



My Father (in-Law), My *Rebbe*

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It is difficult to even attempt to characterize my late father-in-law and *rebbe*, רצ"ל, especially in a brief article. Nevertheless, it occurs to me that it would be quite accurate to say that he was that extremely rare individual who completely internalized and operationalized the entirety of what is written in the first משנה in מסכת פאה and which is recited every morning at the beginning of the ברכות השחר: "אלו דברים שאדם אוכל . . .".

כבוד אב ואם My father-in-law always spoke with great love and reverence for his parents, and it was obvious both from how he spoke of them and from the way his sisters spoke of their relationship, that he fulfilled the מצוה of כבוד אב ואם to its fullest. He also treated his mother-in-law with great love, care, and respect, and went as far as humanly possible to save her during the war. His כבוד for his father-in-law was manifest in the way that he guarded his manuscript throughout his wartime ordeal, and then spent many years in meticulous editing so that he could publish ספר מנחת יוסף and know that it was as perfect as could be.

גמילות חסדים His whole life was devoted to this end. Need I indicate more than his selfless devotion to the work of the organization, עזרת תורה? Among the many letters which were received after the לוויה was a very emotional one from the director of an institution in Israel who emphasized the personal interest which my father-in-law took in every one of the recipients of funds from עזרת תורה. I remember very vividly the many letters he received before each ראש השנה and פסח requesting help, and how he would follow up on each of those requests with the detailed list that he kept. I also remember the many times that he also helped by writing letters of recommendation on behalf of

individual needy scholars to Jewish foundations, and how he followed those letters up as well with calls to the foundations imploring them to make the grants.

השכמת בית המדרש שחרית וערבית Coming to the בית מדרש early for תפילה was almost a "fixation" with him. He was always up the first one and ready to leave the house long before actually necessary in order to arrive on time. I always knew that when we stayed over, I had to be up extra early in order to accompany him to the בית מדרש. During the early stages of his recent illness, he would get up in the middle of the night and try to get dressed in order not to be late for תפילה.

הכנסת אורחים Whenever he saw a guest, be it in the בית מדרש or elsewhere, he would invite that person home for a meal. I recall many times when my father-in-law completely surprised my mother-in-law, תחי', with a guest or two on שבת or יום טוב, as well as during the week. More than once, part of our meal went to the completely-unexpected guest. The fact that there was no time to prepare food or that there was simply no room for the guest were simply not factors to be considered, for my father-in-law, זצ"ל. My mother-in-law, תחי', would joke about their home being like that of the woman who would awaken her children saying: "Get up. Your bed now now has to be used as the table," and she would always remind us to be prepared to say that we're no longer hungry, in case "*der Papa*" brought unexpected guests.

בקר חולים Whenever he heard of someone being ill, my father-in-law would first speak with a close family member of the ill person to inquire about their condition. If at all possible, he would then visit the person and call frequently. He would always ask the person's full Hebrew name and that of his or her mother, so that he could say a מי שברך and pray for their recovery.

Most notably, he would issue very firm halakhic decisions to the ill person and their family members in matters relating to the person's condition and their recovery. Just as he adopted a stringent stance in other areas, he always adopted a very stringent position in matters relating to health. For example, if there was even the slightest suspicion that fasting on any fast day might be injurious to one's health, he ordered the person to eat and assured them that they were not sinning but performing a *mitzva* by not fasting under the circumstances!

הבנסת כלה Every תלמיד who was considering becoming engaged accompanied his prospective כלה on a visit to "Rebbe," where she was greeted with deep personal interest. If and when the couple became engaged, they would come to receive a ברכה, where they would drink a "להיים" with my father-in-law and he would discuss their future plans with them. He always urged every חתן to be very sensitive to the feelings of his כלה, and he would maintain a strong personal interest in her welfare as well as his until the wedding and after. He went to such great lengths to insure that material and emotional as well as spiritual needs of the bride were tended to that I sometimes joked with him that although he did not have the professional degree, he was a first class family social worker.

ליית המת Anyone familiar with ר' רוד, זצ"ל as an orator immediately thinks of his הספדים. He was the ideal-typical classical מספיד. But he did not only go to a funeral when he was called upon to be מספיד. I recall numerous occasions when he overcame great personal difficulties in order to attend the funeral of not only prominent colleagues but of simple lay people as well. He was also frequently called in the middle of night by colleagues, students, friends and even casual acquaintances for guidance and assistance in funeral arrangements. He never stood on ceremony, and he always felt it an obligation to give כבוד המת just as he always felt it of primary importance to respect the living.

עיון תפילה His concentration on the תפילה was obvious to anyone who saw him during תפילה and was a source of inspiration to generations of students. Who can forget his awesome rendering of אבינו מלכנו on Yom Kippur, or his נענועים on סוכות when he shook his לולב with every fiber in his body? I would just like to add that even during his terrible illness, he made every attempt for as long as possible to *daven* every day. Last Yom Kippur, when he was already quite sick, he spent the entire day in the בית מדרש and followed along with me as I sat next to him and said the תפילות aloud for him.

הבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו I can't imagine a person more dedicated to this end. It would literally pain him to hear of a conflict between two people. Even when he strongly disagreed with someone, he did everything in his power not only to avoid conflict but even to remain on good terms with that person. My mother-in-law, תח"י, says that in the 60 years they were married, she doesn't recall him ever saying he "hated" another Jew. Not only was the term not in his vocabulary, the emotion was totally alien to him.

ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם Every one of his תלמידים can testify that this was the case for him, especially those who suggested that they were going in to a profession other than the rabbinate or Jewish education. However, as my wife and I indicated in the *hesped* at the לוויה, even though he may have given some a difficult time, he was always proud of their achievements. He would beam when he said, "This doctor" or "this lawyer was my *talmid*." In terms of my own personal experience, he encouraged me to enter either היגוך or the rabbinate, but when he saw that I wanted to be a sociologist, he encouraged me undertake my graduate courses and my dissertation seriously. Throughout the course of the writing of my dissertation he would frequently ask me about my progress. He took interest in the subject matter with which I was involved, even if he didn't always quite understand all of its intricacies. To me and all of his *talmidim* who went into other fields, though, his questions were always the same: "Are you קובע עתים לתורה" and "What are you learning now?"

His dedication to תלמוד תורה also manifested itself in his commitment to giving *shiurim* even when doing so caused him hardship. I remember numerous occasions when it was difficult for him to say a *shiur*, and I suggested that he cancel it that day, but he wouldn't hear of it. Even during his illness, he garnered every ounce of strength in him and gave *shiurim* until last year when it finally became clear that it would no longer be possible for him to continue. And even then, he kept hoping that the illness would pass and he would be able to return to his *shiur*. On numerous occasions, he urged Rabbi Charlop and Rabbi Bronstein to make sure that his *talmidim* keep up with their learning and prepare for the forthcoming *shiur* which he hoped to give.

He was, of course, much more than that. The dictum, "הוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה", to be as careful with a "lighter" *mitzva* as with a very stringent one, was also one which he internalized to its fullest. For example, although he would ordinarily be the last one to leave the בית מדרש after *ma'ariv*, on the evenings of Chanukah I would have a hard time keeping up with him as he almost ran home to light the *menorah*. And, he would always tell me how his "Rebbe, Reb Shimon" (Shkop) would run home to light the Chanukah *menorah* immediately after *ma'ariv*.

He also had an incredible sense of responsibility for the entire community. I had pleaded with my mother-in-law many times to set hours for visits and calls, but she said that he would not allow such limits. He felt that he had to be available whenever needed. Likewise, although most people begin the Pesach Seder as soon as they return home from shul, he always took a relatively long time until he began. For years I thought it was a matter of his penchant for perfection in preparing for the Seder, but I then came to realize that he felt that he had to wait to begin later just in case there would be someone in the neighborhood with a question for him. This was probably a carryover from his days as the Rav of Suwalk; it is mentioned in Halakha that the Rav waits until everyone else begins their Seder in the event of a question.

And with all of that, there was his incredible humanity. He was not only exacting in the observance of מצוות. He also was meticulous in remembering the birthday of each of his children and grandchildren, in blessing them every Friday night, in being a father and grandfather to them and relating to them according to the appropriate age-level.

He was a *rebbe*-father figure to several generations of students. He established a unique, personal relationship with each תלמיד which extended long beyond the years in Yeshiva. On every *chol ha-moed* and Purim, the house was full of former *talmidim* who came with their spouses and children, and sometimes even grandchildren, to visit *Rebbe*. And *Rebbe* spoke with each one, man, woman, and child, on a very personal level. He was a very unique combination of רב and ראש ישיבה, צדיק and גאון, a person with a great mind and a big heart . . .

חבל על דאכדין ולא משתכחין. יהי זכרו ברוך.