as I have been both completely immersed in his Torah while simultaneously conscious of his absence every day when I come into the Yeshiva, that I have really started to begin to appreciate Rav Weinbach – his vision, his determination and his Torah, his advice, his incisive nature and his colossal contribution to Klal Yisrael and to every individual.

And so, as we approach Rav Weinbach’s first *yahrtzeit*, I just wanted to take a few seconds to say some simple heartfelt words which are unfortunately often construed to be no more than an old cliché. Thank you. Thank you for the guidance, thank you for the opportunities, and most of all thank you for enabling me to make my life what it is today.

• Rabbi Richard Jacobs

I had the privilege of serving as Rav Weinbach’s secretary for 24 years. None of my myriad tasks at Ohr Somayach gave me more pleasure and satisfaction than working for Rav Weinbach. Each week he would give me five handwritten pieces to be typed and sent to the editors of the Ohrnet. Each was the epitome of perfection, in style and content, all in his clear, flowing handwriting.

Even those written on the back of an envelope during a jerky bus ride (for which he apologized) were eminently readable. A week before his *petira*, when he was too weak even to talk, his wife Sheindel faxed me his last handwritten Talmud Tips piece for the Ohrnet. It was as precise and clear as all his others.

Over the years I had often snipped out articles on Jewish issues from the Jerusalem Post, and put them in his tray. Invariably, the next day I would find his brilliantly adapted version, aimed at the Ohrnet readership.

How many times since his *petira* have I come across articles which I am sure would have captured his interest, and reached for a pair of scissors, only to remind myself that there was no longer any point.

The void Rav Weinbach’s passing has left for the Yeshiva and for me personally is incalculable. All that I gained from working with him will remain with me forever.

May his memory be for a blessing.

• Rosalie Moriah - Ohr Somayach

Dear Weinbach Family,

We all share so genuinely in the loss of our beloved Rav Mendel...

I am so pleased that I was able to see him once more before he left us, in Yerushalaim, *Ir Hakodesh*.

He was an extraordinary role model for all of us and one of the central figures in bringing us to recognise the beauty of Torah and *mitzvos* — and to a greater commitment to them.

Ohr Somayach South Africa was enormously influenced by Rav Mendel. Initially, more practically by virtue of his vision and sound advice, and later on, simply as an expression of our own personalities and opinions, so profoundly affected by him.

So much of whatever we have managed to achieve, is his.

“Hamakom yנachem eschem bsoch shar avelei Tzion viYerushalayim...”

• Rabbi Larry Shain

on behalf of all of his talmidim and chaverim in Ohr Somayach South Africa

With heartfelt *tza'ar* I add my small voice to the thousands of *talmidim* left behind by Rav Mendel, *zt"l*. I was from the first group of Ohr Somayach *talmidim* almost forty years ago. I owe a major portion of my life to Rav Mendel. He was more than a Rebbe, more than a Rosh Yeshiva, more even than a father because he was all of the above. His profundity was masked by his gentle chiding humor and his easy-going nature, but not masked for long. I had not spoken with Rav Mendel for several years, and how much *tza'ar* I personally have for that alone. I offer my heartfelt *tefillos* that Ohr Somayach, led by Rav Schiller, *shlita*, continue the great legacy and work of Rav Mendel, and I know that it must be a time of great *simcha* in *Shamayim* to greet such a person, even though we here, wrapped in our darkness, must for now experience this great void.

• Rabbi Yosef Lipson

I arrived at Ohr Somayach in June, 1972, the yeshiva's inaugural year. I was one of Rav Weinbach's first ten *talmidim*, and as an Ohr Somayach staff member for the last forty years I maintained a constant personal relationship with the Rosh Yeshiva.

The personality of Ohr Somayach and the personality of Rav Weinbach were one and the same. Throughout history, almost all great leaders and personalities have become ensnared by the thirst for power and honor. Rav Weinbach was the opposite. His simplicity and humility were legendary. Rather than chasing after honor, he fled from its enticements. He did not proselytize, he did not engage in polemics. He firmly believed that Torah sold itself. Not pre-packaged, superficial Torah ideas, but rigorous, in-depth analysis of the original sources in the original language. The charisma that characterized Ohr Somayach was the charisma of learning, not of personality.

Rav Weinbach always pushed others on the staff to center stage, both in Israel and abroad. But I always appreciated, first as a student, then as a staff member, that there was no question, no *sugya* in Shas, no issue in *hashkafa* or halacha, and no issue in contemporary society or politics which eluded the Rosh Yeshiva's knowledge and insight. Even with little formal secular education, the Rosh Yeshiva's encyclopedic knowledge of secular wisdom and culture allowed him to relate to all the university-trained students of Ohr Somayach.

Rav Weinbach also personified another characteristic of Torah greatness: the ability to relate to and advise every *talmid* as a unique individual. Torah is truth, but that truth is multi-dimensional and must fit the individual and his unique circumstances.

In those formative years, we truly felt like sons, not students. There were times when the truth was hard to swal-

low, when discipline was necessary. Yet we always appreciated the Rosh Yeshiva's commitment to the truth and integrity of the Torah perspective.

Rav Weinbach once told me that no one was irreplaceable. For once I must disagree. The Rosh Yeshiva will always be remembered, but he will never be replaced.

• Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

Dear Rebbetzin Weinbach and Family,

I am very sorry to hear of Rabbi Weinbach's passing away.

I feel that it is important for me to communicate a fraction of the significant influence that he had on my life and the lives of our family.

I attended Ohr Somayach in 1976-77 after the completion of my senior year in college. This was before the construction of the Beis Midrash; in fact on Rosh Hashanah we davened on the ground literally of the future Beis Midrash. I was in the beginners' *shiurim* that were led by Rabbi Weinbach and Rabbi Bulman. I felt that Ohr Somayach gave its best teachers to the beginners. I felt privileged to be introduced to the learning of *Mishnayos* and *Gemara* of these inspirational people. Reb Mendel also taught *Mesilas Yesharim* to a group of those interested. I was privileged to learn nine *perakim* of *Mesilas Yesharim* with him. He taught us how to grasp the *sefer* and what to emphasize. I felt that Rabbi Weinbach and Rabbi Bulman were living examples and role models of the Torah.

Now, over 35 years later, B"H I am privileged to learn *Gemara* and *Mesilas Yesharim* daily. Furthermore, four of our sons learn daily and our two daughters are married to men who learn in *kollel*. I represent one of thousands of *talmidim* who merited to change the course of their lives as a result of their experience at Ohr Somayach under Rabbi Weinbach and Rabbi Schiller's direction. Their *zechusim* for their contribution to the improvement of the world is immeasurable.

I firmly believe that Reb Mendel's visionary role in Torah outreach was due in an important measure to the dedication, support and encouragement of his wife and family. Whatever he achieved, you have an everlasting significant portion.

Thank you for your role in our family's life and the lives of thousands throughout the world.

Hamakom yenachem eschem b'toch shaar avelei Zion v'Yerushalayim.

Respectfully,

• Avraham Halle M.D.

When I embarked on my Beef Jerky side-business I asked Rav Mendel if I could sell it in the yeshiva and he gave me permission to do so. A few weeks later we were at a wedding together and the Rosh Yeshiva came up to me to ask how the product was selling. I know it doesn't sound like much, but when an *adam gadol* shows a personal interest in the trivialities of one's personal life it makes a lasting impact. Beyond his vast Torah knowledge and renowned dedication to the *klal*, I will always remember Rav Mendel as a *gadol* who demonstrably cared about the *yechidim*.

• Rabbi Jonathan Jaffit

During the time I spent at Ohr Somayach, I had to make several important life decisions.

These decisions were not simple, the factors involved complex and the ramifications great. I found it quite a challenge as I tried to sort through it all and come to the proper conclusion.

The Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Mendel, was unique in the sense that one could walk into his office at a loss of what to do. Yet, when they'd walk out, everything would seem clear, guided and straightforward.

In fact, the first time I met Rav Mendel — before I joined the Yeshiva as a *talmid* — was when I was faced with such a decision. The Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva where I was learning at the time suggested that I go speak with Rav Mendel.

So I called Rav Mendel and so began my opportunity and *z'chus* to benefit from his *hadracha* and counsel. The advice I received not only couldn't have been more true, but it provided me with much needed guidance and focus — something that I benefited from greatly as time moved on.

There is one incident that I won't ever forget, advice I remind myself of daily.

To move back to the US, or stay in Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Mendel heard me out, listened to both sides of the question and gave me three clear directives. Looking back, he couldn't have been clearer and I only wish I could still benefit from his counsel.

A person leaves Eretz Yisrael for one of three reasons:

1. *Chinuch* options for one's children
2. Family reasons
3. Lack of *parnassa*

So long as one of those was not a factor, Eretz Yisrael it was.

Every day since then, his message rings clear and perhaps my *z'chus* of living in Eretz Yisrael is truly his *z'chus*. In today's day and age we all seek clarity and guidance. We are bombarded with influences wherever we turn.

Rav Mendel was there to provide that clarity and *hadracha*. His *petirah* left a void that will only get bigger.

There will be many decisions that I'll need to make over the course of my lifetime. Although Rav Mendel isn't here to help guide me, the principles behind his *hadracha* live on.

His *z'chus* are the countless *talmidim* all over the world whose lives were enriched through his Torah, *hadracha* and friendship.

His memory lives on through his *talmidim* who continue their lives with a sense of mission, focus and responsibility — the torch he proudly carried.

• Rabbi Yehuda Goldman

While there are numerous outstanding *talmidei chachamim* left from the original *dor* that founded the kiruv movement (most notably Rav Mendel's life-long *shutaf*, Rav Nota Schiller, *shlita*), one can't help feeling that the passing of Rav Mendel is the passing of a generation. That first generation of leaders of the kiruv movement was so head and shoulders above our current generation that it is difficult to talk of a generational handing over. It feels more like the handing over of one era to the next!

How does one capture Rav Mendel Weinbach, *zt"l*, *Ish HaEshkolos*? One can just marvel that he had chosen to grace the kiruv world as his life-long mission. Here was a brilliant *talmid chacham*, a multi-talented *iliuy*, a holy and simultaneously kind man who had the whole world before him. He decided to become Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Somayach and that is to where he came to every day. There was no *bein hazmanim* by Rav Mendel – life does not have *bein hazmanims*. He sat in his simple, unadorned office, making notes on scraps of paper, acting as a source of wisdom and *chizuk* to people all around the world. Rav Mendel understood us all – he could talk to the heart of a secular college kid as much as he could to a Yid from Mea Shearim. He advised heads of *mosdos*, helped people to dream their dreams, gave encouragement to all who passed his doors.

He was a brilliant writer and an even more brilliant *darshan*. He churned out *mekoros* on all sorts of things. But none of these things defined him. They were just some aspects of his enormous versatility. Over time, he gave *shuirim* on virtually every subject to every level of the yeshiva. And yet, there was no attempt to make Ohr Somayach in his mold. He kept on bringing in the biggest people he could find to stand at the helm of the learning. Rav Dov Schwartzman, *atzal*, and Rav Nachman Bulman, *atzal*, and *yibadel l'chaim*, Rav Aaron Feldman, Rav Moshe Shapiro and Rav Naftali Kaplan – all gave top *shuirim* in the yeshiva. Just as Rav Mendel never held onto the *kavod* of being the Rosh HaYeshiva, so he never held onto *bochrim*. His greatest pride was when someone *outshteiged* Ohr Somayach and went onto the Mir. Yet, when these *bochrim* got married, there would be Rav Mendel – during *chasuna* season he would go to one or more *chasunas* every night; he had so many *talmidim*.

For all his brilliance, Rav Mendel never condescended to anyone. The very opposite. He tried to make everyone feel like a king. His best *eitzas* were short and to the point. “Reb Avraham,” he told me when I started working there, “Kiruv is a sugya like any sugya. Learn it up well and you will do well.” I found myself drawing on his bits of wisdom throughout my life, wisdom that was always said with Rav Mendel’s classic twinkle of the eye. I often didn’t realize how wise was the advice I was being given at the time until I got to validate it with first-hand experience.

There was always a tone of optimism and cheerfulness in his voice. It wasn’t that he did not tell it straight, whether the prognosis was good or bad. But he said it in such a way that one felt, “Oh, okay, let’s gird our loins and go and get it.” When I saw him towards the end of his life I said, “Rav Mendel, we are all davening for you.” He looked up, and said cheerfully, “Keep on davening!” One felt that even on that last stretch he was the one who was encouraging everybody else.

The Jewish people have lost one of its truly great people. The sadness and the pain are ours!

• Rabbi Avraham Edelstein - © Reprinted from Ner LeElef Resources

It’s very hard to write meaningfully about Rav Mendel; all the best stories could never be published! Here’s my attempt. What are the defining memories I have of Rav Weinbach?

Well, he was a profoundly compassionate man who could speak softly, just as he could thunder when the need arose.

He was one of the funniest people I knew, with a dry humor that would have done an Englishman proud. He had that eye for seeing the absurdity of certain people and institutions that comes not from cheap cynicism but from deep insight.

I’m getting closer to what I think was his real gift when I say he was a man of insight. When starting to teach a public speaking course in the Yeshiva I asked him for any tips I should include for the guys (he was a superb speaker). He surprised me by coining an adage, “To be a good speaker you have to be a good listener”, i.e. you must always listen analytically to every other speaker to learn from their successes and errors. On reflection (like most really brilliant observations) it was obvious... but it hadn’t been said before he said it.

It was this quality of insight that, I think, defined him for me. “Man of the world” is not the epithet you expect to hear applied to a Torah leader, but it’s the one that springs to my mind when I think of what we have lost with the passing of Rav Weinbach. Others are better placed than me to describe his *lomdus* (although I consulted him on *halachic* and *hashkafah* issues repeatedly, you really need to be a *lamdan* yourself to “get” how much he knew).

What I could appreciate was the way in which his ironclad commitment to Torah and *mitzvos* was applied with a shrewd understanding of human nature and society. It would have been wrong to call him cynical — I’ve seldom met anyone more on fire with idealism — but he saw through pretense and artifice in the frum world and beyond. That ability allowed him to realize his idealism in practice. He knew when to take a stand and when to make a tactical withdrawal. It was he who first acquainted me with the adage, “Not everything that you think should you say, not everything you say should you write and not everything that you write should you publish”.

He was a man of *shitas*. His best known one was that the best way to introduce someone to Yiddishkeit was through real learning. He had another *shita*, less well known. As one of the heads of an innovative institution that made thinking out of the box the norm, he was often approached by people with great (and often not so great!) ideas. His response was often, “Don’t give me an idea, give me a man!” Ideas are cheap, people who can turn them into reality are dear. His management style was to find people who could get things done that needed to be done, and then to turn them loose with his support behind them.

Rav Mendel was a man in that sense; someone with ideas and the drive — and *siyata d’Shamaya* — to make them real.

• David Olesker - © Reprinted from Ner LeElef Resources

Recalling Rav Mendel

I have three strong recollections of Rav Mendel Weinbach *zt"l*. These three incidents occurred in my years in Ohr Somayach.

The first was possibly my first Shavuot, in '80. At about 1 AM the Rosh Yeshiva spoke on Shavuot in a booming voice. It was breathtaking and awesome at the same time. Rav Mendel made it real. Every Shavuot I think about his *drasha*.

Next, I recall the Rosh Yeshiva speaking on Yom Ha'atzmaut. Everyone came to hear this *drasha*. Women were in the Ezras Nashim. It seemed that everyone knew that the *drasha* would be powerful. I still hear his words, "Today is a day of great joy and of great sadness. Joy because of the Land of Eretz Yisrael, and sadness because of what could have been.

Finally, I recall one Purim morning where Rav Mendel made *gramen* poems at breakfast.

Stealthily, the South African *bochurim* were handing him shots of whiskey, first one and then another.

A few nights later Rav Mendel gave the evening *drasha* and discussed the concept of "*ad delo yodah*". What it means and the depth behind the mitzvah. He summed up and explained the mitzvah to those who were left wondering if Purim was really such a great thing after all.

Rav Mendel's example and lessons left indelible impressions on me. I hear his voice ringing in my ears and I cannot imagine who I would be without his actions, words and feelings.

• Yosef Stolz

For a great man who spoke to me minimally in the few minutes between his *shiurim*, he knew me personally well enough to speak beautifully about me on a unique and individual level at my *vort*.

It is only fitting that his passing was during the days of Chanukah. I strive to make his life work and daily dedication to *kiruv rechokim* an inspiration in my life.

• Brian Silvey

A good friend from college invited me to his wedding at a place called Ohr Somayach. "Parked" me at the Women's school. (Yes, for a brief and beautiful few years there was an Ohr Somayach College for Women, which later on merged with Neve Yerushalayim.)

Knowing no one and having nothing else to do, I let the girls bring me to class. The learning, with its intellectual vigor and the depth of its relevance to the Human Condition, brought a dimension to our lives undreamt of in college and grad school.

The *Em haBayit* (House Mother), Rebbitzin Feldman (wife of Rav Aaron Feldman) initiated the conversation.

She: Why not stay?

Me: I live with someone in the States.

She: Jewish?

Me: Sure.

She: She can come, too.

Me: I don't think so.

She: Why not?

Me: It's not a She. It's a He.

(Pause)

She: He could attend the Boy's school.

Me: I don't think so.

She: Why not?

Me: He's only eight.

She: Let me get back to you on this.

The following day, I was brought in to meet Reb Mendel Weinbach. His voice was high and soft and sweet. He bade me sit down. For the next half hour he listened deeply, laughed lightly and easily and, barely looking me in

the eye, asked gently probing questions about my background, my (total lack of) Jewish knowledge, my impressions of the Girl's School, my little boy.

My family was so assimilated, I explained, that it had only been by chance that I'd found out we were Jewish. My brother had no children. My cousins had all married out. And I was divorced at twenty. My little boy was the last Jew in the family.

Reb Mendel shook his head, sighed. So, perhaps you can bring him here for the rest of the summer. We've arranged a scholarship for him to a day camp, while you continue your learning.

So that is how it all began. By the summer's end, Reb Mendel and Mrs. Feldman had arranged accommodations, a living stipend, and a place for Joshua in an excellent school, Horev.

Joshua is no longer the last Jew in the family. His children, raised in the glow of Torah, all speak Hebrew, love *chesed*, do mitzvot, and like the tent of Avraham, their house is a place full of guests. Recently they've begun to establish a regular kosher minyan in their home.

We continue to flourish, thanks to Ohr Somayach, snatched from the fires of assimilation and annihilation, by the rebbe with a voice like an angel and a compassionate wisdom and determination to bring home the generations of wandering Jews "from our space-less boundaries of loss."

• *Dvorah-Leah Garren*

I'd like to share a fond memory of Rav Mendel from the winter of '78 in Ohr Somayach in Yonkers, NY. These were the early days of Ohr Somayach in NY (pre-Monsey).

Rav Mendel was visiting with us from Israel when we were hit by a major snow storm. He immediately directed us to go down to the local supermarket to stock up on food and supplies. Now you have to remember, this was his first trip back to the States in many years.

That Friday night, in his *drasha*, Rav Mendel (with a smile and twinkle in his eye) recounted the famous *gemara* about Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son coming out of the cave after 12 years.

His ability to communicate was in a class by itself. He was able to touch *neshamos* through his words. He always seemed to have just the right *vort* for the situation. And he did it with that wonderful sense of humor.

By the way, if any other Yonkers alumni are out there, I'd like to hear your recollections of that visit.

• *Chaim Stimmel*

In my time at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem I met a lot of great Rabbis. Rav Weinbach was a brilliantly learned man in Torah. That goes without saying, but it is true for a lot of other Rabbis as well. What made Rav Weinbach memorable to me was that he was so *nice*. I met him briefly a couple times, and he never gave me even a single negative vibe. I got the feeling that I was simply another Jew he was excited to interact with.

• *Michael*

One day I was really down because of a problem I had with my situation at that time and an issue with my flight back to the US. I walked into the office of Rosh HaYeshiva, HaRav Mendel Weinbach *zt"l* and I cried while explaining my issue to him. The next day the problem was solved!

• *IJ*

Although I never had the *zechus* to meet HaGaon HaRav Mendel Weinbach *zt"l* personally, one memory really stands out in my mind. Seven and half years ago I was a bochur in a yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel and I was *zoche* to attend the English-speaking Siyum HaShas in Binyanei Ha'umah in Yerushalayim. Rav Mendel was one of the speakers, and I can recall vividly how he marked the occasion by speaking of the *chashivus* of Talmud Torah. A few minutes into his speech he turned to the thousands of people gathered, and exclaimed "It doesn't matter if

you're a BT (*ba'al teshuva*) or an FFB (frum from birth)!" For Rav Mendel, Torah study marked the greatest of life's pursuits, and in his inimitable style he showed that we should not be driven by stereotypes or pre-conceived judgments - Torah is there for everyone to delight in. In this day and age, such a statement seems obvious. But we have to remember that it was due to the Rosh Yeshiva's efforts and pioneering vision that the modern Ba'al Teshuva movement is what it is today. May we all continue to gain *chizuk* from his teachings and his legacy.

• *Dov Smith*

Looking through some photos, I came across a picture of the Rosh Hayeshiva *zt"l* smiling as he attended a Chanuka party at our home five years ago. This brought back fond memories of a great leader who could deal with each and every *talmid* on a personal level, as a father to son, always caring and listening with patience. Even though we are so far, here in Melbourne, Australia, all the *talmidim* seem to have similar memories and are trying to make sense of a new world without such an amazing role-model. We request the Rosh Yeshiva act as a *meilitz yosher* for Klal Yisroel.

• *Gershon Rose*

What is remarkable is how few *shiurim* he gave in my time at the yeshiva but I can remember each of them because they left an indelible impression. I think one of the most poignant memories was a talk he gave to the Yeshiva about two students who unfortunately became involved in throwing rocks on the road to Ramot to protest Shabbos desecration. The key was not that they had acted without the Yeshiva's permission or knowledge, nor that this behavior was dangerous and against the law, but it was a terrible hindrance to the Yeshiva's capability to reach out to secular Israeli society that viewed the Yeshiva world as primitive and out of touch with reality. He said that a member of the Knesset once got up in the Knesset and decried how many pilots they were losing to Ohr Somayach. What was critical, he said, was to understand that the secular Israeli society was baffled and challenged by the fact that a yeshiva existed that was comprised of university trained academics, Rhode scholars, Oxford scholars, lawyers, doctors and accountants and other professionals who obviously could not be written off as primitive. However, he said that those two students had potentially ruined that challenge. Now the secular elite could say that Ohr Somayach was full of eccentric and psychologically challenged academics. That would be ruinous to the chances that the Yeshiva would continue to be a beacon of inspiration to every segment of Israeli society. *Yehi Zichro Boruch!* I write these words in tears. I loved him from the depths of my heart and I will truly miss him. What a mastermind! What a loss for all of us. May his *neshama* have an *aliya* and may we all be reunited with *Bias Hamashiach* and *Techiyas Hamesim*.

• *Matisyahu Topas*

With all the greatness of the Rosh Yeshiva *zt"l* — from his *bekius* in Shas, *midrashim*, halacha and in fact all of Torah — he remained accessible and engendered in his *talmidim* the idea that it is important to remain "normal".

I remember sitting in a *shiur* with him and with that characteristic smile he leaned back, arms behind his head, and asked in all seriousness, "What is today?" Obviously the *talmidim* thought Moshe Rabbeinu's *yahrtzeit*, perhaps another *Gadol's yahtzeit* etc. After exhausting all attempts, the Rosh Yeshiva gave us the answer: "Groundhog's day!" — and then launched into *Mesechta Makkos*. What a lesson! I will miss him. *Zechuso yagein aleinu*.

• *Dov Connack*

I was only planning on my trip to Israel to last for two weeks. At the very beginning of my trip Rav Weinbach told me to come see him before I was leaving to let him know how my experience was. As a non-Jew he said to me we can offer you everything as far as food and learning. Feel free to eat here and learn all you want. Sleeping in the Yeshiva, though, is reserved just for the Jewish students. I would have to make my own arrangements. With the

little bit of money I had that was no problem and I enjoyed the most amazing, eye-opening, spiritually uplifting experience of my life. I didn't know quite what to do. Continue my experience in Israel in the hopes of converting while studying at Ohr Somayach or to return back to Oregon as planned. At the end of the two weeks, exactly one day before my flight would leave, I entered into his office. I can never forget the image of his face looking down at some huge *sefer* on his desk. He looks up at me with that smile that always seemed to be there. "Come in, Yonatan".

"Um, Rosh Yeshiva. My flight back to the States leaves tomorrow. I don't really know what to do."

"How was your time here?" he asks.

I reply, "It was incredible. I had an amazing time with the JLE and everything."

"How were the *shiurim*?" he asks me.

"The most amazing teachers and personalities I've ever met."

"And how about Eretz Yisrael? You liked it here?"

"Rosh Yeshiva, I loved it!"

"Well, have a great flight back." And here is when his face is buried back into the *sefer* that he was learning. I remained standing in his office for a few moments feeling quite uncomfortable until finally making the decision that it was time to walk out of his office. On my way out it finally hit me. He had me answer my own question. I had every reason to stay. I never got on that flight. Rav Weinbach guided me through my learning and experience in Yeshiva while I had been trying to convert for years. And I will never forget the day I went to the mikveh. It was so perfectly planned out that the moment I arrived back at Yeshiva for the first time as a Yid, there comes Rav Weinbach, this tiny little Rabbi, to give me the biggest hug I could have ever received. I will never forget it. Nor will I ever forget my Rosh Yeshiva, my teacher, my friend who I miss very much. I hope I will be worthy enough to sit in his *shiurim* in the next world as I had the greatest honor and pleasure to do in this world.

• Yonatan Griffith

Five years ago my son was accepted to Ohr Somayach despite the fact he grew up in an Orthodox home. *Kiruv Krovim* was somewhat new to Ohr Somayach. Taking one look at my son, the Rosh Yeshiva *zatzal* was a bit hesitant in accepting him, but nonetheless he did. My son progressed as a *ben Torah* and his whole *tzurah* changed. Well, it's been quite an *aliyah* for my son, and I owe so much of it to Ohr Somayach. The memory I have of the Rosh Yeshiva *zatzal* is what he would say every time he would see my son, "Herschel! You taught me an important lesson. Never give up on anybody." *Yehi Zichro Boruch*.

• Eliezer Stern

Of course I had heard speeches from Rav Weinbach before, either live or recorded. I had seen him around the Ohr Somayach campus, educating, debating, or just making conversation with the students. But one personal story stands out:

During my second year in the Derech program at Ohr Somayach, Rav Weinbach's brother passed away. Several of my friends and I went with our Rebbe to be *menachem avel*. We arrived at his home in the Mattersdorf neighborhood of Jerusalem by bus. This was a man who lived simply. His apartment was clean and orderly, but very modestly sized, with little to distinguish it from its neighbors. This was surprising, to say the least: Rav Weinbach was one of a small cadre of rabbis that shaped the last four decades of the Jewish nation. He obviously practiced what he preached.

While we were there, before we gave him the customary, "May G-d comfort you", an older gentleman was speaking with the Rav about his past. Before that conversation, I did not know that Rav Weinbach was sent away to Yeshiva in New York at a very young age. "Was it difficult?" asked the older man. Rav Weinbach nodded his head slowly. If he had been looking my way, he would have seen me nodding along with him. I was also sent away for high school to a Yeshiva out of town. I knew the answer to the old man's question. Going away from home when you are 14 to

a new city, to a Yeshiva with standards far higher than anything you've ever experienced before is difficult. I realized then that Rav Weinbach had probably experienced everything that I had, and like me, it had become a part of him. Made him stronger. More resilient. More independent. Taught him how to deal with frustration, inadequacy, and unfairness. Taught him to try and be someone great.

Judging from my two years at Ohr Somayach I have no doubt that Rav Weinbach applied all of his life experience to making Ohr Somayach the greatest place it could ever be. My thanks to the Yeshiva and its outstanding hanhala for allowing me to give my small voice in this tribute to our Rosh Yeshiva.

• Ari Lakritz

When I think about you, Reb Mendel, *zt'l*, and what you mean to me personally, there is simply too much to write for the space allowed on this page. So I would like to focus on three things I learned from you. First, *Hashgachah Pratit* — the idea that everything that happens to an individual happens for a reason, even if the reason is not known. To illustrate: The year was 1975. My wife and I were newly married (not yet observant) and came to Israel for a year of study. Someone gave me the name of a rabbi that I should call who would be able to advise me on different options. I called this rabbi but was unable to reach him, so his number went into my pocket for future reference if needed. I then proceeded to Ohr Somayach because a friend of mine studied there the previous year, so I considered it a place to start my search. I was introduced to someone named Rabbi Weinbach. You told me about the institution and the different learning possibilities available. During our conversation, something about your name seemed familiar, and I remembered the number in my pocket. Taking it out, I asked, Is this you? Of course it was, and I realized that this was more than a coincidence. I decided to stop my search and thus began my relationship with you.

Second, I learned from you a deeper meaning of gratitude. Today I have the *nachas* of observant children and grandchildren, some of whom are living in Eretz Yisrael.

Third, I learned from you the idea that when doing for others one should always ask, “Did I do enough?” After spending a year at Ohr Somayach, my wife and I returned to the US and eventually moved to New Jersey, where a friend and I co-founded an adult outreach program that just completed twenty nine years. Of the thousands of students who have passed through this outreach program, hundreds of families today are *shomrei mitzvot* with children and grandchildren who learn in yeshivas all over the US and in Israel. Their observant roots go back to you, Reb Mendel. They did not know you nor did you know them, yet these families are also part of your legacy along with the innumerable others whose lives you touched and the generations who will follow. From me and your *talmidim*, thank you Reb Mendel.

• Jeffrey Glazer

My *keshet* with the Rosh Yeshiva *zt'l* goes back to my days in Ohr Lagolah. During this time I became very close with the Rosh Yeshiva and he was instrumental in sending me to Melbourne, Australia. There I joined the local community kollel, and five years later with the Rosh Yeshiva's guidance I started a small *kehillah* for university students and young professionals. Four years ago our *kehillah* joined forces with the JLC of Sydney (under the auspices of Ohr Somayach) and now is one of the thriving young shuls in Melbourne. This would not have been made possible without the constant support and encouragement of the Rosh Yeshiva.

Over the past 13 years the Rosh Yeshiva has been a guide and mentor for me in every aspect of my professional and personal life. There was no question that was too large or too small. Be it in areas of *kiruv*, *chinuch* or personal growth. He had such *chochma*; every *aitza* was so clear and thought out. His advice was always spot on.

I would make an effort to come to Eretz Yisroel to visit the Rosh Yeshiva every couple of years. The purpose of these trips was to get *chizuk* and recharge my batteries. He would spend 3-4 hours a day learning with me during

those visits. On one occasion he had just gone through a series of treatment and was very weak, but he knew how much our learning meant to me and therefore pushed himself to be there. How I cherish those times I spent with him.

What a loss Rav Mendel's *petirah* is for all Klal Yisroel, but in particular for all those who had the privilege of knowing this *Gadol*.

I felt he took such an interest and pride in everything that I did. I cannot start to express the *hakoras hatov* that I have for all that he has done for me.

My *tefillah* is that together with all his precious *talmidim*, we should be *zoche* to continue the *harbotzas haTorah* that he so passionately lived for. *Yehi Zichro Boruch*.

• *Arieh Berlin*

I remember when HaRav Weinbach told us (JLE 2006) a story about when he was growing up in Pittsburgh. The story was about Simchas Torah, and that same year the Pirates were in the World Series. I remember that he spoke with such emotion. All of the Jews were in the streets dancing with the Torahs when the Pirates won the World Series, and as all the Pirate fans started to storm the streets to celebrate they came face to face with the Jews celebrating Simchas Torah. The non-Jewish Pirates fans exclaimed, "Everybody's a Pirates fan". This was a story which I spoke to HaRav Weinbach about six years later when I returned to Ohr Somayach and he still had the way of speaking... with real emotion.

• *Isaiah Scoufield*

I remember how the Rosh Yeshiva *zt"l* would learn with anyone that asked. We had a few Derech boys that had the "guts" to ask the Rosh Yeshiva, and he found time for every one of them. His constant radiant smile was always so warming as well.

• *Yitzchok Friedman*

When I was a newcomer to Ohr Somayach in Elul 1975 and was just getting orientated, I remember an elder *bochur* who had taken me under his wing discussing with me the time-honored tradition of yeshiva students everywhere, resolving the query of "Who's the biggest *gadol* b'Torah we have here"? Unequivocally he answered "Rav Mendel" and illustrated this with a story from the then just-concluded summer *zman*. He said he had witnessed this himself.

One day a group of top rabbis were all locked onto a difficult point in the *sugya* of the *gemara* at hand. No one seemed to know how to unravel a rather sticky problem, when Rav Mendel came up the stairs from the ground floor office of the Tidhar Street Beit Midrash to look for a *bochur* who had just received a phone call from the States from his parents.

As Rav Mendel was scanning the room, allowing his fingertips to do the walking, one of the rabbis leaned over and asked him the group's *kasha*, and without even taking his eyes off from what he was doing Rav Mendel responded with a few words which sent all of the rabbis reeling, some smacking their foreheads with the palms of their hands. My new friend quipped to me that this sufficiently settled the "*gadol* question" for him once and for all.

I recall being at Rav Mendel's table on the morning of Purim during the year the Weinbachs spent in Zichron Yaakov. The discussion was about new arrivals to the yeshiva and how they often reacted negatively to any Torah learning that highlighted the different status of Jews and non-Jews. I remember him stating that after a while they grew out of it. Not because of any basic change yet in their American-influenced education, upbringing and outlook, but by virtue of the fact that over the span of time spent in the yeshiva they began to appreciate what a Jew really is for the first time in their lives and this altered their perception of the rectitude of those passages in *Mishnayot* or wherever.

The last year I was in the yeshiva, '79-'80, the Mir Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, *zt"l*, passed away the day after Chanukah. I can still see Rav Mendel standing there in front of the Beis Medrish and making the announcement after *Shacharit* of Rav Shmuelevitz's *petira*. Classes were suspended so that we could all attend the *levaya*. He concluded his remarks by saying to us, "Today you will learn what happens when a *gadol hador* dies." Those words still echo in my mind many years later. How ironically fitting, therefore, that almost 33 years later to the day the same announcement was made in the same Beis Medrish for our Rosh Yeshiva. I am certain that more than one of the *maspidim* mentioned him in terms of one of the *gedolei hador*. "Who is honored? Those who honor others." Another fitting tribute for a man known by so many simply as Rav Mendel.

Rav Mendel was so much more than a Rosh Yeshiva. He was our father. For you were and are the ones who brought us to Torah and to Hashem, and without you we would never have made the connection to our true family heritage and roots.

Rav Mendel was a patriarch of the unbelievable and unprecedented phenomenon in Jewish history known as the *ba'al teshuvah* movement.

As Yaakov Avinu lay breathing his last in this week's parsha Vayechi, just as he was comforted by the "Shma Yisroel" that all of his sons rang out together in unison which so convinced Yaakov of the satisfactory conclusion to his own life and of the certainty of the eventual and ultimate blessed outcome of the history of his family in this world, so too as Rav Mendel wends his way upward to take his rightful place in the *yeshiva shel ma'alah* and goes on to his inestimable eternal reward in *Gan Eden*. Every line of Torah we learn, every prayer we daven, every mitzvah we perform, goes with him. For surely they are all his. *Ad bias goel tzedek* - until the advent of *moshiach tzidkenu* and *binyan bayis shlishi, amen*.

• Moshe Parry

It was 36 years ago when I first experienced a 'Rav Mendel shiur.' I was newly arrived from the Kibbutz experience, and willing to taste some Judaism before I headed off to Europe and back to the USA. It was a Talmud class on Tractate Kiddushin, and the topic was honoring your father and mother. The lesson was about gratitude, eternal values, and the challenges of fulfilling duties, even when the people we honor act unworthy, or circumstances provide a special opportunity that might cause us to think that we can overlook the duty to honor. It was an engaging discussion, exemplified by a thoughtful, sensitive, and provocative give and take. Rav Mendel's soft but piercing voice penetrating the issue from all sides.

It wasn't long before Rav Mendel challenged us with the "button" choice. If we could freeze ourselves in any moment for eternity by just pressing a special button, when would we press it? Would we wait until we were happy, or wealthy, or after some special experience like getting married, having a child, or...? Would we always think that maybe the future will hold a better moment, something more, that things were still incomplete, and premature to "press the button"? He waited for our replies, would we, could we; can the eternity of any moment be comprehended, justified, or accepted as the only everlasting reality? Yet, Rav Mendel would look at us and loudly claim, "I would press the button now, when I'm teaching Torah, giving shiur, for that is the moment worthy of eternity." Wow, it wasn't too difficult to understand, that to him this was the most important activity of his life. It made learning from him a special and wonderful experience; he was always on the line. Yet, the intensity wasn't confrontational, it wasn't pushy. No, it was revelation and we were headed to greater clarity.

I sometimes think about his Tisha b'Av *shmuze*. The great artist who painted his masterpiece on the plateau of a mountain. After completing his painting of the beauty surrounding the mountain peak, the artist gazed at his work with tremendous pride and satisfaction. He took a step back to admire its wonder amidst the surroundings. Then, he took another step back to have greater comparative appreciation. Then another step back as he became intoxicated by the combined beauty. His assistant saw that he had backed himself nearly to the edge of the plateau and called to him to stop. Unfortunately, he was entranced and he was oblivious to the warnings. Too far to reach him, the assistant hit the painting, stopping the artist in his tracks, as he began to fill with rage. At that moment

he looked around and discovered he was at the very edge of the plateau, within one step of plunging to his death.

We were intoxicated by the presence of our Temple, we were oblivious to the warnings of our prophets, and the destruction shocked us out of our state of taking for granted our deservedness, our lack of total engagement with Torah and mitzvot, our self-intoxication. Yet, the destruction was of the stones of His house, not of His people, for the road back through *teshuvah* was still possible.

When we played ball, Rav Mendel was out there at shortstop or second base, and always encouraging us to play better, smarter, and have fun.

When we faced challenges as individuals, or as a student body, Rav Mendel was there to cheer our efforts on to solve the difficulties, giving us insightful perspectives, words of *hashkafa*, joining the effort as a teacher, a mentor, and a friend.

We had several extensive discussions about some of my life decisions such as returning to America, coming to New York, helping to establish the Monsey yeshiva, doing Jewish historical research, and going out into the technology profession. He always offered sound advice.

At one of our alumni gatherings in Brooklyn he recalled a lesson he received from Rav Simcha Wasserman back in the days when he joined other Torah Vodaas students starting a program in Los Angeles under Rav Simcha. He spoke of the types of Jews and Judaism they found out west. They were new and improved, like the plastic potato. It looked like a potato, smelled like a potato, even tasted like a potato — but it didn't rot, it didn't spoil. It was "new and improved". Really the only significant difference between it and a real potato was that when you planted a plastic potato, it didn't grow, it couldn't reproduce, it was sterile. He warned us that continuity was a special blessing.

We will all miss our Rebbe, Rav Mendel. To us he's still giving *shiur*, and always will.

• Dovid Gedaliah Romand

How fortunate I was to have been a *talmid* of Ohr Somayach. How precious now are the memories I have of Rav Weinbach showing his concern, reminding me that by learning Torah we were keeping the world going; appearing as if by miracle at my *sheva berachos* in Baltimore. My brother told me that he struggled to keep pace with the Rosh Yeshiva as he hiked with his usual energy from one part of town to another. I remember that energy! And also the time when Rav Weinbach took over for Rav Pindrus' *shiur* and what a contrast his soaring tenor was to the accustomed bass! Now it seems, with the outpouring of memories from so many people, the curtain is revealed a bit more and I am one of thousands of *talmidim* who can say they had a personal connection to this wonderful man. His memory is already a blessing!

• Betzalel Anfllick

We do not realize who we have lost. This was a spiritual earthquake. We all need to do serious *teshuva* and try to fill the massive spiritual vacuum that was just left behind.

• Avraham Shusteris

Rav Weinbach *zt"l* was one of the wisest, strongest, and humblest men I have ever met. About twenty five years ago he helped me through a very confusing and devastating time in my life, with wisdom, concern, and strength. After leaving Ohr Somayach I would correspond in writing with Rav Weinbach *zt"l*. I always wanted to receive his correspondence, with great anticipation of his wisdom. As years progressed, anytime I could access a Jewish Press, I would look for "David's Slingshot".

May Hashem comfort you among all the mourners of Jerusalem

• vj hirsch OS '89-'90

It was my third year in Yeshivas Ohr Somayach and I had decided it was time to start dating, but I had a problem. I had always gone by my English name Josh, and thought that because I had become religious I needed to change it to its Hebrew counterpart - Yehoshua. But I was bothered by this. I liked my English name and was not so excited about changing it. So I went to speak to the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Weinbach. As I entered his office and spoke over my issue, he took off his glasses, closed his eyes and said, "You're Josh - that's who you are." Without any further conversation I realized the important lesson the Rosh Yeshiva taught me — that it's not the name that defines who you are, but it's your actions that define your name. Thank you Rav Weinbach.

• Josh Garbarsky

"What's the best moment you've ever had in your life?" Rav Weinbach asked in a shiur.

The *bochurim* gave numerous answers - 21st birthday party, and so forth.

Rav Weinbach then said, "Ask me the same question. My answer is 'Right now!' What could be better than teaching Torah, in Yeshiva, in Yerushalayim?"

• Yisroel Leskin

Although I always had a relationship with Reb Mendel zt"l throughout my years in Yeshiva, the true importance of our *keshet* did not hit home until his unfortunate passing. But one memory sticks out far above the others and it wasn't even in the Yeshiva.

Unfortunately, my wife and I just suffered a loss, a late-term miscarriage, and we were stuck in the hospital waiting for the staff to take care of it, with all of the ramifications. However, to the hospital, with one of the busiest maternity wards in the world, taking care of a miscarriage was not on the highest of priorities, and we were stuck waiting in limbo for a very long time. As you can imagine we were not in the greatest of spirits.

As I left the ward for a breather, who did I run into? None other than the Rosh Yeshiva, Reb Mendel, who was leaving the oncology ward after another of his excruciating treatments, being supported by several of his children. He stopped and asked me what I was doing there. I replied that unfortunately we were holed up in the maternity ward (which interestingly was next to the oncology ward) not for reasons of *simcha*. The Rosh Yeshiva looked stunned for a second and then replied with his loving fatherly gaze - "*HaMakom Yimalei Chesroncha!*"

I literally felt that he was actually sharing in my pain. Even after he left I could still feel the compassion and warmth he exuded. I knew that I was not special in this regard, nor that it was reserved exclusively for me, but his fatherly concern was for all of his *talmidim*.

May his memory be blessed!

• YBS



Rosh Yeshivas Mir Harav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt'l visiting Ohr Somayach.



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Excerpts from TalmuDigest

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

About ten years ago, the Jewish Learning Library, Ohr Somayach's publishing arm, began to publish volumes of the material that was available on its website, www.ohr.edu. The first volume was a compilation of Rabbi Weinbach's 'Love of the Land' series, and it was joined by two volumes of his *TalmuDigest*. The Jewish Learning Library is hoping to publish additional volumes of each series posthumously, if they can find the sponsorships.

True to his overall belief that Gemara will draw people to Judaism, the concept of TalmuDigest was to make Gemara accessible to those who couldn't learn otherwise. In his introduction, Rabbi Weinbach explains his intentions in publishing the works:

TalmuDigest is an effort to bring the brilliance, beauty, and excitement of the Talmud to the widest range of Jews. For the serious Talmud student, it offers a new perspective of understanding and presenting the material he is studying.

For the Jew with limited time available for study, it provides easy access to Talmudic wisdom. For the relative newcomer to Torah study, it serves as a tantalizing gateway to the incomparable wealth of intellect and guidance contained in the Talmud.

TalmuDigest is not intended to serve as a substitute for serious Talmud study but rather as an appetizer. By being introduced to the broad range of Jewish law and the profound insights of the Sages in every area of life, the reader will hopefully be inspired to join the proud ranks of those who have made Talmud study a valuable part of their lives.

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The Talmud has **data**. The Talmud has **depth**. The Talmud has **dynamic**. The Talmud has **dialogue**.

All of these dimensions of the Babylonian Talmud are digested in this book. TalmuDigest is divided into sections digesting seven pages of the Talmud. Each section contains a concise overview of the material covered in those pages, which is titled **TalmuData**.

A deeper look into some of that material is offered in **TalmuDepth**. The excitement of the classical analytic method of our Sages can be appreciated in **TalmuDynamics**. The questions you and others have asked are answered in **TalmuDialogue**. In addition to these features, we have added quotes from our Sages on the relevant daf.

Regardless of which of these features you choose to satisfy your curiosity regarding the Talmud, you will encounter the wisdom of the ages and the Sages. We are confident that reading one part of this digest will encourage you to read them all and hopefully lead you to move up from a digest to a full meal of Talmud study.

TalmuData

- Alone in the Sanctuary
- The atonement feature of the incense
- Taking coals from the Outer Altar for burning the incense
- The golden shovel and the superfine incense
- Honoring the kohen gadol
- How many fires on the Altar
- Parts of the early olah sacrifice not consumed before Shabbat
- Extinguishing coals from the Altar
- A fistful of incense with the coals
- Why Kimchit merited to have seven sons as kohanim gedolim
- The challenge of kemitzah and chafinah (taking of incense)
- Kemitzah and chafinah — unresolved issues
- The status of spilled sacrificial blood
- Left-handed transportation of sacrificial blood
- The kohen gadol whose tasks are cut short
- Does some sacrificial blood have an animal's status
- Does the kohen gadol's bullock belong to his fellow kohanim
- Sacrifices offered even on Shabbat and despite ritual impurity

TalmuDialogue - Yoma 47a

Question:

Who was the woman who had each of her seven sons serve as a kohen gadol, and what did she do to deserve this honor?

Answer:

The woman's name was Kimchit, and she was a remarkable woman. She had seven sons, and each served as kohen gadol. When asked how she had merited such great honor, she explained that even the beams in her own home never saw her hair exposed.

The connection between such modesty and its reward is explained in the Jerusalem Talmud, cited by Rashi: "The dignity of a princess is in her modesty," writes King David (Tehillim 45:14), "and her garment is made of gold embroidery." A woman of such outstanding modesty deserves children who will wear the golden garments of the kohen gadol.

But how does one woman see seven sons achieve this honor when there can be only one kohen gadol at a time? It can hardly be that one succeeded the other upon his death, because this would mean that this righteous woman buried six of her sons.

The answer is found in the Gemara's account of what happened to one of the sons of Kimchit, Yishmael. Once he became spiritually impure just before Yom Kippur, and his brother Yeshairov substituted for him until he regained his purity.

TalmuDialogue *continued from page 51*

On another occasion, the same thing happened to Yishmael, and his brother Yosef took over for him. Although these incidents are mentioned regarding only three of the sons, we can infer, says Tosafot Yeshanim, that this happened more than twice to these brothers, and eventually all seven had at least a momentary opportunity to serve as kohen gadol, to the delight of their righteous mother.

The Maharsha raises an interesting question regarding Kimchit's son Yishmael mentioned in these two stories. The stories imply that he served as kohen gadol from before one Yom Kippur until the next Yom Kippur, a period of at least one year. An earlier gemara (Yoma 9a) informed us that during the Second Beit HaMikdash, unscrupulous people bought the position of kohen gadol from corrupt kings, even though they were not suited for it. Because of this, none of them, except for three or four, lived out the year of his appointment. How then could Yishmael, son of Kimchit, have been around for two successive fasts of Yom Kippur as a kohen gadol?

One of those few exceptions, explains the Maharsha, was Yishmael the son of Pavi, who served for ten years. He and the Yishmael mentioned in our gemara are one and the same. In the earlier gemara, he is identified by his father's name, as is customary. Our gemara mentions only his mother, Kimchit, because it was the merit of her modesty that gained this honor for him.

TalmuDynamics - Yoma 44b

For Whom the Bell Tolls

Who would imagine bells chiming on Yom Kippur in the Beit HaMikdash? In order to understand how this could be, we must first examine what the Torah tells us about one feature of the Yom Kippur service.

"No one shall be in the Ohel Mo'ed [literally, "Tent of Assembly," but in the Beit HaMikdash this referred to the Sanctuary area], from when he [the kohen gadol] enters to achieve atonement in the Sanctuary until he goes out" (Vayikra 16:17). This passage is part of the Torah's instructions for the sacred service on Yom Kippur. It refers to the kohen gadol entering the Kodesh HaKodashim (inner Sanctuary, Holy of Holies) to offer the incense. No one was permitted to be present in the heichal (Sanctuary area that contained the Table, Menorah, and golden Incense Altar) while the kohen gadol was in this most sacred area, which contained only the Holy Ark.

The superficial interpretation of this passage makes it difficult to understand what our great commentaries write regarding one of the kohen gadol's eight sacred garments, the me'il. The bottom hem of the me'il was belled. The purpose of these bells was "that the sound should be heard when he enters the Sanctuary" (Shemot 28:35). The Rashbam explains that the bells served as an alarm to warn all present in the Sanctuary to depart when the kohen gadol entered to perform his service. The Ramban adds that there is a hint in this passage that the bells summoned even the heavenly angels to leave the Sanctuary, allowing the kohen gadol to be alone with his King. The problem with their approach is that the kohen gadol did not wear the me'il when he entered the Kodesh HaKodashim to offer the incense; rather, he wore only the four garments worn by an ordinary kohen. How then could the bells, which the Torah assigned only to the me'il, serve as a warning for everyone to leave the heichal?

This problem disappears, however, when we learn in our gemara that the requirement for vacating an area of the Beit HaMikdash while the sacred service was being performed was not limited to the kohen gadol's entry into the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom Kippur. The blood of the bull brought as the kohen gadol's special sin offering (Vayikra 4:6) or for the community to atone for a mistaken court ruling (ibid. 4:17), or the blood of the goat brought by the community when such a mistake involved idol worship (Bamidbar 15:26), had to be sprinkled in the heichal.

TalmuDynamics continued from page 52

When the kohen entered the heichal for this purpose, everyone had to depart, not only from there, but also from the area between the Altar in the courtyard and the entrance to the Sanctuary. The Gemara derives this from the word “atonement” used regarding such a need for departing the area on Yom Kippur, which teaches us (through a gezeirah shavah according to Tosafot, or a binyan av according to the Rambam) that this rule applies to all situations when the kohen enters the Sanctuary for atonement purposes. The above-mentioned commentaries are, therefore, referring to a situation where such a service is being performed by the kohen gadol, and the bells on his me’il do indeed sound a warning for all to clear the area and enable this servant, who possesses a higher degree of spirituality, to be alone with his King.

The Sages Say

The incense offering in the Beit HaMikdash served as an atonement for the sin of lashon hara [slander and gossip]. Let something that was done in secret atone for a sin committed in secret.

• Rabbi Yishmael, Yoma 44a

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TalmuData

- The bullock of the kohen gadol
- The curtains at the entry to the Kodesh HaKodashim
- The kohen gadol's route to the Kodesh HaKodashim
- How the incense was offered on Yom Kippur
- Why the sons of Aaron died
- Respectful leave-taking
- Prayer of the kohen gadol
- What happened to the Holy Ark of the Beit HaMikdash
- The keruvim and their symbolism
- From where the earth was formed
- The spraying of the blood and the counting that accompanied it
- The shofar-shaped collection boxes in the Beit HaMikdash
- The issue of bereirah
- Preventing a mix-up in regard to two kinds of bloods

TalmuDialogue - Yoma 53b

The Fate of the Holy Ark

Question:

What happened to the Holy Ark?

Answer:

The Holy Ark played a major role on Yom Kippur. The high point of the Yom Kippur service in the Beit HaMidkash was when the kohen gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodashim and placed the incense in front of the Holy Ark. (Since there was no Holy Ark in the Second Beit HaMikdash, the incense was placed on a stone that marked its place. This stone was called the even shetiah, the foundation stone, from which, say our Sages, the creation of the world began.)

One opinion in the Gemara is that the Holy Ark was taken into Babylonian captivity along with the other sacred vessels. Another is that when King Yoshiyahu anticipated the imminent exile prophesied in the Torah (Devarim 28:36), he ordered the Holy Ark concealed in some secret subterranean passage to prevent its being taken into captivity.

But why did those who built the Second Beit HaMikdash at the end of the Babylonian exile not make a new ark if they lacked the original one, either because it was in foreign hands or because its hiding place was unknown?

TalmuDialogue - Yoma 53b *continued from page 58*

This question is raised by Rabbi Shmuel Strashan (the Rashash). His approach in answering it is based on the Torah command “You shall place in the Ark the testimony [the Tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were etched]” (Shemot 25:16). This would seem to indicate that the purpose of the Ark is to contain those sacred Tablets, and once they were gone there was no longer any need for an ark.

The Rashash notes, though, that some commentaries write that even though the urim v’tumim were missing in the Second Beit HaMikdash, the choshen (breastplate) that contained them (Shemot 28:30) was nevertheless worn by the kohen gadol to complete his full array of eight garments. If so, perhaps the Ark, too, should have been made in order to complete the array of sacred vessels, even if it could not fulfill its primary purpose of housing the Tablets. The same instruction of placing the Tablets in the Ark, the Rashash explains, is repeated five passages later, and Rashi grapples with the question why this reiteration is needed. It may be, the Rashash suggests, that the reiteration is to stress that with no Tablets, there is no need for the Ark.

TalmuDynamics - Yoma 52a

The Royal Route

The kohen gadol on Yom Kippur took a “royal route” from one sacred precinct to another. In order to make his once-a-year entry into the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (Holy of Holies) on Yom Kippur, the kohen gadol had to pass through the heichal area. Both Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yossi agree that in the Second Beit HaMikdash, a single *parochet* (curtain) separated the *heichal* from the *Kodesh HaKodashim* and it was folded back a bit at its northern end to enable the kohen gadol to enter. Their point of disagreement is the route he took to reach this entrance.

Rabbi Meir contends that the kohen gadol walked between the Golden Altar and the Table, which meant that his route traversed almost the center of the *heichal*. He did not set eyes on the heichal until he actually reached the *parochet*, turned right until the northern end, and entered. Rabbi Yossi’s opinion is that he walked between the Table and the northern wall, so that he was in a direct line with the entrance to the *Kodesh HaKodashim*.

Rabbi Meir explains his position by pointing out that it would be disrespectful to the *Kodesh HaKodashim* for the kohen gadol to walk along a route that affords a view of its sacred interior all along the way. Rabbi Yossi’s rejoinder is that Jews are so beloved by God that this was not considered a problem.

Rabbeinu Chananel’s explanation of Rabbi Yossi’s statement is based on the difference between how the kohen gadol entered the sacred precincts of the Beit HaMikdash all year long and how he entered on Yom Kippur. All year long he was required to wear a special garment called a *me’il*, which had bells attached to its bottom hem, “and its sound would be heard when he entered the Sanctuary” (Shemot 28:35). This was like an envoy of the people announcing his arrival to the king and requesting permission to enter. On Yom Kippur, the kohen

TalmuDynamics - Yoma 52a *continued from page 59*

gadol entered the holiest of all areas without the *me'il*, signifying that on this day he was considered more privileged because of God's love for the people he represented. There was thus no need for him to hesitate walking along a route that offered a view of that holy area.

Rashi's approach is that Jews are so beloved by God that they require no agent to bring their prayers before Him. Every Jew can pray directly to God, as King Shlomo put it in his prayer to God at the dedication of the First Beit HaMikdash (Melachim I 8:38). Their emissary on Yom Kippur may therefore enter in such bold fashion.

The prayer of a Jew has a direct route to the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, from where it rises upward to Heaven. Physical access to this sacred area is limited, however, to the emissary of all Jews — the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur. It therefore follows that he should, on that day, have the same free access and not hesitate to follow the most direct route to the *Kodesh HaKodashim*.

TalmuDepth - Yoma 54b

The Foundation Stone

A high point in the kohen gadol's Yom Kippur service was the placing of the special incense on the Holy Ark. Since this Ark was not around during the time of the Second *Beit HaMikdash*, the incense was placed on the even shetiah, the foundation stone.

This stone, three fingers high above the floor of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, was so called because it was where the world's formation began. This view of how Creation began is based on the passage (Tehillim 50:1-2) in which the psalmist speaks of God "calling to the earth" to initiate Creation and goes on to describe how "out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, did God shine forth."

The Maharsha notes that although this source cited in our gemara serves to identify Zion as the foundation of Creation, there is no specific mention of a stone. In the Midrash, however, we find a reference to the stone the patriarch Yaakov utilized to serve God.

On his way from Eretz Yisrael to find his mate in the home of Lavan, Yaakov stopped off at the site where the Beit HaMikdash would eventually stand. After fourteen years of learning Torah in the Yeshivah of Eiver, during which he never lay down on a bed to sleep, he took stones from the area and placed them under his head and went to sleep. Upon awakening, he took the stones, which had miraculously been fused into a single stone, and set it up as a pillar on which he poured a libation to God. "And this stone," he declared, "shall be a House for God" (Bereishit 28:22).

This very stone, suggests the Midrash, was the stone where the world began and where the purpose of Creation became fulfilled in the House of God.

The Sages Say

How beloved are the people of Israel, that God did not require them to have an agent [and that every one of them is able to pray for himself — Rashi].

• Rabbi Yossi, Yoma 52a

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Friendship

By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

Interesting Times, a Chinese Curse

There's an old Chinese curse that says, "May you always live in interesting times". The concept behind that curse is that which interests people is what the media will report. Revolutions, cyclones destroying a section of or buried under snow. Interesting times are times connected to discomfort and tragedy.

For us, however, who believe that Hashem runs this world, that curse is a blessing. Because the interesting things that happen around us — whether it's the overthrow of the government in Egypt or storms wreaking havoc in the world — are all reminders to us to change and improve ourselves.

Chazal tell us that every tragedy that happens, wherever it happens, near or far — be it a volcano on a distant island, a cyclone "Down Under" or a revolution just beyond our borders — is orchestrated by Hashem to remind us that it can happen here. It reminds us that we have the opportunity to avert those dangers through our *davening*, our learning and our *ma'asim tovim*.

Perhaps what is happening in the world today is also Hashem's way of showing us a preview of what's going to happen in the future. Dovid *HaMelech*, in the very second *perek* of *Tehillim*, describes the scene of the arrival of *Mashiach*. When we finally are worthy of the ultimate redemption, all the nations of the world will be in an uproar. Why are the nations of the world in an uproar? Why are they united against *Mashiach*?

And what does Dovid *HaMelech* say about it? "*Yosheiv baShamayim yischak*". He Who sits in Heaven laughs at them. Do they really believe that they can go against the will of Hashem?

In our days we have a preview of this kind of uproar, of what will be when *Mashiach* comes. And then, as now, we must always remember that Hashem is in control.

So things change. There are interesting things that happen in the world. Governments are not stable. The weather is uncertain. But one thing is constant. Today is *erev Rosh Chodesh* and we know every month that there will be the beginning of another month. And today, on *erev Rosh Chodesh*, as we reflect upon what is permanent in our lives, I would like to address one aspect. One thing that is very important in the life of every *ben yeshiva*, and in a broader sense, of every Jew.

Chaveirim Kol Yisrael

This past Shabbos we said the traditional *bircas hachodesh*. We said the *y'hi ratzon* asking Hashem to bless us with a good, healthy and prosperous month. And then when it came the time to announce when *Rosh Chodesh* will be — what did we say? "*Mi she'asa nissim l'avoseinu v'ga'al osam me'avdus l'cheirus*" — He who redeemed our ancestors and took them out of bondage — "*Hu yigal osanu b'karov*" — He will redeem us soon. "*V'yikabeitz galuseinu m'arba kanfos ha'aretz*" — He will gather us in from all four corners of the earth. And here, "*chaveirim kol Yisrael*". All Jews will live together as *chaveirim*, as friends. And then we can talk about *Rosh Chodesh*.

What is this concept of *chaveirim* — friendship and togetherness — that's mentioned in this *tefillah* for *Rosh*

Chodesh? In the simple meaning we know that we only know when *Rosh Chodesh* is nowadays because it says so on the calendar. The calendar that was established some fifteen, sixteen hundred years ago as a permanent calendar for determining the beginning and end of each month.

But before our People were dispersed, there was the Sanhedrin. And the Sanhedrin, each month, based on the testimony of witnesses who saw the new moon, would determine — would be *mekadesh* — the *Chodesh*. They would say, “This is the month, this is *Rosh Chodesh*”.

We look forward to the day when we no longer rely upon a calendar, but when we will have a Sanhedrin — we will have that High Court — to determine *Rosh Chodesh*. And that will only be, as we say in our *tefillah*, when Hashem brings us together from all four corners of the earth. *Chaverim kol Yisrael*, when all Jews are together, then we’ll be *zocheh to kiddush hachodesh*.

The Importance of Friendship

The term “*chaveirim*” is something for us to reflect upon. Not just the idea of *chaveirim* when all Jews are together and *chaveirim*, but also while we live in our own circumstances. It’s so important for us in the yeshiva setting to focus on. What does it mean to have a *chaver*? What is the idea of a friend?

We find in our sources how important our Sages considered the idea of friendship. And certainly for us, who live in such close quarters with one another as we learn *b’chavrusa with a chaver* and as we share rooms with friends and as we eat in the same dining room with friends. There is such an importance of the idea of friends in our lives. And most of us are learning now *Baba Basra* and we hear repeated again and again: “*l’cheverta chavra, u’lchavra chavercha chavra*” — your friend has a friend, and your friend’s friend has a friend. This is the *yesod*, the very basis of the concept of *chazaka* that we’re learning in *Chezkas HaBatim*. That you have a friend, and your friend has a friend, and a friend will reveal whether someone is protesting your claim to a field.

Chaver! The idea of friendship! So important is this in the life of every Jew, and certainly in our own lives. To the point that where Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, who had five *talmidim* — the greatest men of *Klal Yisrael* — challenged each one by asking, “*Eizeh derech yashara*”, which is the proper way, “*sh’yedabik bo adam*”, that a person should attach himself to? And each one of the five *Tana’im* gave his own prescription for what a man should look for. Rabbi Yehoshua said, “*chaver tov*”, a good friend. That’s how important it is, that is what he saw as the key to success in life, to success in happiness. To have a *chaver tov*.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Prachia, in *Pirkei Avos*, says, “*Asei l’cha rav*”. Of course you have to have a Rabbi. But also you need to “*K’neh l’cha chaver*”, to acquire a friend — even if it means buying. Again, we see the tremendous importance of having a *chaver*.

Choni Hama’ageil, Friendship or Death

Let’s see the extreme form of how our *Chazal* put a premium on the idea of friendship. There’s a famous story in the *gemara* in *Ta’anis* of Choni HaMa’ageil. Choni HaMa’ageil was a great *tzaddik*, and in his time when there was no rain there was no need for getting together and saying *va’aneinu* as we’ve been doing for the past few months here. Choni HaMa’ageil would make a circle around himself, stand in it and appeal to Hashem: “I’m not going to leave this circle until the rain comes down!”

And the *gemara* says that Choni HaMa’ageil, this great *tzaddik* who was able with his prayers to bring rain for his people, always wondered about the meaning of a *pasuk* in *Tehillim*. Dovid *HaMelech* reflects as he looks forward prophetically to what’s going to be when Jews are in Babylonian exile for 70 years before they’re able to make their return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Dovid *HaMelech* says, “*Shir Hama’alos, b’shuv Hashem es shivas Tzion hayinu k’cholmim*”, speaking for the nation for which those 70 years of exile were like a dream.

And the *gemara* asks in the name of Choni HaMa’ageil, “How can we understand that a man should dream for 70 years?” The *gemara* tells a story of what happened with Choni HaMa’ageil. One time he was traveling and he fell asleep, and somewhere around him things grew that obscured him from the view of all people, and he slept for 70 years.

He didn't realize that he had slept for that long. But he saw a tree, a tree which had been planted before he went to sleep. And he saw somebody picking carobs from that tree. And he asked him, "Are you the one who planted the tree?" Because the one who planted the tree told him that the tree won't bear fruit for 70 years. The fellow says, "No, that was my grandfather; this is 70 years later." And Choni HaMa'ageil realized that he had been sleeping for 70 years.

Fine, so what does he do now? Choni HaMa'ageil, says the *gemara*, comes to his home. He wants to meet his family and he wants to return to the *beis hamedrash* where he was the giant in Torah learning. He comes into the *beis hamedrash* and he hears the people struggling over a piece of *gemara* and there was a debate going on in a *sugya*. And they said, "Ah! We figured it out! We figured it out! It's as clear to us now as it was in the days of Choni HaMa'ageil! Because when Choni HaMa'ageil was alive he was able to clear up everything for us."

When Choni HaMa'ageil hears this he comes over to them and says, "Ha! You're talking about Choni HaMa'ageil? It's me!" But they laughed at him. "Choni HaMa'ageil disappeared 70 years ago! Who are you?" They didn't believe him, and they didn't relate to him. Nobody would talk with him. So he felt very bad and he went home. He arrived to his home to the same kind of reception. Nobody believes it's him.

Choni HaMa'ageil felt terrible. And then he said a phrase which must ring in our ears for all time. He said, "*Chevrusah o' misusa*." Friendship or death! And he appealed to Heaven to die. Because without friendship, without people that he can relate to, can talk to, can learn with — life is not worth living.

So Chazal have given us here a picture — whether it's the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua of *chaver tov* or whether it's Rabbi Yehoshua ben Prachia who said *knei l'cha chaver*. Or Choni HaMa'ageil who says "*chevrusah o' misusa*". We see how important the idea of friendship is.

But it's so important. What we have to then reflect on is why it's so important? And how do we know who is really called a friend? Rabbeinu Yona in his *perush* on Avos gives us a beautiful explanation of why it's so important to gain friendship.

Friendship, Important for Torah

First of all, Rabbeinu Yona says that friendship is important in regard to learning Torah. *Gedolei Tanna'im*, among them Rabbeinu HaKadosh, Rebbi, said, "*Harbei lamaditi m'raboisei*", I learned much from my teachers; "*u'mechaveirai*", my colleagues, I have learned more than from my teachers. Rabbeinu Yona says that we see from here how important a *chavrusah* is. How important *chaveirim* are — the ones that I'm in my *shiur* with, the ones I'm in the *beis hamedrash* with. *M'chaverai*, more than from a Rabbi! A Rabbi can give over his experience and his knowledge. But working the thing over together with a *chevrusah* can add much more — all of us know what it means to learn with a *chevrusah*. So first of all, friendship is important for the learning of Torah.

Friendship, Important for Yiras Shamayim

Secondly, says Rabbeinu Yona, it's important for *yiras Shamayim*. What does this mean? He explains: You have a friend. And sometimes, since we're only human, you have the temptation to "go to town". Or something else that's not a great idea, but there's a temptation. Now the friend, he's not a bigger *tzaddik* than you are — I'm quoting the words of Rabbeinu Yona. But he doesn't have that temptation right now. So he's going to say, "Ach! What do you want to go to town for? Come, let's go to the learning *sefer*, let's go to the *shiur*."

And the thing works vice-versa also. Sometimes the second fellow is "stronger" than the first and he will give the first fellow the encouragement and the support that he needs in a moment of weakness. So, in a sense, every *chaver* can be like — huh? Jiminy cricket. He can be your human conscience and keep you on the right *derech*. Very important point. Especially when sometimes we have a "down". Sometimes we can have a moment of weakness. And it's the *chaver* who then can be our pillar of support.

Friendship, Someone to Confide In

So far we have two reasons why friendship is so important. For Torah and for *yiras Shamayim*. And what's the third thing? Says the Rabbeinu Yona, the third important reason why you need a friend is for very simple human, social reasons. You need somebody to confide in. You want to talk something over. Sometimes the best advice in the world

you can get is from a good friend, because he knows your situation better than anyone else. He's experienced similar things. And you can trust him to keep the confidence.

Friendship, To Share in Simchas and in Sorrow

I would add to those three things of Rabbeinu Yona that friendship is so important in another aspect. You need someone for emotional reasons — to share in your *simchas*, to share in your sorrows. When I see fellows at a *chasunah* dancing with great *simcha* to bring joy to the *chosson* — that's friendship, sharing the *simcha*.

And when we had just the other week a *shloshim* memorial for a former *talmid*, for Aaron Tomlin *alav hashalom* — we all saw the empathy of the *talmidim* for someone who had passed away. And I felt it personally during the times when people came to comfort me in my time of mourning.

Friends are there for sharing joy, for sharing sorrow. Friends are there for sharing the anxiety of another Jew and trying to give him a supporting shoulder, and an encouraging word. Friendship is crucial for all of these reasons.

Who is a Friend?

But who is considered a friend? You've come across in your learning in Gemara an interesting phrase. *Chaver*. That term again — friend. We find it in regard to “*ein chaver motztei m'yado davar she'ino m'sukan*”. That we can rely on a *chaver* that he doesn't leave this world without taking care of what he has to take care of. In halacha we find that term of *chaver* when you're buying things from an *am ha'aretz*, from somebody who is not careful in the laws of *ma'aser*. So there's a law, halacha, of *demai* — of uncertainty whether it has been tithed or not. You can only rely on it if you buy from a *chaver*.

Talmidei Chachamim; True Friends, L'sheim Shamayim

The Rambam tells us who this *chaver* is we're talking about all the time. Listen to the words of the Rambam. The Rambam in *Mesechta Demai*. “*Chaver*”, says the Rambam, “*chaveirim* are *talmidei chachamim*”. Those who learn Torah, they are the ones who are called *chaveirim*.

And the Rambam says why. Why is it that title is given to *talmidei chachamim* — “*chaveirim*”? “*Ki chaveirasam ze l'ze chevrah ne'emana*”. If you want a reliable friendship — a friendship you can trust, you can count on, not a friendship of a fair-weather friend — that's only somebody who is a *talmid chacham*. And he concludes with the words, “*Ki hi chevrah l'sheim Shamayim*”, because the *talmid chacham* realizes friendship is for all of the reasons that the Rabbeinu Yona said. For Torah, for *yiras Shamayim*, for helping one another. When a person has friendship not for selfish reasons, but *l'shem Shamayim* — because he wants to gain from the friend for his learning, he wants to gain for his *yiras Shamayim*, he wants to gain for all of his development — then that's a friendship you can count on. And that's why a *talmid chacham* is called a *chaver*.

So now that we know how important a friendship is and that the true friend is the one whose friendship is based on his Torah, it's no wonder that anyone who has gone through yeshiva life will tell you that the friends that last for a lifetime are the ones that he learned together with. There's a very precious bond that's created with people who learn together.

Acquire a Friend, Be Tolerant

So that's why it's important to have friends. But how do we fulfill the words of the Pirkei Avos, *knei l'cha chaver* — acquire, buy, a friend? Again we turn to Rabbeinu Yona who explains the meaning of this. In a simple meaning it means that even if it costs you money and you have to spend money in order to gain somebody's friendship it's worthwhile because friendship is more important than money. But money is perhaps the easiest way of gaining a friend.

There's another way which is a little bit more difficult, but more meaningful. And that, says Rabbeinu Yona, is the

ability to tolerate the difference between you and another person. If you're learning together with someone and you have no patience to hear what he has to say, if you're living together with someone and you get upset by everything the person says that doesn't quite jibe with your own view of life — you're not going to have a friend. So *k'nei l'cha chaver* — acquire yourself a friend — means through patience, through tolerance, to be able to appreciate that people are not the same. We have different outlooks on things; we have different understandings of things. And I don't always have to have a monopoly on the truth. I have to listen to what somebody else says. I don't have to necessarily agree, but I have to listen. And I have to have that kind of appreciation of the other person's wisdom, the other person's sincerity.

So that's *k'nei l'cha chaver*. You want to acquire a friend? Learn how to be patient, learn how to be tolerant. And that's when Rabbi Yehoshua says to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai — that what a person should look for in life that is going to be a key to his success is a *chaver tov*. It doesn't mean only to look for a good friend. But it also means to learn how to be a good friend. You want a good friend? Learn how to be one. Learn how to empathize with the pain of another person.

Ba'alei Mussar make so much of a big deal out of that idea, of being *mishtateif b'tzaar shel chaveiro, nosei b'ol shel chaveiro* — to be able to share the burden of another person. Not to be indifferent to the things that are bothering him. Be a *chaver tov* and then you will have a *chaver tov*.

Your Friend In Heaven

We shouldn't think that the idea of friendship is only in regard to the human relationship of *bein adam l'chaveiro*. There's another *gemara* which teaches us that we can use the idea of appreciating friendship — what friendship means — as a springboard towards having a special relationship with Hashem.

The *gemara* tells us in *Mesechta Shabbos*: There was a non-Jew who came before Shammai the *Tana*. And he says I want to convert. But I want a quickie conversion. I'm ready to become a Jew but you've got to teach me the entire Torah while I'm standing on one foot. Shammai had no patience for somebody with such a request, and he told him to get out.

Then he came before Hillel and said the same thing: Teach me the Torah while I'm standing on one foot. Hillel agreed to convert him. You want to learn Torah on one foot? Says Hillel, "*ma d'alach sanei, l'chavracha lo s'aved*". You want to know the whole Torah in a nutshell? What's hateful to you, don't do it to the other guy. That's it. "*Zu hi kol HaTorah*", this is the entire Torah. "*V'idach*", everything else, "*perusha*", is only elaboration on it. Now go and learn.

Strange answer that Hillel gave. You want to know the entire Torah condensed? What's hateful to you, don't do it to the other person. Which is the flip-side of *v'ahavta l're'acha k'mocha*, love the other person like yourself. But the question that arises here is: How in the world does that motto of "Don't do to the other guy what you don't want done to you" cover the entire Torah? I can understand that it should work in regard to a mitzvah like "Don't steal" because you don't want the other person to steal from you. Don't murder, you don't want to get killed. So for all of the negative things, for all of the *la'avim*, it would seem to be very appropriate. But how does it work for the entire Torah? How is a person going to understand why you've got to keep Shabbos or wear *tefillin* or *tzitzis* because of "What's hateful to you, don't do it to the other person"?

Rashi's explanation of that *gemara* is very interesting. On the surface it seems that what Hillel was saying was, "Don't do to your human friend what you don't want done to you". No. Rashi says that Hillel was referring to another kind of friend. Shlomo *Hamelech* in *Mishlei* refers to Hashem as *re'acha v're'a avicha* — Hashem is your Friend and the Friend of your father. He's an "old family Friend". *Chazal* tell us, "Don't abandon an old family Friend", says Shlomo *Hamelech*.

So if the meaning of *re'acha* here is referring to your Friend in Heaven, listen to the words of Rashi. "*Al ta'avov al d'varav*", don't go against anything that your Friend in Heaven has commanded you — positive or negative. *Mitzvahs ase* or *mitzvahs lo sa'asei*. Why? Because "*sanoi sh'ya'avov chavercha al d'varecha*". How do you relate to a human friend? How do you relate to a friend that you trust in and want his welfare, and then you ask something of him and he betrays you? Can you think of anything worse than that? Try to think of it in your human terms. You're my friend! How could you do that to me! You may be familiar with your literature, "the unkindest cut of all" — that stabbing in the back that comes from a friend who defies what you said to him, what you trusted in him.

So this is what Hillel said to this *ger*. The way you relate to a human friend whom you trusted in, who you meant

only good for him and you were his best friend — and he should go against what you asked of him? How could you do it to your Friend in Heaven? How could you do it to Hashem?

So *Chazal* have given us a beautiful idea of how a person can use the proper approach of friendship on a human level — how he can translate that into the right relationship to Hashem. I want a good friend? I want a friend to trust in me? I want a friend that if I ask of him something — and I'm asking it for his benefit — that he should at least believe me and do it.

And when Hashem, your Friend in Heaven, your “old family Friend”, is asking something of you for *your* good — and you turn around and defy Him? How could you possibly do that? What's hateful to you, how could you possibly do that to your Friend, Hashem?

Summary

So these are concepts for us to reflect upon concerning the idea of friendship. To be more careful in our relationship with one another. To realize the wonderful opportunity that we have to be able to learn with a *chavrusah*, to be able to learn with *chaverim* in a *shiur* or in a *beis hamedrash*. And to be able to have that kind of tolerance and patience that the Rabbeinu Yona speaks of. To be able to live together in that kind of harmony. That is what is expected of a person who wants to have a good friend, and who himself is a good friend. And that's the kind of friendship that Hashem wants to see — especially among *b'nei Torah*, especially people who are learning together. We should feel for one another, we should try in every way that we can to help one another. To share in their joys. To share in their moments of anxiety. To always give a helping hand.

And when Jews will develop that kind of harmony within themselves, that kind of friendship — we can look forward to the day when that *tefillah* which we said this past Shabbos will be fulfilled. That Hashem will bring together all Jews—“*chaverim kol Yisrael*”. *V'nomar “amein”*.

*Based on a transcription of a lecture given in the Ohr Somayach Beis Hamedrash.
Transcribed by Elyah Leboff - Prepared for publication by Rabbi Moshe Newman.*



The Roshei HaYeshiva with Ohr Somayach's founding president Mr. Joseph Tanenbaum, o.b.m.

Talmudic Insights into Chanukah

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

The basic mitzvah of Chanukah is to celebrate “the miracle that happened then,” by lighting the *chanukia* for eight days. Interestingly enough, though, there is a dispute in the Talmud between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel whether to increase the number of candles each day from one to eight, or to start with eight and remove a candle each day for eight days. Although the definitive Halacha rules according to Beit Hillel, who argues that we add a candle each day, it is worthwhile to look at the dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel for the many insights into Chanukah that it brings to light.

Beit Shammai’s rationale for going downward relates to the *parim*, the bulls, offered as sacrifices on Succot in the Temple, which were offered in descending order from 13 to 7 on each of the 7 days of Succot totaling 70 bulls in all, corresponding to the 70 Nations of the world. There are two dimensions to the *parim*. One dimension is that we have a concern for the material and spiritual well-being of the entire world. (The Talmud tells us that the 70 Nations of the world are in a perpetual state of decline). When we offer sacrifices, we unlock an energy which brings blessings from Heaven for the entire world. (If the Babylonians and the Romans who each destroyed the Temples in their own time had understood what was being achieved for them with the sacrifices, they would have come with guards to protect the Temple rather than come to destroy it). Therefore, this is an expression of concern for the entire world, because, without the energy created by our sacrifices, the world is in a state of decline. The second dimension of the *parim* sacrifices is to infuse a special nationalistic energy into the Jewish People to remember that they are an elite corps chosen by G-d to be a light unto the Nations, so as to inspire them, and to strengthen their resistance to the negative corrupting pagan influences of the 70 Nations, expressed in the declining pattern of the sacrifices. Thus, lighting the *chanukia* in descending order would symbolize the decreasing effect that entropy has on the world and the decreasing influence that the 70 Nations have on the Jews.

Unfortunately, the 70 Nations of the world did not understand the nature of the sacrifices in the Temple. As such, the Jewish People have suffered countless pogroms throughout the ages and the destruction of two Holy Temples. Although the Greeks did not actually destroy our Temple, they contaminated it. Chanukah celebrates the return of holiness to the Temple after the contamination of the Greeks. Hence, Beit Hillel argues that since holiness was returned to the Temple, and since we move upward in matters of *kedusha*, (holiness), then we should light in ascending order to illustrate this increase in *kedusha*.

Chanukah took place in during the Hellenistic oppression called *golus Yavan*. This third exile lasted 180 years, and was dubbed the exile of darkness because the Greeks made every effort to make Jews see and understand the world in a way which was alien to the Torah. Darkness, because nothing is as dark as the enslavement of the human mind. The *golus Yavan* is always referred to as darkness because it took away the light of Torah.

Darkness is the absence of light. Things that are negative we call darkness. They are the opposite of good. Evil is darkness. But you can combat Evil in the world. You can attack it by fighting whatever is wrong in the world; or, you can create such a tremendous light where you are that the darkness just fades away. Chanukah expresses the victory of light over darkness. But the question lies in what strategy is most successful: to burn away and destroy Evil; or, to create a greater light so that the darkness just vanishes?

Look closely at the nature of a flame. It has two very distinct properties: it can burn, and it can illuminate. In combating Evil in the world, do we destroy it, do we burn it, or do we illuminate Torah creating a greater light in the world to dissipate the darkness? This is the nature of the *machlokes*, (dispute), between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. Both methods are valid, but what is supposed to be the main thrust of a Jew, what is to be learned from what happened in Chanukah?

Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel are both agreed on the purpose of kindling the *chanukia*. It is to rekindle in ourselves the light of the triumph over darkness. And they both agree that the number of candles should be different each night to signify that each day of the miracle is unique. But its uniqueness can be expressed either by adding or subtracting a candle each day. Beit Shammai learns that when we fight the negative corrupting aspects of the prevalent pagan world-culture either through sacrifices, (or prayer when we have no Temple) we are steadily wiping out their influence on us,

which is reflected in the decreasing pattern of the *parim* sacrifices on Succot . Thus, we should light the *chanukia* in the same way: starting with eight and reducing the number of candles each night. In this way, the burning quality of the flame symbolizes the diminishing effect that the negative forces of the world have on us, the destruction of Greek paganism, and ultimately the destruction of Evil in the Universe.

On the other hand, Beit Hillel sees the battle against immorality in the world not as a confrontation, but rather as an important reason to raise ourselves spiritually, to become the embodiment of morality in the world by living according to Torah principles. This way, the entire world would see us and want to imitate us. So, says Beit Hillel, the more successful method of wiping out darkness is by increasing the illumination of Torah everywhere, not by burning away Evil, but rather by increasing our light as a Torah Nation. For this reason we increase the number of candles each night to remind ourselves of our responsibility, as Jews, to steadily increase the light of Torah knowledge and understanding in the world; banishing the darkness of Evil by becoming a light unto the Nations.

When Moshiach comes, all the Nations of the world are going to realize that whatever they did in the world - succeeding in enriching themselves, building a world military-power, making scientific discoveries, becoming an economic-power - the point of it all had to do with what impact it would have on the Jews. We're supposed to be "A Light Unto The Nations." That's our own particular G-d given role in the world. That's what light is all about. When we perform as light, when we do something about bringing the light of Torah into the world, that's when there is light! And when there isn't, when we aren't learning Torah or performing *mitzvos*, when we assimilate, G-d sends us the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the crusaders and the pogromists, Enlightenment and Emancipation, and the Western World, and all the other threats that happened throughout history. They are sent to stimulate us, to wake us up, and to arouse us back to our original purpose.

If we are going to forget our purpose, and if we are going to try to become the 71st Nation of the world, then G-d will stop us. He won't tolerate that. We can't be a 71st Nation because then the entire world will surely sink into the morass of immorality and corruption. There has to be at least one Nation that is pulling everybody up and not copping out of its responsibility. And if we don't do this, then somebody is going to come around and remind us that we're Jews and that we have this responsibility. Why do you think that all the attempts of Jews to become the 71st Nation - to assimilate - have failed? And don't think that they haven't tried hard enough. Jews have tried, oh how Jews have tried in our time, perhaps harder than at any other time in history. There has been an attempt by Jews to disguise themselves or to forget their Jewishness and to just blend into the melting pot, to just blend in with the rest of the world. You know why it has failed? It has failed for one very simple reason: "You can change your Moses, but you can't change your noses." Meaning, you can say all the protestations you want about what you believe, and you can try to dress like them, eat their food, sing their songs, speak their language, and do everything like them, but there is always going to be somebody who will recognize some feature of your Jewishness, and he is going to be the one who reminds you. That is his purpose. G-d sends them to shake us back into a realization of what we're all about and that we can never be part of those 70 Nations because we have a unique role to play in the world.

In the end of days our Sages tell us that there is going to be a world trial, like a post-trial, except that there is going to be only one judge: The One Judge; G-d. And G-d will ask the 70 Nations: "What did you do to promote Torah in this world?" And the Talmud says that all the Nations will come forward with their new understanding of world history, and they will try to take credit for having enabled Jews to learn Torah by providing them with such necessities as marketplaces, roads, bridges, and bathhouses. But G-d will reject their claim telling them: "Although your achievements did actually benefit the people of the Torah, it was only because My Divine Plan of World History put you in a position to do so; but, in fact, your motivations were purely selfish ones: either for economic exploitation or physical gratification." In a broader sense, throughout history, the persecution of Jews, although motivated by primitive anti-Semitism, has also been part of The Divine Plan for reminding Jews of their special mission in this world.

Hence when we are lighting our *chanukia* this year, we should have in mind that, in our encounter with "darkness", we don't want to use the flame to burn and destroy the world. Rather, we want to use it to illuminate the whole world with Torah. We want to light the way for all the Nations so that they can prosper materially and spiritually. The prescription for overcoming "darkness" in our time is the same as it was in the time of the Hellenistic oppression: by increasing our light. If we increase our learning, and if we increase our holiness, then we will truly be "A Light Unto The Nations." Happy Chanukah!

*This essay is an adaptation of Rav Mendel Weinbach's lecture "Talmudic Insights into Chanukah."
The original lecture is available from the Audio Library at Ohr Somayach - www.audio.ohr.edu.*

Mine are the eyes of BAR YOCHAI

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

The accompanying poem, “Mine Are the Eyes of Bar Yochai,” recalls the Talmudic account of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who hid in a cave from the Romans after the Bar Kochba rebellion was crushed in the second century CE. For 12 years, Rabbi Shimon and his son Rabbi Elazar lived off the fruit of a carob tree while studying Torah together and, according to popular tradition, developing the Zohar, the major work of Jewish mysticism. When the danger of Roman retribution had passed, the two emerged from their cave to find a world of men engaged in plowing, planting and reaping.

“How can men thus forsake eternal life to indulge themselves in a transient one?” shouted Rabbi Shimon when he realized that his fellow Jews were not continuously occupied in Torah study. A Heavenly voice answered: “Have you come out to destroy my world? Return to your cave!”

Another year passed, and the two once again emerged from the cave. This time Rabbi Shimon was ready to accept the ways of men, but his son was not. “It is sufficient for the world,” Rabbi Shimon pleaded, “that the two of us study Torah without interruption.” But Rabbi Elazar remained unconvinced. Until one Friday afternoon, just before the sunset was to usher in the Sabbath. They saw an old man running home, his arms clutching two bunches of myrtle blossoms. “What are these for?” they asked him. “In honor of the Sabbath.” “Isn’t one sufficient?” “One of them,” the old man explained, “is for the Heavenly command of Zachor, ‘remember’ the Sabbath to keep it holy; the other is for the second command, Shamor, ‘observe’ the Sabbath by ceasing from all creative labor.”

“See how much love the Jews have for their commandments!” Rabbi Shimon exclaimed, and at last his son was reconciled. (*Tractate Shabbat 33*)



Elsewhere, the Talmud notes that Rabbi Shimon, whose total immersion in Torah study even exempted him from the requirement of regular prayers, once disputed the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael, who believed that man could combine the study of Torah with a worldly occupation. Rabbi Shimon asked: “If a man plows in the plowing season, sows in the sowing season, reaps in the reaping season, threshes in the threshing season and winnows in the season of wind, what is to become of the Torah? But, when Israel performs the will of God, their work is performed by others” ... Said Abaye: “Many have followed the advice of Rabbi Yishmael and it has worked well; others have followed Rabbi Shimon and it has not been successful.” (*Tractate Berachot 35*)

*Mine are the eyes of Bar Yochai
They see about them
Yet look beyond*

*They see
A landscape of men serving the Earth
Which bore them to be its masters
And heirs on that day when all landscapes
Will fade into a patient horizon*

*They look
At these toilers as condemned murderers of
Time, vengefully strangled by the hands
Of a clock whose tireless ticking drowns out
The sweet murmur of eternity*

*Mine are the eyes of Bar Yochai
They see men
Yet seek angels*

*They see
An ancient rushing toward a sunset
Which lies on weary Earth like
A comforting blanket to be clutched
When weekday nightmare ends*

*They look
At the blossoms in that yearning grip
The twin symbols of a frail beauty
That only blooms till another sunset and
Fading, leaves a fragrance for lesser days*

*Mine are the eyes of Bar Yochai
They see foothills
Yet seek mountains*

*They see
Men who are able to find their God
Whispering to him their prayer of perfect faith
In a sublime thought or gesture of kindness
Which paints his portrait on Earthly canvas*

*They seek
The perfect image of his glory which only
His wisdom and word project on a screen
For mind alone to see - and seeing, finds
Dimensions long outlined by heart*

*Mine are the eyes of Bar Yochai
They see earth
Yet seek heaven*

*They see
Men stumbling, as they climb
My royal road to perfection
Forced to admit the reality
Of a world that is but illusion*

*They seek
Those few who lose not heart
Who know that the Levite gift
Of freedom from Earthly needs
Is due each true servant of God*

*Mine are the eyes of Bar Yochai
They set history
Yet seek eternity*



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