



Rav Shimon Alster *zt"l*

BY YOCHONON DONN

Rav Yisroel Shimon Alster ז"ל, who rose from a modest background to become a *marbitz Torah* and a prime guiding light to thousands of people, was *niftar* on Friday afternoon after a short illness. The *rosh yeshiva* of Cliffwood and a longtime *maggid shiur* at the Mesvita of Long Beach, he was 77.

Considered one of the greatest *mekablim* of the Brisker *derech halitum* from Rav Binyomin Paler ז"ל, Rav Alster was known to three generations of *talmidim* as a strict purveyor of the *mesorah* who nonetheless inspired overwhelming love in them.

"He had tremendous *varmkeit*," said Rav Naftoli Respler, a *talmid* from Long Beach who later became his son-in-law. "He was the only person I know who could tell anyone anything and they wouldn't get insulted. He was pure *emes*."

Another *talmid* said that people strived to put Rav Alster's *musar vaadim* into practice because they instinctively felt that he was out for their benefit.

"Everything he said was calculated, everything he said he was holding by, and everything he said was practical," a *talmid*, Rabbi Shmuel Lipschutz, said. "We were able to be *mekabel* from him because we knew that he was real."

Rav Alster knew the gamut of *Shas*, and was familiar with *sifrei musar*, *chassidus* and *Kabbalas*.

Rav Alster was *nov* of Khal Torah Utefillah in Flatbush, a unique *shul* organized primarily by former *talmidim* who wanted their children to retain the *demus* of an *adam gadol*.

"Rav Shimon didn't run it as a *shul*," declared Rav Aryeh Malkiel Kotler, *rosh yeshiva* of Bais Medrash Govoah, at the *levayah*. "He ran it as a *yeshiva*." Rav Kotler would spend a *Shabbos* there each year as part of a Flatbush fundraising weekend for Bais Medrash Govoah.

Rav Alster's greatness could not have been seen even remotely at the circumstances of his birth and early life. An only child of a successful diamond merchant from Antwerp, the young Shimon became an orphan at seven months when his father was killed in the world's first commercial airline crash. Yet, he determined at a young age that Torah was to be his life's sole occupation, and he became one of the earliest American *bochurim* to travel to learn in Eretz Yisroel.

"My father's life could be divided into five parts," his son, Rav Mordechai Alster, noted. "There was the period from his birth to his *bar mitzvah*, his years in Yeshiva Kol Torah in Eretz Yisroel, his time later in Rav Paler's *yeshiva*, then in Long Beach, and then when he founded the *yeshiva* in Cliffwood."

Rav Alster was born in 1946, after 10 long years of marriage, to Reb Yosef Shmuel and Gittel Alster, Chorkotover *chassidim* who originated from the Galician town of Yashlisk. They moved to Antwerp in the run-up to World War I to avoid the draft, and Reb Yosef Shmuel had a successful career in the city's flourishing diamond industry. Reb Yosef Shmuel's *rebbe* in Antwerp was Rav Yehuda Leib Kagan, who would later play a major role in the development of his son.

During this time, Reb Yosef Shmuel



studied with a prominent *talmid chochom* and *talmid* of Slabodka named Rav Reuven Agushevitz. They learned through *Bava Kama* together, and Rav Reuven's *sefer* on that *masechta*, *Biur Reuven*, was later published by Mrs. Alster in gratitude to him.

Rav Alster's parents escaped the German occupation of the Netherlands by biking to neutral Portugal through France, and in 1940 they received permits to enter the United States.

Several months after Shimon's birth, his father returned to Antwerp to see what remained of his family and business. On his return trip, on September 18, he was flying on a Sabena flight from Brussels when it crashed during the landing descent in Gander, Newfoundland. It hit a mountaintop deep inside a forest, killing 26 of the 44 people on board.

It took a few days before rescuers could arrive at the scene of the crash, and by that time, Reb Yosef Shmuel was not found alive. He was buried in a mass grave at the time. The area is so remote and takes so long to reach that Rav Shimon never visited his father's *kever* until about five years ago.

His mother, a young widow, became a successful businesswoman and sent her son to a *cheder* in Manhattan, with plans to send him to a prestigious college after he graduated.

At the age of 14, though, Shimon informed his mother that he wanted to go to a regular *yeshiva* — specifically, a *yeshiva* in Eretz Yisroel, which was an extreme rarity at the time. This was very hard on his mother, who would be separated from her only son for years on end, and who also had to give up on her dream of having her son get a college degree.

In an act of *Hashgocha Protis*, at this time she received a letter from an old friend of her husband's, Rav Zelig Shifmanovich, a Slabodka *talmid*. Writing in Yiddish, he expressed his pleasure at hearing that "your son Shimon found his life's purpose and direction. I know that this is not what you had wanted from him, but you're so lucky. You know how many mothers in Europe would *daven* just to have a son like this, who is going to go to *yeshiva*? In fact, in this generation, most *bochurim* are not even going to *yeshiva*, and here you have somebody who wants to dedicate himself to Torah."

This letter convinced her that it's a good thing to do. She even went along with him to Eretz Yisroel, visiting many *yeshivos* to see which one would be best for Shimon. They settled on Yeshiva Kol Torah, which was led by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. They then bid a tearful goodbye and she returned to the United States.

Shimon attached himself to his *rabbeim*, specifically Rav Yehoshua Neuwirth, author of *Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa*, and Rav Yonah Mertzbach. He had to get used to the food there, which consisted of canned meat and powdered milk, a difficult thing for an American child. "It was like army rations," he later said. Due to the novelty of being the rare "Americaner" in the *yeshiva*, he was given special attention by the *hanhallah*, who made sure that he got a *leben* every day.

He slowly got used to it and *shteiged* tremendously. Rav Alster utilized his time in Eretz Yisroel to familiarize himself with *gedolim* there. He would talk in learning



with the Tchebiner Rov, and go to Kfar Chasidim frequently to spend Shabbos with Rav Elya Lopian. He would later repeat the way Rav Elya would recite "velo sasuru" during *Krias Shema*, with the emphasis and inflection of a *baal mussar*.

A few Gerrer *bochurim* who knew him brought him to the *Bais Yisroel*, and for decades later he would speak about the Gerrer Rebbe's *pikchus* in dealing with *bochurim*.

After almost three years of intense learning in Eretz Yisroel, he felt that it was time to return to the United States, to his mother. Upon his arrival, various people advised him to go to different *yeshivos*. Rav Yehuda Leib Kagan, his father's old *rebbe* from Antwerp, who was then *rosh yeshiva* at Ye-

shiva
v a
R a b -
beinu Yaakov Yosef, or RJJ, suggested Yeshiva Chasan Sofer. His son, Rav Yisroel Meir Kagan, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Toras Chaim in Denver, was a son-in-law of the Mattersdorfer Rov, so he was familiar with the place.

"Go to Chasan Sofer," Rav Kagan told him, "because there's a *Yid* there named Rav Binyomin Paler who is a *talmid* of the Brisker Rov, and he will help you further develop in learning."

Rav Alster followed his advice and quickly gained a reputation as Rav Paler's *talmid muvhak*. Friends from those days recalled how he would be absorbed in Torah even during *bein hasedorim* or meal-time.

When he left Eretz Yisroel, a friend wrote him in a letter that Rav Shlomo Zalman inquired about "the Alster *bochur*." Told that he returned to the United States, Rav Shlomo Zalman said, "Oy, he was such a good *bochur*! He should have stayed over here."

"It looks to me like he really held of you," the friend added in the letter.

Under Rav Paler, Rav Alster gained the Brisker *mehalech* of learning for which he was later famed. He was a clear-headed thinker, and he gained a special relationship with Rav Paler, who would tell him about his time in Shanghai and his *rab-beim*.

At the *levayah* on Sunday, Rav Simcha Bunim Paler, a son of Rav Paler, said that when the Paler family had questions, they would ask Rav Alster, knowing that the answers he would give would be in the *derech* of their father. When the family published Rav Paler's *sefer*, they consulted with Rav Alster on how to best categorize their father in the *hakdomah*.

Rav Alster married in 1969 to Rebbetzin Esther Kreindel Weiss, a daughter of Rav Avrohom Yosef Weiss, a prominent

roy on Manhattan's West Side who had been a *chossid* of Rav Yeshaya Chechoiv-er, the youngest son of the *Divrei Chaim* of Sanz. Rav Weiss himself was a son-in-law of Dr. Raphael Moller, a renowned *askan* and the *rosh hakohol* of the Breuer's *kehillah*.

Another son-in-law of Rav Weiss is the Modzitzer Rebbe of Flatbush.

Rebbetzin Alster, who passed away in 2011, touched the lives of thousands of people, primarily through her job as principal of Bnos Yaakov Pupa Girls School in Boro Park. She was considered a mother of the women who *davened* at her husband's *shul* and served as a partner in the Torah he taught.

"When I see my husband learning with the *bochurim*, being a *marbitz Torah*," she would say, "my heart is full. What more can I ask for?"

A year after his *chasunah*, at the age of 25, Rav Alster was encouraged to apply for a position at the Mesivta of Long Beach. The *yeshiva* had an opening for the *beis medrash second seder shoel umeshiv* position, and the *rosh yeshiva* was looking for an accomplished *talmid chochom* to fill it

At this time, Rav Feigelstock had already nearly settled on a different candidate for the position, but Rav Avrohom Cooper, whose nephew was learning at Rav Paler's *yeshiva* and knew Rav Alster, requested that he meet with him. "He'll be a great asset to the *yeshiva*," he told Rav Feigelstock.

Rav Alster went to Rav Feigelstock's bungalow colony during that summer for a meeting. The short meeting ended up going on for three hours, with the conversation flowing. The main topic was about learning, with the Brisker *talmid* and a *talmid muvhak* of Rav Aharon Kotler going head to head with their divergent styles.

At the end of the conversation, Rav Feigelstock asked him if he could deliver a *musar shmuss*.

"I don't know whether I can give a *shmuss*," Rav Alster responded. "But the difference between a *Yid* and a *goy ken ich avekshellen* — I can establish."

Rav Feigelstock was delighted with the reply, saying, "That is a real *shmuss*. Nothing more is needed."

When they got up, Rav Feigelstock gave what could only be the ultimate compliment a Kletzker *talmid* can deliver. "Rav Aharon would have loved you," he said.

Two days later, Rav Alster got a phone call. Rav Feigelstock was on the line. "We want you," he said simply.

The *rosh yeshiva* and his new hire had different styles and came from different backgrounds of *chinuch*, but there was never a hint of disagreement or disharmony between the two, Rav Elya Brudny, *rosh yeshiva* of Mirrer Yeshiva in Flatbush, said in his *hesped*.

"Although Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock was from the *cheder* of Rav Aharon Kotler and Rav Shimon Alster was from the *cheder* of the Brisker Rov, they complemented each other and gave each other space." Rav Feigelstock gave Rav Alster free reign to develop his own methods in the afternoons, never even stepping into the *yeshiva* building during those hours. Yet, he was completely *mevatef* himself to Rav Feigelstock.

When Rav Alster came to Long Beach, he was just three years older than the oldest *bochurim* there. Yet, it took them many years to realize that, since he had a presence that belied his years.

"I asked former *talmidim*," his son Rav Mordechai said, "how could you consider him a *rebbe*? He was just 25." And they said, "We didn't know. We thought for sure that he was at least 35."

Rav Alster remained in Long Beach for the next 34 years, taking full control during second *seder* and during summers at Camp Horim. He re-imagined how a second *seder* appears in a *yeshiva*, in the words of Rav Elya Svei. He would review the *shiur* with *bochurim*, two or three at a time, until everyone understood it fully.

"He was more than a *sho'el umeshiv*," said a *talmid*. "He was like the *rosh yeshiva* of second *seder*."

A *talmid* recalled how he would randomly call over three sets of *chavrusas* at a time, going over the *sugya* and the *shiur*. He would not begin *shiur* until everyone understood what the *Gemara*, the *Tosafos*, and the *Rashba* were saying, going it over slowly countless times.

He would deliver a weekly *vaad*, pri-

marily exhorting *bochurim* on the power of *davening* on a simple level and the fakeness of the outside world.

"He was a simple person, approachable yet deeply respected," a *talmid* recalled. "He was a *medakkeik b'mitzvos*, had a reverence for *mesorah*, and just wanted to be *mashtiah* on people. He had no desire at all for *kavod*, just to be *marbeh kevod Shomayim*. To give you an example, it bothered him more if he saw someone leaving in middle of *krias haTorah* than if he came late to *seder*."

Over the years, he developed an entire generation of *bnei Torah* who were totally attached to him and who felt like he was a father to them. This closeness lasted for many of his *talmidim* for half a century. This was noticeable at the *levayah*, where hundreds of people sobbed at the loss of their mentor.

In 1995, a group of former *talmidim* asked Rav Alster to become the *rov* of a *shul* that they were establishing, called Khal Torah Utefillah. He lived in Boro Park at the time and would make the trek each *Shabbos* to the *shul* until he moved to Flatbush.

"There was no board of directors, just the *rov's* decisions," his son, Rav Mordechai, said. "They respected him and listened to his every word."

The *kehillah*, now consisting of more than 100 families, stands out in Flatbush for its uniqueness. There are several wealthy *baale batim* there, and he raised everyone to the level of a *ben Torah*. He taught them to refer to each other by the honorific "Reb" and to wear hats and jackets during the week.

Rav Alster decided in 2004, shortly after Rav Feigelstock suffered a stroke, to open his own *yeshiva* in Cliffwood, New Jersey. It was a *yeshiva* where many hundreds of *talmidim* have learned over the past 19 years.

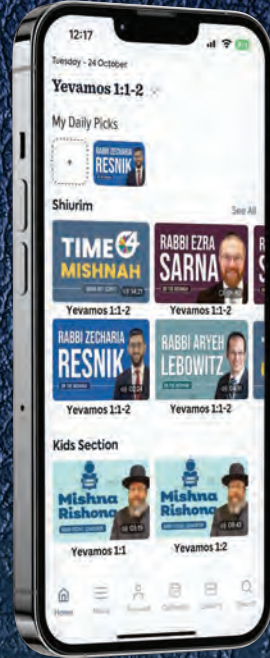
"That's where he was for the past 19 years," his son said. "So, ultimately, he never left the *shender* for 53 years."

Rav Alster's daily schedule began to reflect the overload of work he had. He had a daily *shiur* in his *shul* in Flatbush from 5:30 a.m. until 7 o'clock, when he would make the 45-minute drive to Cliffwood for *Shacharis*. He would deliver a *shiur* during first *seder* until 1:30, then give his famous *been hasedarim vaad*.

He would take a short rest after *Mincha*, at 3:15, but would insist on keeping his phone on to answer calls during that time.

"I used to implore him to shut off the phone, as he needed to rest up a little," his son said. "He always said, 'You're right, but I'm not going to be able to do it today, because this person, who is having problems with his daughter's *shalom bayis*, told me that he's going to call me today, and it's such a problem that I'm going to have to answer the phone.' And the next day he would have a different reason, because this other person is going through a medical issue and they might want to call him. He was constantly making excuses, until I realized that it's not happening. He's always going to answer his phone."

He was in *yeshiva* until 9:15, returning to Flatbush to *daven Maariv* at his *shul* at 10. He kept up this schedule until his wife was *niftar* a decade ago.



MISHNAH YOMI בְּסֵדֶר נְשִׂיִם THIS WEEK

Learn in memory of those that perished on Simchas Torah and as a *זכות* to בני ישראל in Eretz Yisroel.

FREE ArtScroll pocket Mishnayos and calendars available at artsroll.com/mishnahyomi

Ad Sponsored By:
EMANUEL MASHINSKY
REAL ESTATE EXPERT



Download the free All Mishnah app at allmishnah.org



ALL MISHNAH
A PROJECT OF THE OU



Despite having hundreds of *talmidim*, Rav Alster kept up with them and knew where they were holding in life. During the annual parlor meeting for his *yeshiva* in Lakewood, nearly 400 *talmidim* would show up. They would line up, and he greeted each one with a comment specific to that person. To this one he would ask how his son who had been having trouble in class was doing, and to the next he would ask whether his mother was feeling better, and to the third he would ask if he ended up joining that new *chaburah*.

His dedication to the *talmidim* was reciprocated by them. After his wife was *niftar*, a group of them worried that he would be lonely during *bein hazemanim*, so they traveled to visit him. When they entered, he was learning *Maseches Keillim*. He looked up and understood right away why they came.

"People think I'm lonely," he said with his trademark smile, "and they therefore come to visit me. Let me make it clear: I'm not lonely. I'm so happy I can just sit and learn without any distractions. I have what to do to use up my time."

When one of his *talmidim* missed coming to be *menachem aveil* him upon the passing of his wife, he expressed his sadness to his son-in-law, Rav Naftali Respler. "If only he would know how much I love him and care for him," he said. It pained him that a *talmid* would think that he wasn't close to the *rosh yeshiva*.

Rav Respler recalled how one *talmid* told him that his mother wanted him to go to college instead of *yeshiva*. The mother felt that it would be irresponsible not to send a child to college. "Do I look like an irresponsible person?" Rav Alster replied with a glint in his eyes. "I did not go to college."

"That changed my life, and the lives of my children," the *talmid* said. "Today, all my children are sitting and learning and are *bonei Torah*."

Rav Respler said that there are thousands of similar stories.

"He always had the right thing to say," he said. "He was a very unique person. He had an unbelievable impact on *talmidim*. A lot of them feel like they lost their father. He carried so many *talmidim*. They relied on him for everything. They felt that he cared about them and they would follow his advice."

About 10 years ago, he remarried to Rebbetzin Leah Leeder, her previous husband had been a respected *talmid chacham* in Staten Island. The two families were integrated to a phenomenal extent, with Rav Alster becoming an active *zaide* to the Leeder family and his wife taking over as the *rebbetzin* of the *shul*.

Rav Alster continued his busy schedule as *rosh yeshiva* and *rov* until *Pesach* time, when he first developed medical issues. He was *niftar* on Friday afternoon and the *levayah* was held on Sunday morning at his *shul*, followed by a second *levayah* at Bais Medrash Govoah in Lakewood. *Kevarah* took place in Deans, NJ.

Rav Alster is survived by his wife, Rebbetzin Leah Alster; his children, Mrs. Chaya Schwazz, Rav Mordechai Alster, Mrs. Leah Respler, Mrs. Malka Olshin, Mrs. Kayla Zoberman, and Rav Eliezer Alster; and grandchildren following in his ways.

Yehi zichro boruch.



בארזים נפלה שלהבת
הגאון הצדיק
הרב ישראל שמעון
בן הרב יוסף שמואל אלסטר זצ"ל

ל שב באהלה של תורה כל ימיו ולילותיו
ש יעוריו הבהרים היו למופת והאירו עיני אלפי תלמידיו
ד אש ושיבה, מרא דאתרא, מרבין תורה, צדיק וענו
א יך להתפלל אל אבינו שבשמים הדריכנו בשיחותיו
ל יסד על ידי מידותיו התרומיות, וחזק לכל מי שבא בד' אמותיו
שמועת הסתלקותו הגיעתנו ושברה את לבנו
מר ודע עובו אותנו לאנחותינו
ערב ובוקר וצהריים לא כלו רחמיו בעדינו
ו עד ימיו האחרונים המשיך ללמד וליעץ לטובתינו
נפלה עשרת תורה, כתר שם טוב שעלה על גבינו
אשרינו שזכינו להסתופף בצילו ולהשתעשע עמו בתורה והשקפתה.

המקום ינחם את כל בני משפחתו, ועולה על כולנה, אשת חיל עטרת בעלה,
הרבנית לאה שתחי
אשר עמדה לימינו בכל חלקי עבודתנו הטהורה.
והיא גם היא פעלה ודאגה תמיד איך לרוםם ולהזיק את מחנינו בין ברוחניות ובין בגשמיות,
וכולנו נהנים עד היום ממסירת נפשה ופרי מעלליה הטובים.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

מחנה ישיבת סטעטן איילענד

הרב דוד פיינשטיין שליט"א
ראש ישיבה

הרב ראובן פיינשטיין שליט"א
ראש הישיבה

הנהלת מחנה רוח הקיץ



הנהלת הישיבה



THOUGHTS ON THE LOSS OF MY *Rebbi*

BY RABBI BINYOMIN Y. NEWMARK

Rav Shimon was a real *Yid*. His essence was a *Yid*. That was his personification. He wasn't an American *Yid*. He was a *Yid*. Everything he thought was through the eyes of a *Yid*.

His uniqueness was his unadulterated Brisker *hashkafah* brought down to a 20th and 21st century American *bochur* in a language they understood, could accept, and could ap-

preciate.

He would show us the nuanced differences between what's proper and what's off. Very patiently he would explain why certain *hashkofas* or even certain famous people are slightly off from *Toras emes*.

On the one hand, his *shitos* could be perceived as *kanaus*, but he never taught them in a way that made anyone feel pushed away. He always disarmed the corrupted *shitah* or

hanhagah, never the individual or the community. His *kanaus* never hurt anyone.

His *leitznusa d'avodah zarah* was legendary. He would make *leitznus* of *tayvos*, of every newest fad, in food, in clothing, and everything else.

He would make *leitznus* of *kinah*. He would expose the *yeitzer hara* as the *hevel havolim* that it is. Torah and *gedolei Yisroel* reign supreme and everything else is of no value.

Many *rabbeim* give *shmuessen* against things. With Rav Shimon, he made such casual and accurate *leitznus* that you just lost your appetite for that *yeitzer hara*.

Talmidim enjoyed his comments so much that if they saw an ad, article or publication that would elicit a comment from him, they would place it on his desk before he gave a *vaad* so he could expound on exactly what

were just older *talmidim* from Long Beach or Cliffwood or *mispallelim* from the *shul*) at his annual *melava malka* or at the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah shmuess*, he would comment on the Jewish media, on the latest styles and fads. He would make *leitznus* of the carving stations, sushi, even tulip season.

Rav Shimon was our anchor, encouraging the *olam*, each *kefi madreigosom*, to stand strong to the peer pressures of society. To think for yourself and focus on you and your *mishpacha* and on proper *hashkofas hachaim*. Don't do things because "everyone is doing it." If you do need to copy someone, copy the *Chofetz Chaim*.

He would show us the *hevel* of the world and help us recognize *emes*. A *talmid* of Rav Shimon wasn't someone who could just know



At the bris of the author's son.



the proper *hashkafah* to repeat, but knew how to live by his *hashkofas*.

He once came back from a *chasunah* where the *chossim* and his friends were more modern. He said how nice the *bochurim* were. They were so nice and *hakavodik*, with such fine *niddos*. It makes it sadder that they weren't given proper *hashkofas hachaim*. It genuinely hurt him.

At one point, he joined with other Flatbush *rabbonim* and *roshei yeshiva* to protect proper *shemiras Shabbos* in the neighborhood. He even traveled to Eretz Yisroel for it. They went to great lengths to stop the *pirtzah*.

was wrong with that *hashkafah*.

Talmidim loved his *musar*, as it was given as *yemin mekarev us mol doicheh*.

He never stopped teaching and giving over his *leitznusa d'avodah zarah*. Even to his alumni (no one was ever an alumnus; they



I once met the son of the leader of the breach and mentioned that I was a *talmid* of Rav Shimon Alster. The son said that his father told him that if Rav Alster had been the one leading the opposition, it would have ended much more diplomatically. When I reported this back, he humbly replied, "True."

He was a master at diplomatically pursuing *Toras emes* and *hashkofas emes* without trampling on anyone.

He always presented the other side with any topic. If someone came in riled up for or against something, even if they were correct, he always presented the other side. His *bikkush ha'emes* was so strong that he could never be absolute to one side.

He liked to say that you can hold of something 98%, and that means that you really do hold of it, but you must recognize the 2% that is not correct.

When there would be movements or ads to strengthen a certain *mitzvah*, he would explain that we don't believe in "one-*mitzvah* Judaism." Rather, every *mitzvah* is important.

He would show the weakness in fads and movements, even wonderful fads and movements that helped people learn and do *mitzvos*. He wasn't *mevatel* the good, but would show a clarity and perspective so his *talmidim* could outline their pri-

orities, not get washed away by the power, persuasion and media.

He once saw a billboard that said something to the effect of, "Restore hair loss. Restore your confidence." He commented to the person with him, "What does hair loss have to do with confidence?" The person replied, "That's because you don't look in a mirror."

He would often tell me that his mother would always tell him, "Eat more and stand straighter." Once,

after saying it to me, he asked me to get him something to eat, as he obviously hadn't eaten yet that day and it was quite late in the afternoon. "A half of something on a half of something." Why a half? "Azoi." Honestly, I wasn't sure what he wanted. So I brought him two half apples on two half napkins. He smiled, "Exactly what I wanted. Thank you." (To this day, I have no idea what he really wanted, because no matter what, he was going to say, "Exactly

what I wanted.”)

He told a *talmid*, “What’s the big deal with dieting? Just eat less. What do you think I ate today? A cookie and half of an avocado.” (This was after 7 p.m.)

He completely removed himself from the frivolity of *Olam Hazeih*, yet simultaneously fully understood it and its challenges.

It was precisely this clarity in seeing that world and life’s challenges through pristine *Torah hashkofah*, not tainted by outside influences, combined with his keen understanding of people and circumstances, that enabled him to have true *daas Torah*. It is this clarity and empathy that made him the address for so many. Hundreds, if not thousands, of *mishpachos* did not make a move without him.

His advice was given in a way that he spoke out the *tzeddim*, the different angles of the topic at hand. He would dissect every angle together with the *sho’el* and then usually the answer was obvious.

He also tried to answer things in a way that a *talmid* would never be going against some-

one brought up, he challenged them with the advantages of the other choice. The person was confused, until he realized that Rav Shimon was playing devil’s advocate to help bring out the different angles so the decision could be made properly.

I once forgot someone to Rav Shimon to discuss a weighty matter. After presenting the question, he continued to talk to the person for 45 minutes. At one point, he explained, “It looks to you like I’m just *shmoozing* with you. Really, I’m getting to know you and thinking about the question.” After the meeting, he gave this individual confident, decisive advice, including many detailed aspects that the person didn’t even realize at the time would be ramifications of the decision.

When there was an *eis tzarah*, Rav Shimon would never ascribe a reason for why it happened. Rather, he would always say, “Every person knows where they need to improve.”

Rebbi taught us how to love and care about *talmidim*. Not through hugs or words, but through *hergeishim* that ran so deep that

said, “We have to be *mamshich*.” He was in hospital with his wife. Shortly thereafter, his *rebbeitzin* was *niftar*. When this *yungerman* came to the *shivah*, Rav Shimon said, “I didn’t forget about you. We’ll speak after *shivah*.”

When someone had twin preemies in Eretz Yisroel, he wrote a letter of *chizuk*. He did so as well when a *talmid* was sitting *shivah*. He bemoaned the fact that people don’t write letters anymore.

When my son was in critical condition, *rebbe* called every day during *bein hasedarim* to check in. When the doctors gave him a few hours to live, he said, “Let everyone else *daven* now. You ask Hashem to hold your hand.” At the *bris*, Rav Shimon repeated from Rav Chazkel Levenstein that before *yemos haMoshiach*, *refuot* will be similar to *techiyas hameisim*. (How I was convinced the same would happen to him...)

The *rash yeshiva* believed in the *peninim* of every *Yid*. There is no term *ahavas chinom* in *Chazal*. *Sinas chinom*, yes. Not *ahavas chinom*, because it’s not *chinom* - it’s *ahavas*

In learning, he taught us that if you make a proper “*poshute laining*,” you will be *mechaven* to the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* in the *sugya*. He would call *talmidim* up around his *shinder* and learn with us, challenging us not just to look up *reid*, but to actually think until we were *mechaven* to the *emes* of the *sugya* ourselves.

Rebbi liked to say, “Contrary to popular belief, thinking didn’t go out of style.” He would sometimes put his head down or place his head in his hands and sit and think for a long time.

When we were up by his *shinder*, we were in a completely different world. We were in his world - inside the *sugya*. Sometimes, after he arrived at a *p’shat*, he would say, “Let’s say it again.” Then, he wouldn’t repeat himself, but take it from an entirely different angle and end at the same result. (He did the same in his *shumness*.) You could write many articles about what it was like being up at his *shinder*. Learning how to learn. Learning how to think. It transformed the way a person looked at a *Gemara* for life.



thing he said explicitly. I once asked a question and he responded, “Ask those *rabbonim* who answer these questions.” The next time I saw him, he asked me what I did. I replied, “I listened to *rebbe*. I didn’t do it.” He was satisfied. “I knew you would understand.”

I once heard of two different couples who had asked him the same question about going to Eretz Yisroel during *bein hazemanim* of *shana rishonah*. He answered both of them the same way: “It’s a vacation. Maybe it’s a kosher vacation. The Grand Canyon is also a kosher vacation, seeing *niflans haBorei*. Maybe it’s more kosher because you can daven at *mekomos hakedoshim*. It’s a kosher vacation.” One couple understood that they shouldn’t go. The other understood that they *should* go. They both did what he wanted and expected them to do. They understood what they were doing and were able to make a proper decision.

Someone went to him to discuss an important life decision. Whichever angle they

were enveloped in the knowledge that we were his children. He said that the goal is *ohev es habriyos umekarvan laTorah*.

He cared so deeply about people that he was almost bothered when people didn’t follow up and update him. He once remarked to me, after commenting that he hadn’t heard from someone in a while, “You want to know what *hakoras hatov* is? *Hakoras hatov* is to call every so often and tell me what’s going on.”

It bothered *rebbe* if a *talmid* “fell off the map.” He cared so much. He told us that to Rav Paler, there was no difference in the relationship of a son or a *talmid*. Both were the same.

When a *talmid* failed to be *menachem avel* when Rav Shimon was sitting *shivah* for his *rebbeitzin*, he remarked, “If he knew how much I care about him, he would have for sure come.”

A *yungerman* called him about going to work. During the conversation, Rav Shimon

Yisroel. We love every *Yid* because he’s a *Yid*.

He used to tell the following story. A *chossid* went to work and started wearing a short jacket to fit in. Whenever he went to his *rebbe*, he would put back on his long jacket. However, he always felt guilty that he was tricking the *rebbe*. Once, he decided to be “true to himself” and went to the *rebbe* with a short jacket. The *rebbe* asked him what happened. In response to his explanation, the *rebbe* replied, “You weren’t faking me. You were faking them. The real you is the *chossid* in the long jacket.” Rav Shimon would say, “The real you is the *Yid*. Everything else is fake.”

Rav Shimon once walked in to give a *vaad* and a *bochur* was sleeping using his chair as a pillow. His instinctive reaction was to quickly turn around and walk out of the room. When he came back a few minutes later, he said, “Tell the *bochur* I didn’t see who it was.” His instinct was sensitivity.

The greatest thing *rebbe* taught us was how to learn.

A *talmid* once started talking while he was talking. Rav Shimon stopped and said, “When you do *hagolas keilim*, there is a *shitah* that the *tarfus* doesn’t go back in, because while it’s *polet*, it’s not *boleia* (while it’s expressing, it can’t be absorbing). You understand what I’m saying? Okay, let’s go *veiter*.”

A *yawn* by his *shinder* was from the “*gimmel chamunos*.” He said, “No one yawns when playing basketball. If you were involved in your learning, you wouldn’t yawn.”

Once, towards the end of a long *seder*, when we were tired, he related the following.

When he was in Eretz Yisroel, if the *lomdei Torah* got sick, the Vaad Hayeshivos would send them to a hotel/resort to recuperate. He was once sent there, and at breakfast he met an *alter Yid* who probably never saw such a spread of food in his life. The man commented, “They say that we need to eat to recover, so let’s eat.” They came to lunch, and again the food was plentiful, and the *alter Yid* had the same reaction. When it came to supper



and this *alter Yid* again saw a whole meal, he was overwhelmed. He turned to Rav Shimon (a young *bochur*) and said, "Come! *Lomir mechazeik zein* so we can eat again."

Rebbi turned to us and said, "This *Yid* needed *chizuk* so he could eat. At least let's be *mechazeik* each other to learn *shtark*."

He didn't understand *retzifus* programs. If you are *areingeton* in your learning, you are learning *b'retzifus*. He would point out how some *bochurim* treat *retzifus* programs like not talking during washing and *hamotzi*, so they would go "Eh... um... nu..." but were *meisich daas* from the *sugya*. Just be *areingeton*.

He would exhort us to be *mekabel* to think in learning in the streets. I heard from a *talmid* that in his early years in Long Beach, he would tell *bochurim* to go to sleep with an *Inrei Moshe*. This was in the 1970s.

As *bochurim*, he taught us *sugyas* in *Shas*, *massar*, and *nachshavah*. He gave us *mesoras haTorah*. For him, there was no *Litvishe To-*

rah, *Chassidische Torah*, *Hirschonian Torah* - there was just *Toras Emes*. And the Torah was enjoyable. It was sweet. It had a *geshmak*.

His *geshmak* and excitement in learning were contagious.

His entire focus of life was Torah, Torah, Torah.

The *rosh yeshiva* had tremendous *hisbarlus* to the *Rishonim* and *gedolei Acharonim*. If you were *mechaven* to a Rav Akiva Eiger's *kasha*, he would say, "You weren't *mechaven* to Rav Akiva Eiger's *kasha*. You bumped into it. Rav Akiva Eiger planted a tree in the *sugya* through tremendous *yegiah* and *harovanya*. You bumped into Rav Akiva Eiger's tree."

Rebbi taught us *emes*. Don't make things up in learning and say a *dochek p'shat* or *ukimpta*. The *Rishonim's sugya* had lights on in the room, so when they saw that there was no door and the only way out of the *sugya* was through the window, they would say a *dochek*. But by us, the room is dark, so you can't just



climb out the window when there is an open door to climb out of. Don't be too lazy to search for the open door.

He would quote the *Chasam Sofer* who said, "You can say whatever I say in your name, but don't say what you say in my name."

If I ever told him Torah or a *shmuess* I was planning on giving, he didn't just compliment, he always had comments. If I would ever say, "This is the *pshtat*," he would always show me how there is more. His *bikkush ha'emes* could never limit something to one simple *pshtat*.

At the same time, he was always building people, sure not to make anyone feel bad.

I once asked him something from a *Rishon* that was different from the way he was learning the *sugya*. At the time, he looked for a second and said, "It's not a *kasha*." I wasn't sure why, but went back to learning. A couple of weeks later, I went over to ask him a question and he said, "You were right." I looked at him blankly and he explained, "The way you learned the *sugya*." And he jumped right in to the *sugya*. I replied sheepishly, "I'm not really holding in the *sugya* right now." To which he answered, "Neither am I. But the point is you were right."

After he became a *rosh yeshiva*, it bothered him that the job of a *rosh yeshiva* included so many aspects that were unrelated to just learning with *talmidim*.

He encouraged the value of Torah and *mekomos haTorah*. He explained that there is a special *siyata diShmaya* and *Hashgocha Proti*s for *yeshivos* and *yungeleit*. Once, he needed to make payroll for the *yeshiva*, but there was no money in the *yeshiva* account. Even if he would call someone for a donation, it would

be a check and take a couple of days to clear. He went to *daven Mincha* in *yeshiva*. A *baal habayis* who never stopped by the *yeshiva* came to *Mincha* and handed him an envelope with cash that covered the full payroll.

Rebbi would say, "Our goal in life is either to be *lomdei Torah* and *marbitzei Torah*, or go to work and try to earn enough to be a *toemeh Torah*."

After the Har Nof massacre, a *talmid* asked if it's better to make a *kabbolah* in learning or in *avodas Hashem*. He said that our *mesorah* is to work on Torah even if other parts might fall, because the *ikkar avodah* of a *ben Torah* is to be *areingeton* in *limud haTorah*. Definitely work on other areas, he said, but the main focus must be on Torah.

Rav Shimon acted and spoke with the *malchus* of a *talmid chochom*, exactly as the *Rambam* in *Perek Hey of Hilchos Dei'os* describes.

On *Chanukah*, the *rosh yeshiva* gave a *shmuess* about how the *Chashmonaim* had the *middah* of *Hod Sheb'malchus*. I always felt that that described him. Many of the *maspidim* spoke about his *middas hanod*. He also possessed a *malchus* that was felt by anyone who met him.

He always dressed and spoke *bakavodik*. He rarely ate *b'rabim*. He ate in a refined manner befitting a *talmid chochom*.

Once, he had been sitting with the *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock, for quite a few hours. At some point, the *rebbeztin* brought in corn on the cob to eat. The *rosh yeshiva* looked at Rav Shimon and said, "*Ess azoi vi ihr eat in der heim*" (eat it like you eat it at home), and walked out of the room. Rav Shimon ate it like he always did, cutting off

the kernels with a knife and a fork.

When *bochurim* asked why we have to wear a hat and jacket when we leave the building, he explained that that is called fully dressed and a *ben Torah* always walks fully dressed.

Every story and experience was a life lesson to be taken out at the right time.

Others have written and spoken about his youth, how he grew up as a *yasom* and *ben yochid* and went to Eretz Yisroel at the age of 14 to Yeshivas Kol Torah. He was a private person and didn't just share stories of difficulties in his life. However, if there was a *limud*, he would share.

At home as a child, he had every toy and childhood luxury imaginable. He told us about the great adjustment to the austerity and poverty of Yerushalayim in the early 1960s. When he came to the *yeshiva* dining room and saw all the *bochurim* using the same knife to spread their bread, he started looking around for a clean knife. A *bochur* said to him, "I don't understand. How many knives do you have at home? We have two - a *milchige* one and a *fleishige* one."

He *shieiged* to a tremendous level even as a *bochur*. He was at a *chasunah* and a certain *adam gadol* was *mesader kiddushin*. The *mesader kiddushin* commented that it seemed that a certain word in the *kesubah* was superfluous. Rav Shimon, then a *bochur*, spoke up and said, "Maybe it's *bavornim* the *Ketzos*." The *adam gadol* wanted to know who that *bochur* was.

In Long Beach, he became extremely close to the *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Feigelstock, and a great part of his *haskofah* was from Rav Aharon Kotler through the *rosh yeshiva*.

The *rosh yeshiva*, in turn, would accord him tremendous *kavod*. The *rosh yeshiva* would not come into the *bais medrash* during second seder or to Camp Horim during the summer so as not to infringe on Rav Shimon. The mutual respect was tangible.

A *rov* is *domeh l'malach*. A *malach* does everything differently. Rav Shimon thought on a higher wavelength. He spoke on a higher wavelength. He interacted with everyone on a higher wavelength. He reacted on a higher wavelength. He guided on a higher wavelength.

He said that children are attracted to *gedolim* because children are attracted to what's pure. He had a tremendous *ne'imus* with kids. All children loved him. He would stroke their cheek, hold them close, and speak to them on their level.

The *Gemara* in *Brachos* relates that when Rav Yochanan ben Zakai's *talmidim* came into him at the end of his life, he began to cry and said, "I see two *derochim* in front of me, *Gan Eden* and *Gehennom*, and I don't know which direction they are taking me (*molichim osi*). I shouldn't cry?" Rav Shimon asked, "Who is bringing him and why did he only cry when the *talmidim* came in?" He said from Rav Reuven Katz that the *talmidim*'s future *ma'asim* are what will continue to pull him in either direction. That's why he began to cry when the *talmidim* walked in.

May all of us, his thousands of bereft *talmidim*, be *zoche* to go in the *derech hayoshor* that he taught us and be *zoche* to be *molich* him continuously in *Gan Eden*, and may he be a *meilitz yosher* for us. *Lomir mechazeik zein*.



The great loss that we suffered this past *Erev Shabbos* with the *petirah* of our beloved *rebbe*, Rav Shimon Alster, is beyond words. Those of us who remember how Rav Shimon was *maspid* his *rebbe*, Rav Binyomin Paler, will surely recall the phrase he repeated over and over to describe his *rebbe* — a “*Maayan Hamisgaber*” — an overflowing stream! And that is what our *rebbe*, Rav Shimon was as well — overflowing with Torah, overflowing with advice, overflowing with care and concern, overflowing with love for each person that he encountered. And that is why it is so hard to write about Rav Shimon, as he was so much more than just a *rebbe*, so much more than just a *rosh yeshiva*, so much more than just a *rov* of a *kehillah*.

A year ago, when Rav Shimon spoke to his *talmidim* in Lakewood during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, he began by saying “Rav Chaim *iz nishit duh*, Rav Chaim *iz nishit duh!*” Rav Chaim Kanievsky is no longer here!” And now, we say to ourselves... our *rebbe*, Rav Shimon is no longer here!

Rav Shimon often repeated what the Brisker Rov said when the Chazon Ish was *niftar*. “Yesterday we lived in a world with the Chazon Ish, today we live in a world without the Chazon Ish.” For Rav Shimon’s *talmidim* and *mispallelim* and for the entire *olam haTorah*, there is a feeling that we are living in a world without Rav Shimon Alster.

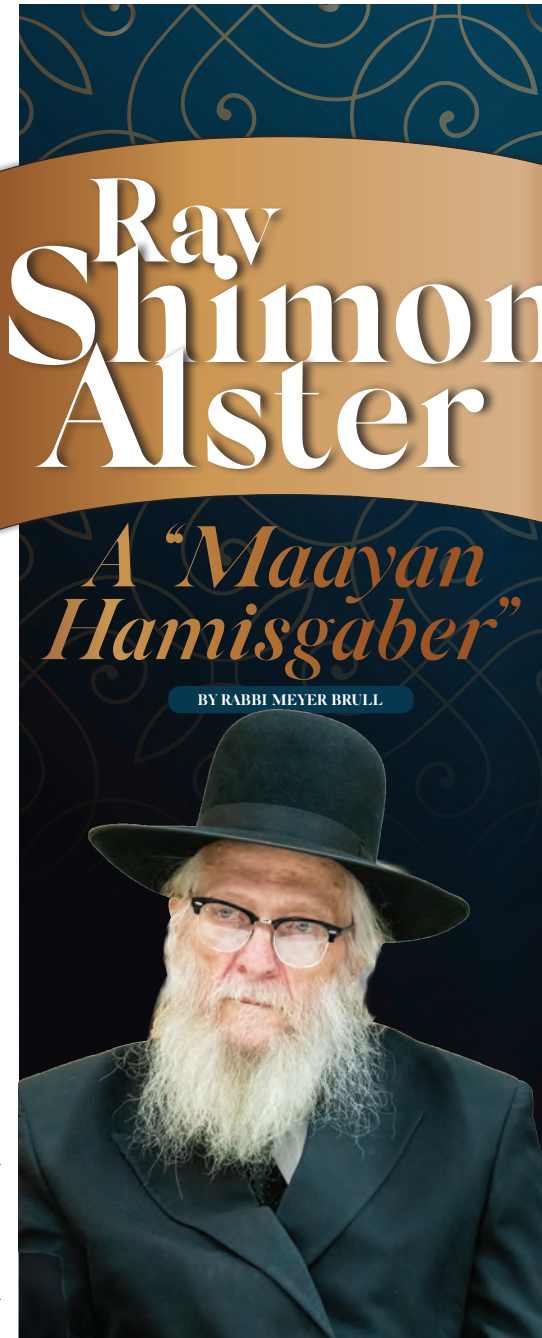
When the *besurah* came that Rav Shimon was *niftar*, fellow *talmidim* messaged me, how will we go on? Who will we turn to for guidance? Hundreds of *talmidim* have turned to him for over fifty years and are now unfortunately left totally distraught.

Rav Shimon’s life trajectory was something incredible. He tragically lost his father, in a most horrifying plane crash, at the age of six months old. As a young teenager, he traveled to learn in Eretz Yisroel. This was a tremendous sacrifice on his mother’s part, as she was an *almonah* and Rav Shimon was an only child. Rav Shimon said that while he was learning in Eretz Yisroel, he wrote a letter to his mother every single day!

Rav Shimon later became a close *talmid* of Rav Binyomin Paler. Rav Shimon felt that he was his *talmidim*’s connection to the Brisker Rov. He would tell us, “Rav Paler was a *talmid* of the Rov, I am a *talmid* of Rav Paler, and you are my *talmidim*.” He lived his life with what he absorbed from Rav Paler, perpetuating his legacy and relaying it to his own *talmidim*.

Ultimately, he not only thrived in learning, but was even tapped to be a *maggid shiur* in the Mesivta of Long Beach in his mid-20s. Our great *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock, a prime *talmid* of Rav Aharon Kotler, met Rav Shimon and immediately grabbed him to be a *maggid shiur* in his *yeshiva*. At the end of their meeting, the *rosh yeshiva* exclaimed to Rav Shimon, “Rav Aharon would have loved you!”

My father, Rabbi Boruch Brull, was from Rav Shimon’s original group of *talmidim* in the Mesivta of Long Beach.



My father shared with me that Rav Shimon was faced with a difficult task. It was a group that was not accustomed to learning a full day, including a second *sefer*. And Rav Shimon himself was a young, inexperienced *maggid shiur*. Yet, they grew together and today, the Mesivta of Long Beach is one of the premier *mosdos haTorah* in the entire world.

What we always found fascinating about Rav Shimon was that although he grew up without a father, he was so fatherly. His warmth was felt by all. Any *talmid*, *mispallel*, or anyone who turned to Rav Shimon for *hadrochah* immediately saw and felt how Rav Shimon would empathize with them. Your problem became Rav Shimon’s problem, and you knew that he cared about you as if you were his child.

As *bochurim*, we all felt an extremely strong *kesher* to him, both in learning, as well as in *hashkofah*. Whether it was a *shmuess* or just standing around his *shiender* hearing his take on what was going on in the world, he was always teaching, always sharing, always uplifting. And it didn’t end when we left *yeshiva*. For most of his *talmidim*, a day doesn’t go by in which we don’t repeat something Rav Shimon taught us.

A *talmid* or a *mispallel* of Rav Shimon’s knew that Rav Shimon was always there for them. He answered his cell phone himself. There was no *gabbai* or secretary. You called, he answered. And if he missed your call and you left a message, he called you back. There was no *kavod*, no *shlick* — if someone needed an answer, no matter how busy Rav Shimon was with all of his responsibilities, he always made himself available.

When Rav Shimon spoke to you — you were the only person in the world who mattered. He grabbed your arm tightly and wouldn’t let go. A *bochur* shared with me that he was once talking to Rav Shimon and a member of the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah called. Rav Shimon apologized to the *gadol*, but said, “I am in the middle of talking to someone, can I please call you back?”

A *talmid* was offered a very prestigious job offer out of town. Of course, he called Rav Shimon to discuss the opportunity. Rav Shimon told the *talmid* to follow up in a few days, as he’d like to personally research the situation. When the *talmid* called back, Rav Shimon told him not to proceed. He said that you will be very successful in the role, and all of your children will thrive there. But your youngest son will do better where you currently live. Without knowing the conversation, that particular child asked his mother, why Totty didn’t take the job he was offered. The mother replied that Totty’s *rebbe* said you wouldn’t do well in that city. The boy told his mother that *rebbe* understands me!

Being normal was something important to Rav Shimon. He shared with us that one year as a *bochur*, he decided not to eat before *Tekias Shofar*, and sat and learned in the *bais medrash*, while everyone else went down to make *Kiddush*. Rav Paler saw him and admonished him — just be normal. Similarly, he shared the story of the Gerrer Rebbe, who saw someone at the

At the wedding of a son of the author.



At the *hanochas tefillin* of the author's son.

Kosel, pumping his fists wildly while *davening*. The Rebbe asked the fellow, "Have you tried asking nicely?"

Rav Shimon wasn't limited to which type of *seforim* he would use when teaching *talmidim*. He would quote from *Chasidish seforim* or from the *seforim* of Rav Shmshon Refoel Hirsch the same way he would quote from a *yeshivish sefer*.

Rav Shimon had a fantastic sense of humor. Not a *leitzaus* style of humor, but rather he had a way of making a joke that made the listener think and realize the point that he was trying to bring out. I don't recall any conversation that I had with him when he didn't share something that made me smile. When you spoke to him, no matter how complicated the issue at hand was, his easygoing and positive nature always made things lighter.

For as long as we can remember, and literally until shortly before his *petirah*, Rav Shimon always traveled for *simchos*. He would drive or fly; wherever and whenever the *simchah* was, he graced us with his presence. It's fair to say he was *moser nefesh* to travel to be *misamei'ach baalei simchos*. I will never forget how he attended my *chuppah*, ran out (and changed out his *kapote* into his short jacket) to give his nightly *shiur* in his *shul*, and then returned to dance with me.

Rav Shimon knew how to give, but he had no idea how to take. In fact, when he made functions to benefit his *yeshiva*, he would give out books to the donors that may have exceeded some of the donations.

On the receipts that the *yeshiva* would send out, he would write long letters of *hakoras hatov*. This wasn't only for high-end donors, he made each donor feel appreciated.

Many years ago, unfortunately, one of Rav Shimon's *talmidim* suffered a terrible tragedy. We gathered together to hear words of *chizuk* in the wake of what had happened, as we all felt broken. Rav Shimon told us: "We don't say 'we all' need to do, 'we all' need to change, 'we all' need to take on this specific *kabbolah*. No! Each individual knows what he needs to improve, each *yochid* know what his family needs to do better. Go home and make a *chesbon hanefesh* on what you know needs to be taken care of."

Parting from Rav Shimon at his *levayyah* was so hard. The *talmidim* and *mispallelim* all looked forlorn. The loss for each one could be seen on each person's face. We didn't just lose a *rebbe*, we lost our guiding light.

Our sole *nechamah* is that just as Rav Shimon never stopped caring and advocating for us in this world, he will certainly continue from *Shomayim* to be a continuous *meilitz yosher* for the thousands who relied on him for so many years.

In closing, on behalf of the *talmidim*, the *hakoras hatov* to Rav Shimon's *choshuve rebetzin* and children is immense. They did whatever they could to make try to improve his health and no doubt they extended Rav Shimon's life and we are certain that he will be *meilitz yosher* for them. *Yehi zichro boruch*.



ISRAEL BOOKSHOP
Publications

The book for teens & young adults who've lost a parent



In *NEVER ALONE*, geared for teens who have lost a parent, popular writer, educator, and speaker **RABBI Y. Y. RUBINSTEIN** - himself orphaned of his father as an adolescent - sensitively and thoughtfully shares a path toward healing and moving forward. There are so many feelings a young teen in this position might be feeling - sadness, anger, pain, and guilt, among others - in addition to having numerous loaded questions about it all. With warmth, wisdom, and understanding, Rabbi Y. Y. offers validation, reassurance, answers, advice, and even some smiles.

Also included are pieces written by world-renowned maggid **Rabbi Paysach Krohn**; highly sought-after psychologist **Mrs. Mindy Blumenfeld**; and others who experienced profound losses yet whose experiences built them into the strong and supportive people they became.

The heartwarming real-life stories offer hope and encouragement and remind us that we are not alone in our pain. If you're looking for a book that will reassure, empower, and uplift you, here it is!

-Rabbi Aron Litwin, MA, director of Mekimi, UK

Rabbi Rubinstein has for many years been involved in Pillars and Links, the two largest organizations dedicated to helping children who have sadly lost a parent. His new book, *Avi Yesomim*, is a lovely, kindhearted book. I highly recommend it. -Rabbi Shimon Russell, LCSW, world-renowned parenting, marriage, and educational expert

Avi Yesomim captures the real-life candor, clarity, and charisma that are synonymous with Rabbi Rubinstein's approach... This book is a heartfelt analysis of the realities relevant to orphaned children; a book that is valuable and necessary to bear them through loss and grief...

-Shoshana Ruben, director of Pillars