

In Tribute to Rav Hershel Schachter

by Rabbi Shay Schachter '14R
Rosh Beit Midrash, Young Israel of Woodmere



Rav Hershel Schachter '67R, Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS, Nathan and Vivian Fink Distinguished Professorial Chair in Talmud, and Rosh Kollel, Marcos and Adina Katz Kollel, will be awarded the HaRav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik zt"l Aluf Torah award at the 5777 RIETS Chag HaSemikhah, celebrating 50 years as a marbitz Torah at RIETS and in Jewish communities around the world.

Every year when reading Parshas Vayigash, Rav Mayer Primishlaner, the preeminent student of the holy Baal Shem Tov, would be overcome with emotion. כי איך אעלה אל אבי והנער איננו אתי, Yehuda unabashedly exclaims, “for how can I go up to my father and the lad (Binyamin) is not with me?” I too ask myself, said Rav Mayer, כי איך אעלה אל אבי והנער איננו אתי, “for how can I go up to my Father in Heaven, and the lad is not with me? What will I say to my venerable Father when He asks what I have done for the youth of my generation?”

How many in any given era can claim that they have done their utmost to inspire and lead the youth of their time? How many in our generation have been able to infuse our world, facing unprecedented challenges, with the leadership necessary to prevail?

One person who certainly can answer these difficult questions, is *Avi Mori Ve'rabi*, my father HaRav Hershel Schachter *shlit"a*.

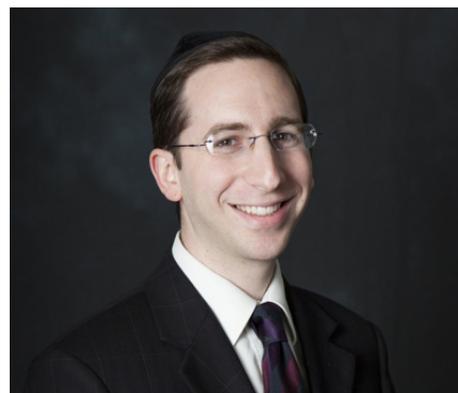
As a child, I watched my father give every measure of his being to ensure a robust and promising Jewish future. I continue to observe my father cultivate the most notable educators and scholars of our time. I marvel at his work in enriching the world with the next league of outstanding rabbinic leadership. This

labor of love has comprised fifty years of relentless and unyielding commitment to the youth of our generation. Fifty years spent inspiring and educating men, women, and children, many who have grown to be accomplished personalities in their own right.

There is much to say about my father's impressive character, but I would like to focus on three especially distinguishing qualities that have shaped so much of what I continue to learn from my father.

Principles

My father lives a life of exceptional courage and fortitude. For my father, לא איש תגורו מפני איש is a way of life, not simply an edict. He has never been intimidated or daunted by the contrary word of a deeply admired scholar, a prominent or wealthy communal leader, or an outspoken critic who might challenge his position. He places his trust entirely in the integrity and absolute truth of Torah and proceeds accordingly. Politics is not in my father's vocabulary. As he has told me on many occasions in the name of his Rebbe, the Rav z"l, “The Hebrew word for politics is שקר.” There is nothing else that matters other than the Torah itself. My father's determination and advocacy for



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what he believes is right is something that I can only aspire to in my own life.

When considering my father's deep sense of principle, I am reminded of a parable of the famed Dubno Maggid about the skilled archer who explained, “My trick is that I first shoot the arrow, and only then do I proceed to paint the target around where it has landed!”

Most people, writes the Dubno Maggid, first draw their “bull's eye target” by painting a picture of how exactly life ought to be lived. They then disingenuously shoot an “arrow of Torah” toward that picture-perfect illustration. That “arrow” can later prove to be a cause of great inconvenience or severe disturbance in the landscape of life's experiences.

But for others of integrity, for great people like my father, the “arrow,” the Torah itself, is always placed first. It is the axis, the absolute standard, and the heart that informs every action and decision throughout his personal life. Those central Torah principles are what give my father the courage to stand up to the harshest of critics. His authenticity, integrity and absolute commitment to truth always prevail, at times even at great personal sacrifice and travail.

Preparation

I comment on occasion to my father about how much time I invest in preparing my shiurim. I often feel as if I am left with almost no time for studying anything else.

Each time my father responds, “Shay, isn’t that your job? A Rabbi must always be prepared! There is no such thing as delivering a shiur that is not well prepared. You may as well just not give it at all.” He often relates to me that the Rav z”l, when once asked to address a kindergarten class in Boston, pulled out a few pages of prepared notes from his pocket. There was no engagement, major or minor, for which the Rav z”l had not thoroughly prepared. Likewise, my father can always be seen with his folded papers of well-prepared and organized notes.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 5:8) informs us that even if one has attained a thorough mastery of Torah, it does not always mean that he will be able to easily transmit that knowledge to others. God Himself, says the Midrash, the Ultimate Master of Torah, reviewed each lesson no fewer than four times before transmitting it to the Jewish people.

I often recall the conversation we had before I delivered my first brief shiur as a member of the rabbinat. My father told me, “You are a young yeshiva boy, but for most people in the room, this might be their only opportunity throughout the day to learn Torah. If



The author learning with his father (courtesy of Rabbi Shay Schachter)

they fall asleep because the Rabbi didn’t prepare enough to make it interesting and relevant to them, it is you, and not they, who is held responsible for their going an entire day without learning a word of Torah.” Effectively imbuing others with an understanding of the relevance and sweetness of Torah entails disciplined and rigorous preparation, one of my father’s greatest hallmarks.

My father has impressed upon me that the same way one is willing to spend considerable amounts of money to ensure the greatest hiddur mitzvah in our lulav, esrog, tallis and tefillin, there is an aspect of hiddur mitzvah when it comes to teaching Torah as well — namely, imparting a shiur that is well-prepared, engaging, and most enjoyable. That hiddur mitzvah calls for a substantial expenditure of one’s time and effort.

Humility

A number of years ago, my father and I visited one of the premier Torah personalities of our time. Although much was spoken by others who were present, very few words were exchanged between these two great Torah giants. My father proceeded to thank him for his fervent commitment to the teaching of Torah and for all the insight and inspiration he provides for Jews around the world. I will never forget how overcome with emotion my father was when he said to me, “Consider yourself blessed that you have learned from, and been exposed to, a person with such sterling character traits.” Later that week, this great Torah giant said, “Who could have ever imagined that there lives in America a Jew with such outstanding humility?” Although very few words were exchanged, my father’s extraordinary humility could

not go unnoticed. Anyone who has ever interacted with my father is immediately struck by his unparalleled modest and unpretentious demeanor.

Through the years I have watched my father presented almost daily with the most sensitive, complex halachic *shailos*, a man called upon to address the most difficult and pressing communal issues. It is that same father, a Gadol in our time, that I have also watched on innumerable occasions put everything on hold to make time for a Jewish public school student struggling to come to a better understanding of God. My father gives his undivided attention and unconditional care and love to everyone in need of his ear. From the poor widow crying with an outstretched hand to an ingenuous teenager showing him his new college schedule. From the depressed adolescent who cannot find himself a suitable high school to the delusional fantasizer wanting to discuss how best to reveal himself as Mashiach. From the inquisitive young child posing the most basic halachic inquiry to the agunah whom no one else will advocate for.

From the young couple preparing for a lifetime together to the family embroiled in a bitter divorce. No person is too small and no issue is too shallow. My father always listens and does what he can to be of personal assistance.

A small but telling anecdote: a few months ago, my father was carrying a heavy package from the post office and a very kind gentleman walking a dog offered to carry it in his stead. Very appreciatively, my father gave him the load, but this man then proceeded to give my father the leash to his dog. There they were, leisurely walking the streets of Washington Heights, this man holding the heavy package for my father and my father walking the dog by its leash. My father is a man of tremendous stature and worldwide acclaim, yet a person who views little as being beneath his dignity.

My father has influenced and inspired, by instruction and personal example, a generation of leaders to adhere to these three critical life lessons, principles, preparation and humility, and so many more. His unwavering commitment to place God and His

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Torah at the core of all that he does; his emphasis on being well prepared and holding himself accountable for the collective Torah study of the Jewish community; and finally, the constant need for deeply honest self-awareness and genuine humility.

ימים על ימי מלך תוסיף — May my father be blessed with אריכות ימים ושנים and continued courage, endurance, vigor and vitality in his most exalted service to God and the Jewish people. ■

