

A
MALACH
IN OUR
MIDST

THE LEGACY OF A
TREASURED REBBI

**HARAV MOSHEH
TWERSKY**

ה' יקום דמו

BY A TALMID
RABBI YEHOSHUA BERMAN

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PREFACE

IT WAS NOT AN easy decision to write this book. Rav Mosheh Twersky — our Rebbi — was such a private, humble person that I could not help but question if a biography would give him *nachas ruach*. An incident comes to mind, just one tiny illustration of how Rav Twersky found it viscerally painful to receive honor. Rav Twersky slept in the yeshivah for Yom Kippur. Boys of a particular room would find other accommodations and make their room available for their Rebbi. One year, on Erev Yom Kippur, Rav Twersky was ushered into the room. Like all the *talmidim*, the occupants of the room revered and adored their Rebbi. In fact, they had a beautiful, framed portrait of him perched on the desk — which they neglected to remove before Rav Twersky arrived. As he walked into the room and saw the big picture of himself, he groaned, “*Oy vey! Oy vey!*” The picture was swiftly removed.

Had Rav Twersky written a *tzavaah*, it is almost a given that he would have forbidden anyone to eulogize him. At all. Attention, honor, and praise were an anathema to him.

So why did I do it? What imperative pushed me to put words onto paper and highlight Rebbi’s greatness to the world?

The answer is — first of all — that I didn’t do this alone. Chazal tell us that husband and wife are one unit — two halves

of the same whole.¹ They further tell us that when a man dies, the one to whom he is truly lost is his wife.² I therefore decided that the one person in the world who is both entitled and qualified to make that call is Rebbetzin Bashy Twersky, may she live and be well.

Although she was hesitant when I first broached the idea, in the end, the Rebbetzin's approval and support was both unequivocal and enthusiastic. And that support translated into action. In addition to taking of her time to provide me with a formal interview and generously sharing with me the wealth of history, insights, and stories about her great husband, she also made time to speak with me on the phone whenever there was a point I felt required further clarification or a new facet that had as of yet not been discussed. In addition, Rebbetzin Twersky provided me with access to important photographs and documents vital to this book. She also facilitated my interviews with other significant members of the family.

I will forever be deeply indebted to her not only for helping me so much to make this dream a reality, but perhaps even more so for investing her trust in me to undertake this seminal task.

But what about the fact that Rebbi would so obviously never have wanted his actions brought into the public eye? The answer to that question, I think, is that the situation changed. Drastically. In his prime, he was suddenly and violently torn away from us. The trauma of his murder — together with his fellow *Kedoshim* — sent massive shockwaves through the entire Jewish world. His family and *talmidim* reeled in agony.

As intense as Rebbi's humility was, his care for others was

1. *Yevamos* 63a; *Zohar Vayikra* 7b.

2. *Sanhedrin* 22b.

just as strong. Perhaps even greater. That being the case, I think it is safe to say that were he to be here now, he most probably would tell us, “If this is what you need as a comfort, then go right ahead.”

It is, so we did. I say *we* because the Rebbetzin, her family, the *talmidim*, and everyone else who contributed to this project were an indispensable part of it.



Chazal tell us that *kavod haTorah* is one of the highest values.³ Furthermore, Chazal also discuss the very serious, specific obligation to eulogize a *talmid chacham* after his passing.⁴ Publishing a book that highlights and pays tribute to the wonderful accomplishments, contributions, and qualities of a great Torah personality is an important fulfillment of that mandate.

Reading about great people affords an opportunity to learn from their example and do our best to strive for the perfection they embodied — as best we can and as suits our level. As the Ramchal writes, “One should ponder what it is about the early ones, the fathers of the world [... and all the great ones before us], that caused HaKadosh Baruch Hu to desire them so much... and he should identify what is good for a person to do his whole life, and he will also do it, and it will be good for him.”⁵

Beyond that, there is another, crucial element to this genre of Torah literature.

There are times when we are at our best, and times when we

3. *Megillah* 3b.

4. *Shabbos* 105b.

5. *Derech Eitz HaChaim*.

are not quite so. Consider a family leafing through a wedding album a couple of years after the *chasunah* took place. One of the brothers exclaims, “What has gotten into me?! I look great in that picture... why do I let my beard grow so scraggly? And how do I walk around now with such a beat-up hat?”

Something’s wrong with such a reaction. Not that it is incorrect, per se, just that it’s out of place. It is intuitive that looking at a wedding album is not a time for self-criticism or recrimination. It’s a time to simply experience pleasure and joy in seeing how wonderful and beautiful we are when we’re at our best.

Gedolei Yisrael are *Klal Yisrael* at its best.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that the highest levels of *avodas Hashem* are not usually reached by the general populace. Through the merit of those singularly unique individuals who do attain the pinnacles of devotion, the entire nation is uplifted;⁶ for, ultimately, we are all one.

Rav Yaakov Weinberg, *zt”l*, once posed the following question: Who needs prophets more: our generation, or the generations of yore? Of course, the answer is our generation! So then why doesn’t Hashem give us prophets? The answer, explained Rav Weinberg, is that a *navi* does not exist in a vacuum. A *navi* has to be produced by *Klal Yisrael*. The generation has to be on a sufficiently high spiritual level to bring about a *navi* from its midst.

What this underscores is that the greats of each generation are the highest-end product of that generation. *Klal Yisrael* is as one unified body,⁷ and the great ones among us manifest the most wonderful part of us. Our *Gedolei Torah* are us at our best.

6. Chapter 13.

7. *Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4 with commentary of *Korban HaEidah*.

Reading biographies of *Gedolei Yisrael*, then, is an opportunity to gaze upon the finest, most spiritually developed aspect of *Klal Yisrael*. It is to become infused with an invigorating and empowering sense of “*Mi k’amcha Yisrael!*” Look how special we are — we had such great people among us, in our generation! Reading about *Gedolei Yisrael*, despite the acute pain of the loss, is an uplifting experience that is borne of the joy and pleasure that one derives from perceiving oneself — within the context of being an inextricable part of the *Klal* — at one’s best. And it is that very joy that brings the pain of the loss into such acute focus. As contradictory as they may seem — the joy and the pain — their coexistence is the reality we live with and grow from.



Trying to capture the full depiction of a great Torah personality is an impossible task. A *gadol b’Torah* contains expansive worlds of depth, dimensions, and majesty that remain the private domain of his heart, known only to the One before whom he toils. If this creates a difficulty in writing a biography in general, it is intensified in the case of Rav Mosheh Twersky. Not only was Rav Twersky naturally shy and private, he actively avoided the public (and even private) eye — and was eminently successful in doing so. The thought that a book could properly paint a full, clear portrait of him is preposterous.

Compounding this conundrum is the intrinsic nature of this work. A biography is not merely a collection of assorted stories, anecdotes, sayings, and observations. It is an attempt to organize, categorize, and give definition and dimension to the collection, so as to emerge with a living sense of the subject. It requires a depth that enables the reader to feel as though he

actually knew this person. That necessitates a heavy degree of built-in commentary and impressions on the part of the writer. A biographer, by necessity, is forced, to a great extent, to filter all the pieces of information through the subjective prism of his own understanding in order to present a cohesive picture.

Indeed, when reading biographical works, the discerning mind will often feel a sense of restrained yet persistent frustration as he tries to differentiate facts from commentary. For every story, there is a context and an interpretation. All too often, a biographer, by dint of his intense desire to produce a fully lucid, educational, and enjoyable product, can fall into the trap of blurring the demarcating lines between the basic facts and his own commentary. Even something as seemingly innocuous as into which chapter a particular story or statement was inserted, is inescapably a heavy act of commentary! Just the title of the chapter — and how much more so of the whole book — necessarily carries volumes of commentary.

Misrepresentation, then, is a very real and present danger. First and foremost, of course, is the cold, hard fact that the writer's understanding — and thus commentary (implied or explicit) — may be incorrect. Beyond that, though, is the added factor of artificial constriction. Great people are, by dint of their greatness, multi-dimensional. What may seem to the onlooker as a simple, straightforward act or statement — in still black-and-white — may in fact contain within it a full-color, motion picture. Within any given action, word, or experience of a great Torah personality can exist layers upon layers of significance, meaning, and implication.⁸ Not for naught did Chazal tell us that

8. As Chazal say, even the mundane conversation of a *talmid chacham* deserves close study (*Sukkah* 21b; *Avodah Zarah* 19b).

it takes forty years for a *talmid* to plumb the depths of his Rebbi's mind.⁹ Biographical sketches can strip away those innumerable reverberations of depth; leaving but a thin membrane of superficial meaning.

Therefore, it would be foolhardy to approach such work without a sense of trepidation. And, at this juncture, I would like to make a personal confession. Upon assuming this task, my assumption was that I had a solid grasp of who my Rebbi was, and I had but to fill in the blanks. Roughly one month into the writing, though, I began to realize what a foolish assumption I had made.

As I gathered, sorted, and filtered the innumerable stories, impressions, and reflections of *talmidim*, family, and friends, I began to notice that I was encountering entirely new dimensions of my Rebbi's personality of which I had not previously been aware. This held true even regarding *divrei Torah* that I heard from him personally or first-hand experiences. Through my work of trying to understand and synthesize it all, I had begun to recognize a greatness and profundity of my Rebbi of which I had heretofore been thoroughly unaware.

This heightened awareness did not slowly seep in. It hit me with an astounding force! So many times — and I really mean so many times — I would exclaim out loud as I sat in solitude before my computer screen. Perhaps just as often, I would find myself laughing in incredulousness that Rebbi could fit so much into so little.

And sometimes I cried.

There were even times when I felt a sense of despair. I remember one such occasion. I was reviewing the eulogies that

9. *Avodah Zarah* 5b.

had been delivered by Rav Moshe Wolpin, Rav Chaim Ilson, and Rav Nachum Baumol. I had attended part of that evening's live presentations, and had not emerged with any particular sense of significantly heightened awareness. Six months later, as I listened to those speeches in the privacy of my workroom with the alert, discerning ear and ready pen of a writer, I was summarily blown away.

Each one of those great men dwelled and expounded on a completely independent facet of Rav Twersky's character and accomplishments. And each speech was filled with a depth of content and breadth of grandeur so intense that I simply could not have imagined possible. It was such an arresting experience that I could not help but feel, "Yehoshua, forget it. What's the point?! This is an impossible task. You've gotten in way over your head." With Hashem's help, I did manage to forge ahead, but with an ever-greater sensitivity to the inevitable paucity of whatever would be the final outcome of my endeavor.

This, then, is both my confession and my plea. As you read this book, don't lose sight of the fact that whatever portrait it paints of Rav Twersky is but a semblance and mere taste of who and what he was. Recognize that the synthesis and presentation is but that of just one of his *talmidim* whose exposure and connection to his Rebbe was far less than many, many others. Please, do not allow yourself to become limited to the understanding with which I identified, organized, and put together all the information. Appreciate it as the overarching and collective impressions of but one *talmid* who took the time and effort to do his best to capture a sense of his great Rebbe within the time allotted and the resources available to him. It's no more than that. I am convinced that were I to spend years and years on such a work, I would never cease to discover new insights, dimensions

of greatness, and depth of meaning and character; in addition, of course, to new pieces of information.

So, as you read this book, question in your mind whether my choice of title for a particular chapter makes sense. Question in your mind whether my particular placement of a story or statement or *dvar Torah* makes sense. Contemplate every single piece of information that this book contains and decide how best to understand and define it. Work hard at discerning the *maaseh* from the *peirush hamaaseh*, and don't let my own understanding limit you. Distill each anecdote, expression, and thought down to its basic, factual report, and weigh and assess it on the scales of your own mind.

I hope and pray to the *Ribbono shel Olam* that my arduous effort was not in vain; that the semblance that I did manage to capture and convey is accurate and true to whom my Rebbi was. I pray that this book will inspire the hearts of readers to an ever-deepening sense of our uniqueness as Hashem's chosen nation, and that it will thus be a source of *aliyah* and *nachas* to my Rebbi in *Shamayim*.

25 CHESHVAN 5775 / כ"ה חשוון תשע"ה

IT WAS A MORNING like any other. Alarm clocks went off, men left for shul and returned to help get their kids off to school. Women adeptly hurried through their myriad morning tasks. Children spilled breakfast cereal.

But it was anything but a normal morning. News spread: a terrorist attack. Living in a country where such reports are a painful, painful part of everyday reality, many of us become calloused and desensitized. Maybe it's a survival technique, pulling us away from the tragedy.

But this time was different. Heaven have mercy on us that we need "different" tragedies to wake us up.

The reports began to filter through. A pall of intense, suffocating sadness gripped the Jewish world. The unthinkable had



The shul where the attack took place. The right seat of the third bench from the rear, on the left side, was Rav Twersky's makom kavu'ah.

happened. Two gun- and hatchet-wielding monsters had made their way into Kehillas Bnei Torah of Har Nof. In the middle of *davening*. There, they had perpetrated a horrific attack.

Scenes we thought belonged to a distant, bedeviled past, suddenly assaulted our senses. The twenty-fifth of Cheshvan became a bitter, bitter day for all of world Jewry, and in particular for the loved ones of the five *Kedoshim*: HaKadosh Rav Kalman Levine, HaKadosh R' Avraham Shmuel Goldberg, HaKadosh R' Aryeh Kupinsky, HaKadosh R' Yechiel Rothman, and Moriv' Rabi HaGaon HaKadosh Rav Mosheh Twersky.

Five precious Jews, killed simply because they were Jews who represented what being a Jew is all about. Their final moment of *kiddush Hashem*¹ was clearly not only for themselves, but was on

1. See *Teshuvos Maharil*, response 99, where he refers to those who were killed in “*gezeiras Prague*” as *kedoshei elyon*. The Maharil was born circa 5120 (1360), and he succeeded his father as Rav of Mainz in 5147 (1387). *Seder HaDoros* (Volume I) records how, two years later, the following occurred in Prague: “Hooligans gathered on Isru Chag of Pesach in 5149, and they attacked the People of Hashem with swords and axes, murdered them in the streets, burned down their homes, and pulled their dead out of their graves... This took place during the days of Wenceslaus [IV] King of Bohemia, and there was no fear of the monarchy [at that time]; rather, every man would do as he pleased.” Insofar as the pogrom of 1389 is the only massacre of Jews in Prague on historical record during the Maharil’s lifetime (it is mentioned in many historical sources and is known as one of the worst pogroms during the Medieval time period — 3,000 Jews were murdered), it is almost certain that this is the event he was referring to as “*gezeiras Prague*.” (Some timelines indicate that there was a stake burning in Prague in 1400, but I could not find a definitive source for that claim. In addition, and more significantly, the *Seder HaDoros* makes no mention of such a tragedy, which is a very strong indication that it is nowhere to be found in the writings of the Rishonim who lived during that time.) As such, this statement of the Maharil is a very strong source for the universally accepted institution of conferring the status of *Kedoshim* to those who are killed because they are Jews.



Rav Kalman Levine



R' Avraham Goldberg



R' Aryeh Kupinsky



*Rabbi Chaim Yechiel
Rothman*



Rav Moshe Twersky

behalf of Klal Yisrael as a whole. Although even they cannot imagine the pain and trauma of the Twersky family, *talmidim* of Rav Twersky acutely felt the tragic and violent loss of their beloved, awe-inspiring Rebbe. It was terribly difficult to absorb the fact that he was gone.

Throughout the *shivah*, the Twersky home was flooded with family, friends, neighbors, *talmidim* of Yeshivas Toras Moshe, students of Hadar Seminary, and endless scores of Jews wanting to come and pay their respects and offer the traditional words of comfort.



Bereft talmidim

Many people could not help but be struck by the irony that, though they

had come to comfort, they were comforted by coming. The fortitude of the Twersky family in accepting this very difficult expression of *middas hadin* was incredible. Again and again, the Rebbetzin spoke to the crowds that flooded her home, telling them that her great husband's death was his final act of *kiddush Hashem*.

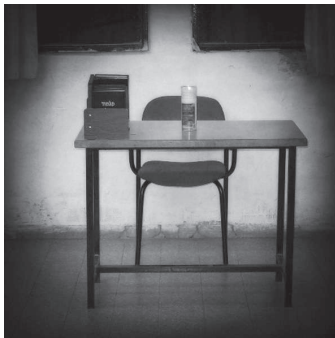


Bitter news, levayah poster

Kiddush Hashem is a topic that was very near and dear to Rav Twersky's heart. He discussed it often, on various occasions. In *shiurim* he would clarify its parameters, and would emphasize that it is a mitzvah a Jew must be prepared for at any moment.

The Gemara says that when the Romans were combing the flesh of Rabi Akiva, he was reciting *Shema*. His students asked in wonderment, "*Rebbi, ad kan?*" He responded: "My whole life

I suffered with the thought, 'when will this mitzvah come to my hand so that I may uphold it,' and now should I not uphold it?!" The general understanding of this exchange is that Rabbi Akiva's *talmidim* were expressing their wonderment at their Rebbi's ability to display such unwavering fortitude. *Ad kan*, even to this extreme extent you are able to say *Shema* and not cry out in grief? And Rabbi Akiva's response was, yes, because I've thought about this my whole life.



Rav Twersky's empty place in his shiur room following the tragic petirah

The importance of preparing for challenges was a message Rav Twersky often emphasized. Reb Avrohom Rudner shared, "I recall that he once spoke to us about the importance of accepting to give up one's life *al kiddush Hashem* when one says *Shema*.

He told us about a *bachur* who was killed by an Arab, who said *Shema* as he was dying. The Rebbeh said in the name of that *bachur's rosh yeshivah* that he was able to do so because when he said *Shema* on a regular day, he kept the mitzvah of *mesiras nefesh* in mind. That's how, when it came to actuality, he was already prepared."

When rockets were being shot as far as Yerushalayim, many questioned what to do if a siren sounded in the middle of *davening Shemoneh Esrei*. Certainly, as in any question of such gravity, there are differing opinions.

Basing himself on the conduct his own Rebbi, Rav Yisrael Elya Weintraub, Rav Twersky adopted this outlook: "Either way you look at it, it doesn't make sense to interrupt your *Shemoneh Esrei*. If the rocket doesn't fall where you are, then you interrupted your *Shemoneh Esrei* for nothing; and if it does fall where you are, what better way to die than in the middle of *Shemoneh Esrei*!" One cannot help but hear in these words an echo of the Gemara (*Shabbos* 118b): "Said Rabi Yosi, let my lot be among those who die on their way to do a mitzvah."²



HaKadosh

2. Of course, as in any area of halachah, one may not extrapolate from one case to the next without having a solid understanding of the fundamental principles at work. A number of *talmidim* heard statements from Rav Twersky that made it clear that his proclamation was based on an underlying assumption that a siren wailing does not truly constitute a life-threatening situation for any given individual. A *talmid* was once learning with Rav Twersky when a siren wailed. Rav Twersky put his head down for a moment or two, then looked up and said, "The statistical probability of it landing here is practically zero." Obviously, Rav Twersky was acutely aware of the *halachos* governing the rules of safety. He would not make light of that mitzvah, *chalilah*; just as he never, in his entire life, made light of any mitzvah. As always, his words and actions

Just as living a life of *kiddush Hashem* defined Rav Twersky's whole essence, so was the possibility of literally giving up his life for *kiddush Hashem* a reality he lived with. It was real to him. And it was a prospect he considered to be a great merit. This became abundantly evident in a question he once shared with his *talmidim*.

I saw in one of the contemporary anthologies of halachah the following question. If a non-Jew coerces a Jew to transgress at the threat of death; the halachah is that, if it is in the presence



At the ohel of the Vilna Gaon

of ten Jews, one must give up his life and not transgress. No matter what aveirah it may be.

Now, what if one of those ten Jews can run away? Do we say he should run away so that the person under threat will not have to give up his life?

Regarding the person who is under mortal threat, the Rambam says explicitly that if he can, he must run away. In the opinion of the Rambam, there is no such thing as optional mesiras nefesh (unlike the opinion of other Rishonim).

But what about the spectators that form the quorum of ten? Do we say that, if possible, one of them should run away?

This question is an amazing point to ponder.

were based on solid halachic considerations, and not simply on what common assumptions may or may not be.

It occurred to me, though, that you could put forward this line of questioning in the opposite direction as well. If there are only nine Jews there, and the person under threat wants the opportunity to give up his life for kiddush Hashem, can he call out, "A tenth! We need a tenth person to complete the minyan!"³ Is it forbidden to do such a thing? Perhaps it is a mitzvah to do so?

But there is another dimension to dying *al kiddush Hashem* that Rav Twersky shared with his *talmidim*.

According to the Gra, the words "ad kan" mean literally, "until here?" In other words, the students asked Rabbi Akiva, "Why did you stop with the first pasuk of Shema? Why don't you continue and complete your recitation?"

Rabi Akiva's response was that his whole life he was plagued by the thought: "When will I ever get the opportunity to fulfill the great tenet of combining the mitzvah together with the reading of its pertinent pesukim?"

Elsewhere, the Gemara tells us that if one reads the pesukim of Shema without wearing tefillin, it is as if he brought a korban without its attendant libations.⁴ On the other hand, when one takes care of his bodily needs in the morning, cleanses his hands, dons his tefillin, and recites Shema and davens; that is the full expression of accepting the sovereignty of the

3. It is disputed whether or not women are counted toward the quorum of ten regarding the obligation to give up one's life for *kiddush Hashem*. See *Minchas Chinuch* mitzvah 296 and *Gilyonei HaShas* of Rav Yosef Engel on *Sanhedrin* 74b.

4. *Berachos* 14b.

*A-lmighty upon himself. It is as if he built an altar and offered up a sacrifice on it.*⁵

*In other words, the full completeness of a mitzvah is achieved when performance is combined with reciting the pesukim that delineate that mitzvah.*⁶ So, his whole life, Rabi



Wrapped in his tallis, crowned with tefillin, and immersed in tefillah at the Kosel

Akiva agonized over whether he would ever manage to fulfill the mitzvah of giving up his life for kiddush Hashem in the fullest way possible. Namely, while engaged in the recitation that conveys that mitzvah.

Giving up one's life for kiddush Hashem is the ultimate act of submitting to the kingship of the A-lmighty. It is the quintessential declaration and demonstration that the will of the A-lmighty reigns supreme.

Although we derive the obligation from the words "with all

5. Berachos 15a.

6. In the context of that *shiur*, Rav Twersky also mentioned an eye-opening Rabbeinu Bachayei in *Yisro* 19:3. There, Rabbeinu Bachayei says that when Chazal reveal to us that a certain mitzvah carries a *segulah*, the moment one is engaged in doing the mitzvah is an opportune time to pray for the *segulah* to materialize, and that one should take advantage of this. This is a source for the *minhag* of women to *daven* for their children to grow up to be righteous, learned, and G-d-fearing when they light Shabbos candles; as the Gemara in Shabbos 23b says, "*Haragil b'ner havyan lo banim talmidei chachamim* — One who is meticulous about lighting Shabbos candles will merit children who are Torah scholars."

With his prodigious mind and tremendous heart, Rav Twersky embodied the supreme centrality of total immersion in Torah study, together with full fervor and absolute devotion in *avodas Hashem*.

CONNECTED TO HIS ROOTS Rav Twersky drew great meaning from his roots. He was deeply aware of the significance his *yichus* carried, and it meant a lot to him. And yet, his unique ancestry was not a source of boastful pride. On the contrary, it was a personal mandate that he strove to live up to. A neighbor of Rav Twersky expressed it as follows: “He came from exceedingly distinguished parentage but he was unassuming and self-motivated... The Twersky-Soloveitchik marriage brought two worlds of greatness and nobility together... Rav Mosheh married the daughter of a great and noted scholar, Rabbi Abba Berman... For someone who grew up amid



Rav Avraham Yehoshua Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshivas Brisk, wishing Rav Abba Berman mazel tov at the chasunah of Reb Meshulam Twersky

royalty, in a cloistered club of dignified thinkers and holy men; Rav Mosheh was remarkably free of airs.”⁴

In fact, one *talmid* witnessed the following exchange between Rav Twersky and one of his children.

One Shabbos, I was invited to join the Twerskys for a meal. Rebbi's father was visiting from America and was also present then. During the meal, one of the young Twersky boys began to talk excitedly about his superlative yichus on both sides of the family.

Rebbi asked his son to bring him a Gemara, Maseches Menachos. He opened it up to a particular daf and showed Refael, based on what it says there, that ancestry is a responsibility, not a gift.

*Rebbi then used the opportunity to empower his son to live up to the ideals of his heritage. He turned to me, as well, and added that I, too, am a descendent of the Avos HaKedoshim and therefore have the same responsibility.*⁵

“Everyone can have his own particular niche in the Torah,” Rav Twersky once remarked to his youngest son Reb Avrohom. “Personally,” he continued, “I feel that my *cheilek* is primarily in the *Chiddushei Rabbeinu Chaim HaLevi* and the *Nefesh HaChaim* of Rav Chaim Volozhiner.” During their regular, joint learning sessions, if Reb Avrohom would ever mention to his father that his rebbi in yeshivah had discussed an insight of Reb Chaim during *shiur*, Rav Twersky would say, “Please bring the *sefer*. Let’s learn the whole piece together.”

4. Mr. Jay Homnick.

5. Reb Akiva Bergman.

Rav Twersky's deeply felt connection with his great-great-grandfather was sharply manifest when he went to visit Reb Chaim's grave in Warsaw. Originally, he had arranged to go with all three of his sons, but circumstances did not allow him to make that first-planned journey. This was a great disappointment — he felt that the trip was an important way of bequeathing the family *mesorah* to his sons. He repeated numerous times, “From Heaven, I was prevented from doing this.”



Studying Chiddushei Rabbeinu Chaim HaLevi mid-flight, together with his son Reb Avrohom, en-route to Warsaw

Eventually, he visited Reb Chaim's *kever* on three different occasions. Each time, he would learn *Chiddushei Rabbeinu Chaim HaLevi* as a preparation for the occasion.



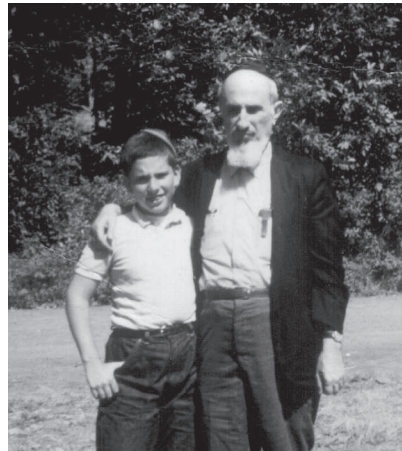
The kevarim of the Netziv and Rav Chaim Brisker, side by side

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT Rav Twersky's relationship with his illustrious grandfather actually began from infancy.

Rebbetzin Atarah was completing her doctorate at the time, and on her way to Harvard each day, she would drop off her young charge at her mother, Rebbetzin Tonya's, home. This began from the time her baby was one month old. There, baby Mosheh became the apple of his grandfather's eye.

Rebbetzin Atarah recalls being practically aghast one afternoon when she returned to her parents' home to pick up her baby. Her own upbringing — during which her father had zero involvement with any of the practical aspects of raising the children, and only began to form a relationship with them from the time they were able to participate in rational conversation — left her totally unprepared for the sight she beheld that day. A blanket had been spread out on the floor, and there sat her father — on his hands and knees — valiantly trying to decipher precisely how one wraps a diaper cloth around a freshly cleaned baby.

For Rav Soloveitchik, it was love at first sight with his first grandchild, and those feelings



As a young boy, with his grandfather, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik



Rav Yitzchak Asher and Rebbetzin Atarah Twersky standing proudly with their oldest grandson, Reb Meshulam, at his bar mitzvah

remained and grew as the years progressed. Often, during the extended weekends that found Rav Soloveitchik in Boston — he was in New York for the other part of the week giving *shiurim* — he would take his baby grandson for daily walks in the lush park near his home. A neighbor recalls wondering to herself, as she gazed upon this unusual sight, what each one of the pair must have been thinking about on those walks.

Of course, as time passed and young Mosheh acquired the ability of walking and talking, these walks assumed an ever-greater significance. Even from the tender age of five years old, Rav Soloveitchik would sometimes utilize their walks through the beautiful pine forests to begin instilling fundamentals of Torah into his beloved, young prodigy.⁸

In 5728 (1967), Rebbetzin Tonya Soloveitchik passed away. From that point on, Rav Yitzchak Asher and Rebbetzin Atarah welcomed their father into their home. Speaking about this arrangement in a 2011 address, Rav Twersky said, “*Hashgachah* provided my parents with the unique opportunity of *kibbud av*, having my grandfather *zt”l* live in their home for over twenty-five years. They seized this opportunity — fraught with challenges — wholeheartedly. Growing up at home with my grandfather was probably the defining point of my life. He invested great amounts of time and energy and effort into teaching and learning with me, and this formed and continues to be the foundation

8. The degree of intense fondness that Rav Soloveitchik felt for his grandson, Mosheh, found charming expression in a statement the latter once made to his grandmother, Rebbetzin Soloveitchik. Little three-and-a-half-year-old Mosheh had misbehaved in some way, and he received an appropriate reprimand from his grandmother. Feeling a bit contrite, Rebbetzin Soloveitchik said, “Mosheh, you know that I love you, right?” “Yes, Bubby,” Mosheh answered, “I know that you love me. But Zeidy *really* loves me.”

upon which any accomplishments which I might — or might not — have, rest.”⁹

Although, technically, Rav Soloveitchik was Rav Yitzchak Asher’s father-in-law, their relationship was as close as a true father-son relationship could possibly be. Rav Yitzchak Asher and Rebbetzin Atarah both considered Rav Soloveitchik’s needs to be the fulcrum upon which the rest of their life pivoted.

For the remaining twenty-six years of Rav Soloveitchik’s life, the Twersky home was put at his complete disposal. Toward the end of Rav Soloveitchik’s life, when it was difficult for him to walk up the hill to shul, Rav Yitzchak Asher and Rebbetzin Atarah sold their home and bought a new one up the road to make it easier for him. Rav Soloveitchik certainly never requested that they move, but to Rav Yitzchak Asher and his Rebbetzin, it was simply the obvious course of action to make Rav Soloveitchik’s life easier.

Not only did the Twersky home serve as Rav Soloveitchik’s residence, he became the primary figure there. It was Rav Soloveitchik who occupied the seat at the head of the table and conducted the Shabbos and Yom Tov meals. It was Rav Soloveitchik who led the Pesach Seder — despite it being the quintessential father-child experience of the year. Rav Yitzchak

9. Aside from the inestimable proximity to his grandfather that Rav Twersky gained at that point in his life, there was yet another, deepening facet to the powerful bond between him and his grandfather that evolved as a result of the situation. His wife’s passing left Rav Soloveitchik bereft. Rav Yitzchak Lichtenstein, also a grandson of Rav Soloveitchik, explained that part of the reason Rav Soloveitchik spent so many long hours learning with his oldest grandson was due to his wife’s passing. Learning with his grandson, Mosheh Twersky, was Rav Soloveitchik’s primary comfort and consolation.

Asher simply handed the reins of his home to his father-in-law. The devotion with which Rav Yitzchak Asher and Rebbetzin Atarah provided, served, and cared for Rav Soloveitchik was truly phenomenal. In fact, Rav Soloveitchik once commented, “One could write an entire *Shulchan Aruch* on the mitzvah of *kibud av v’eim* based on how my son-in-law cared for his parents¹⁰ — and also how he cares for me.”

In addition to his own Torah thoughts, Rav Soloveitchik would regularly discuss Torah insights of his grandfather Reb Chaim and his father Reb Moshe. The innumerable anecdotes



R-L: Rav Moshe Feinstein,
Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rav Shneur Kotler

10. Rav Twersky once remarked to his brother, Rav Mayer, that it was amazing how their father continued honoring his father with the same type of intensity and devotion as during his lifetime even after he passed away. Every year, Rav Yitzchak Asher would deliver a special *shiur* on 26 Iyar, the day of Rav Meshulam Zusha’s *yahrtzeit*. He never once missed giving that *shiur*.

for Torah — as their children and grandchildren lived so far from them. “I am jealous of your great merit,” Rav Twersky enthused. “Baruch Hashem, I have the merit to have children learning Torah, but the self-sacrifice of sending a child far away for the sake of learning Torah is not something that I have.”⁹

HAVE YOU SEEN MY ZEVACHIM? Rav Twersky was, quite simply, captivated by Torah. The following recollection highlights both the pristine level of truth to which Rav Twersky held himself, and concurrently, his deep love for Hashem’s most precious gift.

There is a well-known story about Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch: He once made a special visit to the Alps. He ex-



Rav Twersky's well-worn Shas

plained, “When I come before Hashem, I will have to answer for many things. But what will I tell Him when He asks me, ‘Did you ever see My Alps?’”

One Friday night, as we were sitting around Rebbi’s Shabbos table, that line came up in the course of the conversation. Perhaps one of the bachurim mentioned it in reference to a planned trip for bein hazemanim.

Rebbi immediately responded, “That’s fine, but remember

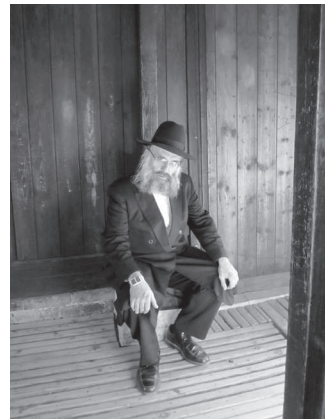
9. This was prior to Reb Refael Twersky’s move to Lakewood, New Jersey.

that long before you are ever asked about the Alps, you will be asked ‘Have you seen My Zevachim? Have you seen My Menachos?’”

That line stuck with me for a long time, and it was one of the first memories that came to mind after I heard the terrible news of my Rebbi’s tragic demise.

There is no doubt that to Rebbi, Zevachim and Menachos were as much wonders of the world as the Alps, if not more so. And anyone who was fortunate enough to see the worn-out Shas in his living room — particularly Maseches Chullin, which is famously falling apart at the seams — knows that Rebbi saw Zevachim, Menachos, and the rest of Shas over and over and over again.¹⁰

This story has a beautiful postscript. During the last few years of Rav Twersky’s life, he would travel to Warsaw to visit the grave of his great-great-grandfather, the famed Rav Chaim Soloveitchik. In the summer of 5774 (2014), the last summer of his life, that trip included visits to numerous other graves of great *tzaddikim* and other important, historical Jewish sites. “You cannot come to Poland,” Rav Twersky averred, “and not make a point to see what happened here.” Visiting the Majdanek death camp was therefore an important part of those trips for him. After looking at the gas chambers, he would fall silent



After seeing the gas chambers

10. That *Shas* got so worn out over the years that Rav Twersky had to start using new Gemaras.

for some time, engaged in deeply inward introspection.

In the planning stages of that last trip, two of the Twersky children discovered that if they booked a flight with a stop-over in Switzerland, the price would be substantially reduced. Additionally, they would have the opportunity to sightsee in the breathtaking Swiss Alps. When



At Majdanek



Inside the building of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, next to a portrait of Rav Meir Shapiro, founder of the Daf Yomi Movement



In the Jewish cemetery of Warsaw



At the kever of the Chozeh Mi'Lublin



Learning in the Nozyk Shul — the only shul in Warsaw that was not destroyed during the Holocaust

“First and foremost, I express gratitude and appreciation to the Borei Olam... for granting me an opportunity to learn Torah from the most splendid Rebbeim, and to teach and transmit Torah to virtuous talmidim.”

A LINK IN THE CHAIN Rav Twersky was a link in a magnificent chain of Torah transmission — and he had a profound appreciation of the impact this had on his own development. In the continuation of his address, Rav Twersky identified the hallmark and litmus test of a successful *rebbei-talmid* relationship: A successful student is not merely a conduit, transferring information from one generation to another. A successful student ultimately develops his own understanding, his own standing as a *talmid chacham*. The primary way this is achieved is through a dynamic, robust relationship with one’s Torah instructors, wherein one fully applies oneself to absorb their teachings, insights, and overarching approach. Thus, he spoke of “learning Torah from the most splendid *rabbeim*” — and not just of learning Torah by himself.

Indeed, one of the striking facets of Rav Twersky’s character was the way he cultivated relationships with a plethora of Torah giants. By all accounts, by the age of twenty-five, he was an exceedingly accomplished *talmid chacham*. At around thirty, he let slip to a close friend of his that the one *masechta* he had not yet learned in depth was *Eiruvin*. The implication was clear: he had learned all the other *masechtos* in *Shas* in-depth. Rav Twersky viewed his scholarship as an



Delivering the keynote address at the 2011 Yeshivas Toras Moshe annual dinner

outgrowth of the Torah instruction he had received from a wide spectrum of great Torah scholars. The first and foremost of these was his grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *zt"l*.

VISITING ALPHA From the tender age of eight, Rav Twersky
CENTAURI spent much time learning privately with his
grandfather, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik *zt"l*.

As a teenager, those private learning sessions lasted for many hours. After graduating high school, Rav Twersky relocated to New York so he could formally learn under his grandfather's steady tutelage where the latter delivered regular *shiurim* in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan.



*Rav Moshe Feinstein
and Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik*

After one year in New York, he returned to Boston where he spent a year in Harvard University. From conversations with people who were close to Rav Twersky at that time, it seems that he was very reluctant to attend university, but nevertheless did so because his parents were insistent and he did not want to contravene their wishes. While there, he erected a strict regimen and guidelines for himself that enabled him to remain firmly ensconced in Torah and *mitzvos*, to the extent that one of his friends from that era remarked, "His apartment had the feel of a *beis midrash!*"

After just one year at Harvard, Rav Twersky returned to New York for another year to continue learning under his grandfather. Then, he once again returned to Boston for another year-and-

a-half, by the end of which time he completed his undergraduate degree. Despite this highly accelerated pace of university studies, Rav Twersky spent an enormous amount of time learning Torah even while in Boston and maintained it as his primary focus. Furthermore, Rav Soloveitchik would return home from New York every week for the extended weekend, and Rav Twersky would spend any time available to learn with him then.



Rav Soloveitchik delivering a shiur

Even when Rav Twersky was in New York and attended his grandfather's *shiurim*, he would not suffice with that. Every other week, Rav Twersky returned to Boston with his grandfather to review with him the material that he and his *chavrusa*, Rav Chaim Ilson, had covered together. Rav Ilson vividly describes the experience of learning with Rav Twersky during those formative years.

Our relationship started about forty-one years ago, when he asked me to study with him. To the best of my recollection, we were scheduled to study from about 10:15 p.m. to midnight. I don't know quite how to say this, but, sensing his determination and complete commitment to learning, I was ashamed to close my sefarim at 12:00 a.m. Gradually, as the days went on, our seder began earlier and earlier, and it ended later and later. We would often continue learning until 4:00 a.m.

I tried my best to keep up with him, but it was clear that we came close to, or surpassed, commonly assumed parameters of minimum sleep necessary to function. I recall many times that I did not reach his endurance level. I was so incredibly

you make the time!” Because for a *talmid*, Rav Twersky strongly felt that you need to make the time. And he did.

LIKE A FATHER Rav Twersky genuinely loved his *talmidim*. If a *bachur* would leave for the States for *bein hazemanim* without saying goodbye to his Rebbi, Rav Twersky would be genuinely hurt. Because he truly cared.²⁷ He would openly talk to his *talmidim* about the need to say goodbye when leaving, and greeting a rebbi when returning.²⁸

One *talmid* recalls:

After being in Rebbi's shiur for one year, I reluctantly had to return to the States. However, after being back in the America for only a short time, the situation suddenly changed, and I was able to return to Eretz Yisrael not long after Rosh

27. Reb Yechezkel Lang.

28. One *talmid* shared: “After my first *zman* in Rebbi’s *shiur*, when I came back after Pesach, the first thing I said to him was, “Is there *shiur* today?” He looked at me for a few seconds, and then, with a smile, he stuck out his hand and said, “*Shalom aleichem!* How are you? How was Yom Tov? Did you leave Mitzrayim?”

Reb Yoni Ash also shared a story of this nature: “It was in the beginning of *Elul zman* when we started *Bava Metzia*. I had come a little late into the *zman*, so I was just getting into things. I went to go say hi to Rebbi and chat with him a bit. He asked me, ‘How are things going?’ I said to him ‘Good. *Yevamos* was hard, but, wow, *Bava Metzia* is also really difficult.’ He asked me which I think is harder, and I responded, ‘Well, *Yevamos* I had a *tefishah* on, but *Bava Metzia* is still new so I can’t really judge yet.’ The guys who went to Rebbi’s house that Friday night said that Rebbi specifically mentioned how important it is to come up and say hi to your *rebbeim* in the beginning of a *zman*.”

Chodesh Cheshvan — I only missed the first week and a half of the winter zman.

I still remember the warm welcome I received from Rebbi. He exclaimed loudly, “Naftali s’vah ratzon.”²⁹ I immediately asked Rebbi if I could join him for the Friday night meal — there was nowhere else I wanted to be. He agreed without hesitation.



Reciting a berachah under the chuppah of a talmid

When I arrived at his home that leil Shabbos, I immediately realized that I was the only bachur present, a very uncommon occurrence. It turned out that Rebbi’s mother was visiting at the time, and, it seems it was supposed to be exclusively a family meal. Yet, apparently in honor of my return to yeshivah, Rebbi allowed me to come.

He continued the honor by allowing me to lead bentching, which he usually did himself when hosting bachurim. I left that night energized and excited to make the most out of my year.³⁰

“One cannot say ‘he was my rebbi,’” Rav Twersky would often emphasize, “if he isn’t your *rebbi* now, that means he never was your *rebbi*.” From Rav Twersky’s vantage point, a *rebbi-talmid*

29. A reference to the *berachah* given to Naftali (*Devarim* 33:23): “Naftali is satisfied of will.”

30. Reb Naftali Eichen.

relationship is a unique bond that lasts forever. Of course, his words were rooted in the statement of Chazal that one's *talmidim* are like children. Accordingly, he explained this in very simple, down-to-earth terms: "Would you say about your father, 'he was my father'? Of course not! Well, the same thing applies to your rebbi!" This fatherly perspective toward his *talmidim* constituted a primary force behind the warmth, care, and genuine concern that he forever radiated toward them.

Rav Twersky was once at the *vort* of a *talmid* whose parents weren't able to be present. When Rav Twersky stood up to speak, he said, "Chazal tell us that a rebbi is like a father. So, right now, I am speaking as a father."³¹ Part of the unique depth with which Rav Twersky related to this well-known concept came to light in a *shmuess* that he delivered before Shavuos one year.

*What is the connection between Parashas Bamidbar and the Yom Tov of Shavuos?*³²

The connection, or at least one of the connections, is what Rashi says on the pasuk, "These are the progeny of Aharon and Moshe on the day that Hashem spoke with Moshe on Har Sinai." The next pasuk only mentions the sons of Aharon, which shows that teaching someone Torah is like giving birth to him. "And when did the sons of Aharon become the progeny of Moshe? On the day that Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai — the day of Matan Torah — because Moshe then taught them what he learned from the A-lmighty."

The Gra says that this is not a mere metaphor, it is literal. Just as there is physical birth, so there is spiritual birth. A

31. Rabbi Matis Feld.

32. Shavuos usually falls out during the week following *Parashas Bamidbar*.

CHAPTER EIGHT
MOADIM U'ZEMANIM,
EACH SPECIAL DAY

“**S**OON IT WILL BE *shloshim yom kodem hachag*, thirty days before the upcoming *chag!*” Just a few days before he was taken from this world, Rav Twersky excitedly shared this thought with his daughter. He was cruelly taken from us on the twenty-fifth day of Cheshvan, so Rav Twersky was referring to Chanukah, the Yom Tov of spiritual light.¹

1. It is not surprising that one of the last, memorable statements Rav Twersky made was in expression of excitement over the thirty-day period prior to Chanukah. Not just Chanukah itself — that goes without saying — but even the thirty days that precede it. Now, in the Gemara (*Pesachim* 6a) and *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim siman* 429), the thirty-day period preceding a Yom Tov is delineated as marking the point at which one must begin preparing for it by learning the associated *halachos*, and *talmidei chachamim* are enjoined to give precedence to discussions and questions involving the upcoming Yom Tov (*Biur Halachah*). The thirty-day period is the time during which it is incumbent on a person to already be taking the upcoming Yom Tov into account (see *Pesachim* 21b and *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 436:1). But here’s the thing. Whenever the Gemara brings up this idea of “*shloshim yom kodem hachag*,” it is always with the expression of “thirty days before Pesach.” For that reason, there are opinions who hold that the obligation to start learning the pertinent *halachos* thirty days prior, only applies to Pesach. The reason is that Pesach in particular has an abundance of *halachos* associated with it. For other Yamim Tovim, though, these opinions hold that a few days prior suffice (*Mishnah*

LIVING THE DAYS The *Moadim* of the year — and that includes any calendar day with special significance, such as Rosh Chodesh, *Sefiras HaOmer*, Tishah b'Av, and Tu b'Av — were not merely observed by Rav Twersky. Their message and atmosphere regulated his inner life. He lived and breathed the Jewish calendar. The unique spiritual reality of these days was as real and tangible to him as the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening.

I once experienced firsthand how deeply Rebbi lived with the reality of all the days of the Jewish calendar year. This incident actually had a touch of humor to it, although Rebbi was totally unaware of that. It occurred during the too-short period during which I had the singular merit to learn with Rebbi during morning seder.

Berurah 429:1). Of course, there are other opinions — significant ones — that say otherwise. They maintain that although the particular expression employed is always “thirty days before *Pesach*,” it is clear from the way the Gemara applies this concept to other Yamim Tovim (*Bechoros* 58a) that it is only the chosen mode of expression, but really it applies to all the Yamim Tovim (*Mishnah Berurah* 429:1). Even within the context of this more stringent opinion, though, it is clear that the discussion pertains to Sukkos and Shavuos because they have days that are a full-fledged Yom Tov, with all the accompanying *halachos* thereof. On top of that, there are those that say that even if the thirty-day preparatory learning obligation does apply to Sukkos and Shavuos, it is only by force of a *minhag*, not a specific enactment of Chazal (*Shaar HaTziyun* 429:2). In any event, as far as it seems, there is no source to carry over this concept to Chanukah and Purim. Certainly, it would be very difficult to posit that it should be obligatory to start learning *hilchos Chanukah* on 25 Cheshvan and *hilchos Purim* on 14 Shevat. The point of all this background information is to help us appreciate, not only how original Rav Twersky was in his approach to *avodas Hashem*, but more so the deep-rooted relationship paradigm that he forged with the Yamim Tovim, the *Moadei HaShanah*.

It was Tammuz, nearing the final stretch of the thirteen-week-long summer zman. I was sitting in the room where we



Delivering shiur in the fourth-floor otzar sefarim of the Yeshivas Novhardok building, where Toras Moshe was formerly located

learned together each morning, and where Rebbi would give his shiur every day. The fourth-floor, dilapidated room was made even smaller by the wall-to-wall bookshelves on all four sides. The furniture, seemingly imported straight from pre-war Mir, Poland, capped off the décor. I always got the feeling that Rebbi really liked that room, and that he felt it was

very heimish and conducive to proper focus.

As soon as Rebbi arrived, I noticed something different about him. “Good morning, Rebbi,” I said, “how is Rebbi doing?” His answer took me a moment or two to process. “It’s a difficult time period.”

Figuring that he was referring to the atmosphere of mourning of that time of year, yet still not quite understanding what exactly he meant, I responded, “I don’t feel anything difficult in particular. Baruch Hashem, I am doing just fine.” That was my way of saying, “Huh?”

Instead of explaining why it is appropriate to feel a bit down, and perhaps how to connect with that feeling, Rebbi just expressed amazement: “That’s great that you’re managing to keep your head above the water!” He was genuinely impressed with me.

I almost felt like laughing out loud, though I would never have done that in front of my Rebbi. With his trademark humility, he must have assumed that I felt the reality of those days just as he did, and he was therefore impressed that I

not hold back from writing that I got a very good feeling from reading your pamphlet, "Shesiyah Ka'Das."

The teaching of Chazal that all one's deeds should be for the sake of Heaven and that the Merciful One desires the heart, were said in general... and in this particular mitzvah [of drinking wine on Purim] it is urgently necessary, for it is a hairsbreadth that distinguishes between drinking which is a mitzvah and an act of kedushah and spiritual uplift, or the opposite, R"l. Your pamphlet serves the purpose of highlighting that defining hairsbreadth. From between the lines arises a scent of refinement of the soul which is fitting for the give-and-take of these halachos, and makes a [positive] impression on the heart of the reader.

In this time-period, the enemies of Hashem bellow, and the haters of Torah have raised their heads. May it be the will [of Heaven] that [we merit to see the] fulfillment of [the pasuk that says], Hashem will awaken [with a start] as one who [was] sleeping [from inebriation], like a mighty [person] rousing himself from his wine. And he will smite his enemies, etc. And He should bring about for us an eternal salvation in a wondrous manner.

With great honor,
Mosheh Twersky

With all of Rav Twersky's insistence on self-control and maintaining a respectable form of celebration, in no way was his home a picture of stoic seriousness. On the contrary, it established the setting that allowed for what people could not help but feel was the real thing. And people sensed this and flocked to his home. A close friend of the family remembers his first encounter with Rav Twersky on Purim, many years before the latter had a home in Har Nof that was flooded with *talmidim* and guests.

This goes back about thirty years (around 5744 [1984]). The Twerskys were living in Monsey at the time, and my family lived down the block. I am a good few years older than the Reb Mosheh, and, at the time, they were one of the new, young couples in town.

I was acquainted with Reb Mosheh from my days of attending his grandfather's shiurim in Boston. Reb Mosheh was always around. But he was a young boy then, and I didn't get to know him at all.

Our street was quite a distance from the concentrated Jewish area, and we formed a minyan in our house. It was tough going those first few years; we only had six permanent members and would have to "schnor" the rest. Reb Mosheh would sometimes come by and join us when he could. He even leined for us on occasion. At first, he didn't want to — I suppose because he had concerns that the Sefer Torah was not kosher according to some opinions — but when I told him that the minyan was in a precarious state and we really need him to do it, he agreed.

Anyway, on Purim, I get a knock on the door, and when I opened it, I was pleasantly surprised to find Reb Mosheh and Bashy Twersky standing at the door. It was such a nice gesture, and we were really touched that they had come to visit us and bring mishloach manos.

Now, I noticed right away that Reb Mosheh didn't look drunk, but he did look different from his usual self. He was always very serious, but on that day he looked like he was in a light mood, in a different place. It was so beautiful. Seeing him like that on Purim had a tremendous effect on me for years after. I felt that what I had seen was the right way of going about simchas Purim. It became a part of me.

As soon as Purim concluded, Rav Twersky reverted to his usual serious demeanor. As far as any onlooker could see, there were



Experiencing the special elation of Purim

no after effects of the drinking and rejoicing. This abiding self-control was perhaps particularly evident in the way he concluded a particular Purim. The Rebbetzin, *tibadeil l'chayim*, brought her husband what looked like an extremely strong, albeit quite small, cup of coffee to drink after the *seudah*. He drank it down quite quickly, and it was just

amazing to see how quickly he seemed to become completely sober. He did not let things drag out for no purpose. When it was time to *bentch*, he gathered whoever was still around and sober enough to do so, and *bentched*. When he led the *bentching* one year, he stood up to his full height when he said *Elokeinu* in the text of *zimun*.

He had a unique, subtle way of conveying in which areas he felt *talmidim* could improve, and his venue for doing so was often the more relaxed Purim atmosphere. He was once sitting with some of the *bachurim* at the close of Purim, sharing a Torah thought. One of the *bachurim*, who was dressed up in a punkish outfit said, "Rebbi, I don't understand." Rav Twersky gently responded, "Maybe if you would be dressed differently you would understand." That was his way of offering an indirect reprimand and prodding his *talmid* to aim higher. In the middle of the Purim *seudah* one year, a *talmid* wearing an outrageous costume together with a long wig arrived. Quite drunk, he teetered over to Rav Twersky and said, "Rebbi... you're the man!" Rav Twersky looked at the boy's get-up and said, "I wish I could say the same about you!"

got home. One year, on their way out, Rav Twersky noticed that the *bachurim* were dancing in the sukkah. He turned to his son and said, “It’s such a beautiful thing to dance on *motzaei Yom Kippur*.⁵² Please remind me next year that I would like to dance with them.” And the following year, that is exactly what he did.

LIKE AN ANGEL Often, it was around 11:30 p.m. by the time Rav Twersky finally arrived home on *motzaei Yom Kippur*. Inevitably, one of his daughters — when they were old enough to understand the greatness they were growing up with — would be so struck by her father’s appearance. “Mommy,” she would say excitedly, “look! Tatty looks like a *malach!*” Although he seemed completely parched and was probably quite hungry, he was not interested in eating anything until he first demonstrated his care and concern for his wife and daughters. He would ask each of them how Yom Kippur went for them, and would listen to what they had to say with genuine interest. When his daughters were married and had young children already, he would ask if they were able to make it to shul. If they answered in the affirmative, he would tell them how wonderful that is. If they answered in the negative, he would say, “Good, you fulfilled your *tafkid!*” Only after he had demonstrated his interest in and care for his family would he finally have something to eat.⁵³

52. It is interesting to note that dancing after Yom Kippur was probably something that Rav Twersky absorbed in his youth, as in the Talner *Shtiebel* in Boston they were accustomed to dancing for some time following the close of Yom Kippur.

53. Rebbetzin Twersky, Reb Avrohom Twersky, Mrs. Rivkah Walder. It is interesting to note that this characteristic of “holding on to Yom Kippur” was also

Rav Twersky often highlighted the necessity of having a solid learning *seder* on *motzaei Yom Kippur*. This is one of the things



Having a private Simchas Beis HaShoeivah dance with his son and son-in-law

he learned from the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah when he spent an *Elul* with him in 5747 (1987). He would speak ardently of the need to do this in order for the Yom Kippur to be truly successful, and for one to keep hold of the impact it had on him. At home, as well, Rav Twersky strongly inculcated this message; and, as such, his sons would remain in Yeshivah for the night of *motzaei Yom*

Kippur, returning home for the *Sukkos bein hazemanim* the next morning.⁵⁴

evident in Rav Twersky's grandfather, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik *zt"l* (who lived in the Twersky home from the time Rav Twersky was about eleven years old). Rav Soloveitchik's daughter, Rebbetzin Atarah Twersky (Rav Twersky's mother), would prepare her father a cup of tea. It would take him about an hour to drink it. His mind was still wrapped up with Yom Kippur, as was evident from the fact that he would be quietly singing songs from Neilah to himself during that time. It took him a while until he finally would be back to normal. (Rebbetzin Atarah Twersky.)

54. I once asked Rav Twersky that there seems to be a contradiction to this from the Rama who says that it is meritorious to begin building one's sukkah immediately on the night of *motzaei Yom Kippur*, in order to go from mitzvah to mitzvah (*Orach Chaim* 624:5). He replied, "That you can fulfill through the mechanism of *u'neshalmah parim sefaseinu*. Learn some of the *sugyos* in *Maseches Sukkah!*"

One *motzaei Yom Kippur*, before Rav Twersky left to go home, Reb Yoni Ash was conversing with his Rebbi about various topics, and at a certain point, they got to speaking about Sukkos. Reb Yoni asked, “What *kavanos* should I have during Sukkos? What is the general idea, and what should I be focusing on?” Reb Yoni thought that his Rebbi would launch into a whole exposition about the lofty concepts of Sukkos, but all Rav Twersky answered was, “Be happy!” Reb Yoni pressed a bit and said, “That’s it? No other ideas?” But Rav Twersky responded, “No! Just be happy! That’s all you have to do. Be happy that whole Yom Tov.” After a short pause, he added, “It can be a difficult *avodah!*”



*At Har HaTzofim on Chol HaMoed,
gazing down on Har HaBayis*

Reb Ari Lindner recalls that one of his last meals in Eretz Yisrael was with his wife and two daughters in Rav Twersky’s sukkah. “I remember,” says Reb Ari, “an idea from the Arizal that Rav Twersky mentioned during that meal: ‘What does the minimum size of two walls and a *tefach* represent? It reflects the reality of Hashem wrapping his arm, as it were, around us as one does to a close friend.’ The two walls are the upper arm and forearm, and the *tefach* is the hand. One could see this on Rav Twersky. He felt Hashem’s constant embrace.”

same without him.” It was much more than that. We felt as though the central pillar was missing.

And yet, even though his presence literally created the whole Shabbos and Yom Tov atmosphere, and was what drew so many talmidim to our home over the years, he would always tell me, “The bachurim come for your food!”

READY TO GO Although his *talmidim* had few opportunities to witness their Rebbi’s family life, there were some rare glimpses. One of these took place during the last Pesach Seder of Rav Twersky’s life.

Right before Rav Twersky began to sing *Chasal Siddur Pesach*, he asked, “Is everyone ready to leave *Mitzrayim*?” It was a very real event for Rebbi. All of us *talmidim*, though, weren’t sure how to respond to that, and we kind of looked at each other timidly. The *Rebbetzin*, though, enthusiastically said, “I’m ready!”

Rebbi replied, “Okay, so we are ready to go!”

At that point, one of the other guests — someone who had known the Twerskys for decades and had a good sense of humor — said to Rav Twersky, “Of course you’ll go wherever she goes; she’s got the food!”

The *Rebbetzin* quickly corrected him. “I go wherever my husband goes.”

As she said that, she and Rebbi exchanged a look of such absolute love and respect, that it left a permanent imprint on my mind: the picture of an ideal marriage.⁴

4. Reb Binyamin Mandel.

Rav Twersky would sometimes publicly express his deep appreciation for his wife on Purim: “Everything that I have in *ruchniyus*,” he exclaimed, “is on account of my wife!”

Rabbi Avi Lowenstein was one of the fortunate few who got an inside look at Rav Twersky’s interactions with his family.

I was in Rebbi’s shiur around eighteen years ago (around 5757 [1997]). One Friday, Rav Twersky was in the middle of explaining a complex point — in full, serious concentration mode — when, suddenly, the door swung open. In walked Rebbi’s youngest son — he was about three or four years old then. We were all surprised at the sudden, unexpected interruption.



On a cable car in Switzerland

We watched to see how Rebbi would respond. He turned to his son, and

with a smile that seemed bigger than his face, exclaimed in a louder than usual, happy and excited tone of voice, “Avrumi!”

The shiur was momentarily interrupted but we didn’t stop learning for a second. What a priceless, hands-on lesson in childrearing!

There was another special “Avrumi moment” that afforded a glimpse into how Rav Twersky modeled parenting, as a *talmid* recalls:

I find it striking that my most vivid memory of Rebbi isn’t from a shiur or a discussion in learning. The memory is from

a Friday night meal in his house. With the tricks that time can play on our memories, I no longer recall if I was there or if I heard about it from a friend, but either way, the story is priceless.

During the meal, Rebbi's young son, Avrumi, who must have been seven or so at the time, came over to his father holding a copy of *Chiddushei Rabbeinu Chaim HaLevi*. The large tome seemed almost bigger than the child. Avrumi insisted

that his father learn something from the sefer with him.

Rebbi did not tell his son: "When you're older." He didn't push off his request in any way. Instead, he opened up the book to Reb Chaim's famous piece about two different types of concentration during davening: that of understanding the meaning of each word versus the basic awareness that one is standing before Hashem.

Rebbi pointed to the line where Reb Chaim explains that for *Shemoneh Esrei* to be considered an act of prayer, one has to see himself as standing in

front of Hashem. He read it out loud to his young son.

For me, that moment encapsulated everything Rebbi was to me: his knowledge, his firm grasp and recall of everything he learned, his practical brilliance, his role as a teacher and father, his vision of *tefillah*, his appreciation for his ancestors,



Rav Yitzchak Asher Twersky reciting berachos at the bris of his grandson, Reb Avrohom. In the background is Rav Refael Reichman.

and his desire to transmit that appreciation to the next generation.

This is how I remember Rebbi — always looking to teach and inspire. Always seeking a chance to remind us that we have an obligation — and an opportunity — to connect with the Ribbono shel Olam on a daily basis.⁵

HONORING HIS PARENTS While Rav Twersky was reluctant to allow his own children to do things for him, he was eager to help his parents in any way, large or small.

One Friday night, while Rebbi was already sitting at his place at the head of the table, after hamotzi, he noticed that his mother had gotten up to make her way to the kitchen to help serve the meal. Rebbi literally jumped out of his chair and ran to the kitchen. He wanted to serve his mother — and not the other way round.⁶

Numerous *talmidim* witnessed his exceptional respect for his mother, commenting that these occasions were the only time they ever saw their Rebbi move with such speed. Rebbetzin Twersky shared a humorous example of her husband's superlative *kibbud eim*. Just a few weeks before Rav Twersky's *petirah*, his mother, Rebbetzin Atarah Twersky, came for a visit. Rav Twersky was learning in the dining room, and his mother came in to get something. Rav Twersky immediately stood up to his full height and remained standing until his mother left the room. Rebbetzin

5. Reb Yaakov Rabinowich.

6. Reb Yosef Schwab.

Atarah didn't notice that her son had stood for her. A few minutes later, she again needed something from the dining room. When



*Learning at his dining-room table,
deep in the sugya*

she reentered the room, Rav Twersky stood up again and remained standing until his mother left the room. This then happened a third time, at which point Rebbetzin Atarah noticed what was going on. She subsequently told her daughter-in-law, "I stopped going in there, because otherwise he

would have kept that up the whole day!"

After a year-long illness, Rav Twersky's father passed away in 5758 (1997), the morning following Yom Kippur. Over the course of that difficult year, Rav Twersky flew into Boston a few times to visit. Toward the end, his father's condition deteriorated, and Rav Twersky flew in again after Rosh Hashanah. Together with his mother and brother, Rav Twersky stayed with his father in the hospital on that last Yom Kippur of his father's life.⁷ Reb Meshulam, Rav Twersky's oldest son, was told by his father that although he acutely felt the lack from not being able to *daven* in shul on that Yom Kippur, he was nevertheless able to grow from the opportunity in ways he had never been able to before.

Rav Twersky's father, Rav Yitzchak Asher, and his paternal grandfather, Rav Meshulam Zusha, are both buried on Har HaZeisim. Rav Twersky would visit his father's and grandfather's

7. Mrs. Tzipporah Rosenblatt.

burial spot on each *yahrtzeit*. For his grandfather's *yahrtzeit*, security arrangements were very easy, as it is on the same day as the *yahrtzeit* of Rav Shlom'keh Zviller when there are numerous chartered, armored buses coming and going on that day. However, arranging the visit for his father's *yahrtzeit* was more difficult. In earlier years, he made private security arrangements and brought a *minyán* of *bachurim* so he could say Kaddish by the grave. However, when the security situation deteriorated, Rav Twersky felt he could no longer take responsibility for the safety of his *bachurim*. Unfortunately, on the last *yahrtzeit* of Rav Twersky's life, the situation on Har HaZeisim was so volatile that he felt even he could not go there. In lieu of visiting his father's *kever*, Rav Twersky found a vantage point on the ramparts of the Old City, from which he could see the *kever* — he even took binoculars along so he could feel close to it.⁸



With his father and his children

8. Reb Avrohom Twersky.

on eating the kugel, why did you take a piece?” Rav Twersky explained simply, “When someone wants to give so much, how can you not take?!”²⁶

GRATITUDE IN ACTION Expressions of gratitude were uppermost in Rav Twersky’s mind. One of those to whom he always felt extremely grateful was Rav Moshe Meiselman, Rav Twersky’s close cousin and the *rosh yeshivah* of Toras Moshe. In his address at the 2011 dinner, he thanked Rav Meiselman not only for providing him with the opportunity to teach Torah, but also for the latter’s unstinting efforts to create a yeshivah that maintains an excellent standard of application to learning and *avodas Hashem*.

Years earlier, when Rav Meiselman’s father passed on, the family brought him to Eretz Yisrael for burial. After the funeral, Rav Meiselman returned to his home in Har Nof to sit *shivah*. When Rav Twersky arrived at the *shivah* house, he sat down next to Rav Meiselman, and inched himself closer. Rav Twersky asked him, “Are you going back to Boston for the remainder of the *shivah*?” When Rav Meiselman responded in the affirmative, Rav Twersky asked, “What time is your flight?”

“Midnight.”



*In conversation with the Rosh Yeshivah,
Rav Moshe Meiselman*

26. Rabbi Avi Lowenstein.

Rav Twersky then offered to drive Rav Meiselman to the airport for his flight, an offer Rav Meiselman gladly accepted. A *talmid* who witnessed this exchange remembers being so surprised that his Rebbi — who cherished every moment of learning — would take the initiative to make such a time-consuming offer, despite not being asked by anyone to do so or having any obligation to do so.²⁷ But as Rav Twersky would tell his *talmidim*, when it comes to interpersonal *mitzvos*, it's not just about the technical mitzvah and obligation. You have to really care. And he did.

One day, while still a bachur in Yeshivas Toras Moshe, Rabbi Yehudah Eisenstein was in the courtyard of the yeshivah when he saw a big, bright rainbow. It was quite magnificent. He ran inside to get a siddur and made the appropriate berachah.

Then, still bubbling with excitement over this rare occurrence, he ran back inside to tell his Rebbi about it. "Rebbi, come, there's a huge rainbow outside! You can make a berachah on it!" Rav Twersky walked outside, looked up, and exclaimed, "Ah, according to all opinions!" He then recited the rare berachah without the assistance of a siddur.

When Yehudah returned to the beis midrash, he was accosted by one of his friends who showed him where the Mishnah Berurah says you're not supposed to tell others about a rainbow.²⁸ Just then, Rav Twersky came back inside and thanked his talmid for telling him about the rainbow.

Now, Yehudah was really perplexed.

27. Rabbi Yehudah Eisenstein.

28. *Mishnah Berurah* 229:1.

“But, Rebbi, Eliezer just showed me this Mishnah Berurah that says I wasn’t supposed to tell you about the rainbow!”

“That’s true,” Rav Twersky agreed, “you’re really not supposed to tell. But, still, you gave me the merit of making a berachah, so I have to say thank you.”

Even by doing something as simple as taking note of someone’s presence and demonstrating interest — just giving someone a bit of heartening attention and a kind word — Rav Twersky could leave people with a positive, warm feeling. Reb Shalom Rothman merited being one of the final recipients of that inestimable attention.

The last time I spoke to Rav Twersky was during lunchtime on the day before his tragic petirah. He had given his regular shiur from 12:30–1:30 to a class of second-year students. After the shiur, he regularly stayed behind, learning at his desk, in case any of the bachurim had questions for him after they finished their lunch downstairs.

Seeing that it was mostly empty, I entered the classroom to sit down at a table and eat my brown-bag lunch.

Rav Twersky glanced up, saw me, and greeted me with his beautiful smile. He asked me how I was. I told him I was doing fine, and that it happened to be my birthday.

He remembered my celebration of the year before, when I celebrated the 50th anniversary of my bar mitzvah. He looked at me with his trademark smile and said, “That’s great! Fifty-one years of Torah and mitzvos!”

This type of caring, personal attention was not confined within the walls of the yeshivah. Reb Yisrael Caplan relates:

CHAPTER TWELVE
A UNIQUE LIFE
OF CONNECTION AND GROWTH

ONE YEAR ON PURIM, all the *bachurim* lined up to get a *berachah* from their revered Rebbi. “When it was my turn,” Reb Yechezkel Lang reminisced, “Rav Twersky gave me a *berachah* that I should be a *talmid chacham* and *yerei Shamayim*. To be honest, I was surprised. I had been expecting much more than that. So I said, ‘Rebbi, that’s it?’ To which he responded, ‘What else is there in this world?!’”

Unintentionally, Rav Twersky once revealed the depth of this inner reality of his to his *talmidim*, when he shared with them a comment of the Vilna Gaon. Reb Yitzchok Goldsmith remembers it well.



Giving a berachah to a talmid on Purim

Rebbi once told us that the Gaon says that, “Tov yatzar kavod lishmo” means, Hashem created a good thing, to be able to give honor to Hashem. I could hear and feel the deep emotion in Rebbi’s voice as he said, “What greater thing could a person possibly do than give kavod to Hashem?!”

“He didn’t need, he wasn’t interested, and he didn’t have anything else in this world.” That was how Rav Yisrael Elya Weintraub *zt”l*, Rav Twersky’s rebbi in the hidden realm of Torah, explained a statement made by Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai. On the day that he left this world, Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai quoted the *pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim*, “I am for my beloved, and upon me is His desire” (7:11), and exclaimed: “All the days I was bound in this world, with one knot was I bound to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Therefore, now ‘His desire is upon me.’”¹

To explain what Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai meant, Rav Yisrael Elya said, “*Nischt gedarft, nischt gevolt, nischt gehaht in di velt epes anderisch.*” Rabi Shimon bar Yochai had no need and no interest for anything else in the world. All he had was his connection to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and he entertained no desire or interest whatsoever for it to be any different.

Rav Nachum Baumol related the above as the opening remarks in the *hesped* he delivered for his beloved *chavrusa*, Rav Mosheh Twersky.

“Every time Rav Mosheh would repeat these words of Rav Yisrael Elya,” Rav Baumol shared with obvious emotion, “or heard someone else repeating it, he would become so excited and alive by it. He literally thrived on the memory of it!

*“And it was not just because it was such a beautiful, precise explanation. It was much more than that. With these words — *nischt gedarft, nischt gevolt, nischt gehaht* — Rav Yisrael Elya expressed something deep inside Rav Mosheh himself. The inner essence of a person is just that, deep and*

1. Zohar, *HaIdra Zuta*, *Haazinu* 288a.

inside. Often, a person may not be aware of certain facets of his own inner essence.

“A rebbi, though, can give clear expression and identification to that essence and thus enable his talmid to obtain an appreciation and grasp of his own self on a much deeper level and higher dimension. In these words of his Rebbi, Rav Mosheh found expression of his own inner self. Nischt gedarft, nischt gevolt, nischt gehaht. That was Rav Mosheh. The only thing he had in this world, and the only thing that he wanted in this world, was his connection with Hashem. He wanted nothing else.”

I’M NOT INTERESTED This sentiment was echoed by Rebbetzin Twersky as well, when she was asked if she felt her husband lived a life of *prishus*.

My husband did not particularly appreciate the term prishus in the way it’s often used in the modern vernacular. Was his life a life of prishus? Yes. I mean, what did he have with this material world?! But in no way did it come across as an approach of abstinence or asceticism.

Look, we have a nice, decent apartment. He was the one who chose it! And we’ve always had a decent car. But as far as he was concerned, the car was primarily to serve the purpose of him being able to travel to learn from Rav Yisrael Elya Weintraub in Bnei Brak, and for transporting the sticks² used

2. I once had the merit to help Rav Twersky move those sticks from the storage room where he kept them all year, to his car. Even that task was carried out with great alacrity. He was completely focused on the task at hand, and I