

He was the *Sar HaTorah*, the *Rosh Kol Bnai HaGolah*. The *yochid b'doro* whose passing left no other like him in the generation and whose impact will be felt for generations to come.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu in His kindness granted us the privilege to learn and seek guidance from a Gadol of a previous era. We were zoche to observe and consult a living embodiment of Torah. We were able to witness the undiluted clarity of Mesorah filtered through the all encompassing vision of da'as Torah. We beheld the living symbol of what has always sustained us as a People. We had an ultimate source for truth and guidance.

We had Maran HaGaon, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevezh, HaRav Elozar Menachem Schach zecher tzadik v'kadosh livracha. And now we are yesomim without a father. Woe to the world which has lost its leader, woe to the ship which has lost its captain.

The famous Mishna in Sota describes the days of Ikvesa D'Meshicha, the horrifying last period before the arrival of Mashiach. "Chutzpah will be the order of the day Fear of sin will be rejected in disgust. Truth will disappear The face of the generation will be as the face of a dog and on whom will we rely? On our Father in Heaven."

The Mirrer Mashgiach, Rav Yerucham Levovitz Zt'l asks: What is so unique about the last of the points mentioned in the Mishna? Ostensibly, it is listed as another manifestation of the darkness of Ikvesa D'Meshicha. But we know, that even in the best of times it is upon Hashem that we rely.

The answer, says Rav Yeruchem, is that Hashem in His infinite mercy blessed us with many things upon which we could rely. The Neviim, the Urim v'Tumim, Torah and the wisdom of our leaders have always been our strength providing us with support even in the most trying of times. The especially horrific aspect of Ikvesa D'Meshicha will be the absence of all these treasured gifts, which we had come to rely upon in past generations. We will still have our ultimate and

last resort-Our Father in Heaven-but we will be devastated by the loss of the sources of guidance, which Hashem had granted us for so long.

With the passing of Maran HaRav Schach Zt'l, we are left with the stark realization that the era of Ikvesa D'Mashicha is upon us. The pillar of our strength has been taken away. He was our Urim v'Tumim, our source for guidance in every situation. And without him we remain with only our Father in Heaven to turn to.

We cannot-we dare not-attempt to describe with mere words who Rav Schach was and what he represented to the generations he so profoundly touched in his long and all-encompassing life. We can merely recognize in sorrow the void he leaves behind. Yet, limited though we may be, we must try to capture the essence of our great teacher through examining his ways and recounting the many stories which together paint a portrait of gadlus that we will never know again. Perhaps our appreciation for what we had will be heightened and our sorrow over what we lost will gain a deeper meaning.

## **PART ONE:**

### **THE EARLY YEARS FROM VABOILNICK TO PONEVEZH**

1894. It was a world which knew greatness in Torah and Yiras Shomayim. The Yeshiva of Volozhin was still thriving, Gedolei Torah could be found in every shtetl in Europe and the upheavals of the Bolshevik Revolution and WWI were still a generation away.

The small town of Vaboilnick in northern Lithuania might easily have been forgotten with the passage of time. It probably would never have any significance to Jews who lived outside of its tiny perimeter. Indeed, but for the birth of baby boy in the winter of 1894, Vaboilnick would have disappeared from memory as so many other shtetlach did. It was from that tiny city on 29 Teves, that a leader emerged; a lion whose roar would shake the foundations of the

Torah establishment and inspire generations of our People to strive for ever greater heights in their avodas Hashem.

His mother once told him that Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin Zt'l. the Gadol HaDor, was niftar on his (Rav Schach's) birthday in 1898 when Maran Zt'l was yet a small boy. This simple remark made a profound impression on the young Lazer. There was no Gadol like Reb Yehoshua Leib for generations before and certainly for ever after. It made the young Lazer want to strive as well for gadlus in Torah. Eventually he would achieve that same lofty status as a 'yachid b'doro' and his impact on Klal Yisroel would span decades and continents.

His parents, Rav Azriel and Bas Sheva (nee' Levitan) Schach infused within him yiras shamayim and an intense love for Torah. They taught him to regard avodas Hashem, even what we would consider minor acts, with the utmost seriousness. Once when Rav Schach was four years old, his yarmulke fell off. He slowly bent to pick it up, and saw his mother crying. "Lazer, how could you not jump quickly to get your yarmulke? What will be with your yiras Shamayim?"

His mother's tears made such an impression upon him, that for the rest of his life if his yarmulke slipped while putting on tefillin or while he was asleep Rav Schach would rush to straighten it. Even as a zakain muflag-well past 90 years of age-his talmidim relate, that if his yarmulke fell off his head in the middle of sleep, he'd awake in a sweat with his mother's words ringing in his ears!

He told bochurim who were lax in reciting krias Shema in the right zman, how he, as a child, was makpid to daven Krias Shema with the zman of the Mogen Avrohom, which is earlier than the generally accepted Vilna Gaon's zman. Only once in his entire life did he miss the Mogen Avrohom zman, and he spent the rest of the day crying tears of charotoh.

He imparted those lessons of Yiras Shamayim to his talmidim on a constant basis. Even young children who could not yet understand his great shiurim

knew how Rav Schach was very careful in fulfilling every precept of halacha with infinite care. He often said that "one must be lochem tumah with kedushah."

Though Rav Schach's ceaseless yegia in Limud haTorah would be the central focus of his life, there was an equal regard and fervor when it came to the simplest of mitzvos maasiyos, as chavivus hamitzvos was ingrained in his very being as a toddler in Vaboilnick.

A talmid, Rabbi Menachem Savitz, relates, "We once visited the Rosh Yeshiva and brought him over \$20,000 dollars in tzedaka to distribute to aniyim. During that time there were shailos over the maror grown in Eretz Yisroel. Thus we brought him maror from chutz laaretz. The minute Rav Schach saw the maror he pushed the money aside, held the maror lovingly, and said, "Ah, maror which is yotzei l'chol hadeios!" He had \$20,000 dollars in cash laying on the table but could not contain his excitement over receiving the means to fulfill the mitzvah of Maror.

Throughout his life the mitzvah of maror followed him as he learned Torah through yesurim noraim, and exile after exile. Yet all he saw was the sweetness of the Torah and the merit of its learning.

As he advanced in years, the young Lazer grew in greatness and although there was a yeshiva in his home town of Vaboilnick, Rav Schach expressed a strong desire to "exile himself to a place of Torah"-specifically, to learn in Yeshivas Ponevezh, a bigger city about 38 kilometers away.

He begged his reluctant parents to permit him to fulfill his dream and eventually they agreed. On the very next morning after he obtained their permission, he was ready to leave. With tears in their eyes they bade farewell to each other as the young , seven year-old boy embarked on the road to Ponevezh, beginning a journey of limud Torah that would take him to greatness and a leadership role in which he would serve as the master guide for all those who would travel on the road of true amailus baTorah. Little did he know that one day he would

head the yeshiva that bore the name of the town in which his journey to greatness began-Ponevezh.

While in Ponevezh, Rav Schach was influenced by Rav Itzele Ponovezer. He often described watching the great tzadik daven with tremendous kavana and hislahavus, emotions that would impact his own approach to tefilah for the rest of his life.

In those days being away from home meant years at a time and not just the few months between yom tovim. Rav Schach would recount how, upon reaching the age of bar mitzvah, he simply put on tefillin without making any announcements. A day later another bochur noticed him putting on tefillin and wished him mazel tov. Soon the entire yeshiva lined up to wish him mazel tov. That was his entire Bar Mitzvah celebration! Rav Schach would often repeat this tale when decrying the excesses of simchos today.

The emerging Gaon developed his unquenchable thirst for Toras Hashem in the derech that chazal deemed most appropriate for growth in Torah; pas b'melech tochalv'chayai tzar tichye. In those early years he reached a remarkable level in Torah while living in conditions that we, today, would describe as abject poverty.

It was during this formative stage of his spiritual development that he began to cultivate the unique traits that would help him become one of the most universally accepted Torah leaders in recent history: his tremendous hasmada and yegiah in learning, his intellectual brilliance, and his uncanny ability to foresee the long-term consequences of events.

Rav Schach's sister, who lived in Bnai Brak, once repeated, "We grew up in the shtetl of Vaboilnick. One day, when I was a young child, I saw that the house was 'lebedig', people were coming to give my father mazel tov. 'Why the commotion?' I asked. 'Your brother Lazer who is learning in the Bais Medrash

sent a letter to Rav Chaim Brisker, and the Brisker Rav wrote back to him.’ The entire village was in an uproar over the news!”

## **SLOBODKA**

After a few years in Ponevezh he traveled to Slobodka. He began learning with Rav Yechezkel Bernstein, the Divrei Yechezkel, while staying in the home of a community member.

During that tekufah, young Lazer would cross paths daily with the secretary of Rav Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor, Rav Yaakov HaLevi Lipschutz. Invariably, when the young boy was returning to his ‘stansia’, Rav Lipschutz would be on his way home from the mosad HaTorah where he served as Menahel. Rav Lipschutz would take the time to discuss with the young Lazer the pertinent issues of the day facing the Jewish community.

Reminiscing about these daily encounters to a great-grandson of Rav Lipschutz, Rav Schach recalled how as a young bochur he wondered why Rav Lipschutz chose to relate to him the difficult dilemmas and issues that were being debated by the elder leaders of the generation.

We, with the clarity of hindsight, see the yad Hashem at work inculcating the future leader of our People with the Mesorah that would enable him to bear the yoke of Klal Yisroel’s dilemmas more than half a century later.

Eventually the young prodigy joined the great Yeshiva of Slobodka, Knesses Yisrael, under the leadership of the legendary Alter of Slobodka, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel Zt’l. In the short time he was there he developed a close relationship with Rav Yitzchak Isaac Sher, Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein and above all, with the great Gaon Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer.

In Slobodka, it soon became apparent that Rav Schach was destined for gadlus. Though he would continue on to become a talmid of other Yeshivos, he would

forever feel a closeness to Slobodka, extolling the praises of its unique approach to Ameilus baTorah, and the Shviras Hamidos which is the prerequisite of true character refinement. He would always refer to Slobodka as "Aim HaYeshivos"- the mother of yeshivos and would declare that "all of the Yeshivos in existence today, both in Eretz Yisroel and America, are an outgrowth of Slobodka."

## **WORLD WAR I**

Rav Schach was already established as one of the most highly regarded bachurim in Slobodka when World War I broke out across Europe. The bachurim were scattered to different cities. Rav Schach, along with hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout Europe, became a destitute refugee.

In later life Maran Zt'l would find it hard to speak about this terrible period in his life. He suffered deprivations and uncertainty as he fled from one city to the next in an effort to stay out of the crossfire between the warring armies. He wandered through Europe in this way, a young refugee who had no idea where his parents were, or even, if they were still alive. Indeed, he was never to see them again.

But Rav Schach was not running for shelter simply to spare himself from the bullets of the invaders. Rather he was looking for a shelter that would be a haven of Torah, enabling him to continue to learn uninterrupted. Thus, he would reach a town and immediately head to the nearest shul. He would search the shelves of seforim, looking for the volume of Shas he was in the middle of learning, as if the travails of reaching this latest haven were but a 'bain hasedorim' in his ongoing seder halimud. Upon finding what he sought, he would open the Gemarah and immediately muster his strength, continuing to learn as if there was no war. Oblivious to the lack of food and clothing, he would spend his days and nights in the shul, immersed in seforim, sustaining himself from whatever food the town's residents offered him. In his mussar shmuessen, he would describe how he slept on shul benches for months at a time. For personal hygiene, he would wash his hands and face in well water-whenver it

was available. It is told that at one point Rav Schach hid in a shul attic with only a Sefer Rav Akiva Eiger and a Gemara Yevamos. For most of two years he did not cut his hair, nor shave his beard. He had no where to sleep except on a bench in the shul and nothing to eat except for the bit of food and water brought to him every day by a kind woman.

Despite his abject poverty and constant fear for his life, Rav Schach never diminished his reverence for even the minutest detail of halacha. In Shulchan Aruch it states that one must honor Shabbos with a clean shirt. Rav Schach had only one shirt. And so every Thursday evening in the dark cold of night, he would take off his shirt and wash it on the roof of the Bais Medrash.

Embarrassed to return downstairs clad in but underclothing and tzitzis, he stood in the frigid cold Lithuanian winters, waiting for the shirt to dry somewhat, before he would put it back on and return to the Bais Medrash.

It was during those years that Rav Schach totally disengaged from gashmius for the rest of his life. The physical world meant nothing to him. Only those who witnessed his relentless hasmadah and total immersion in Limud Ha Torah, were able to understand how one of Israel's oldest and greatest sages could live in a tiny, simple home unadorned and unfurnished but for a bare light bulb hanging over a rickety table. It was as if he shed the constraints of his earthly body upon entering the spiritual realm of the blatt Gemora. His only surrender to his physical limits were the few hours of sleep which would transition the Rosh Yeshiva from last night's K'tzos to this morning's Nesivos. To those privileged to observe his disengagement from gashmius it was no wonder that the man upon whom thousands relied for guidance, advice and council would sleep on a lumpy, thin mattress, on a bed with three legs, the fourth, replaced by a makeshift pile of wood and bricks.

Rav Schach did not see the physical world as playing a factor in his life. Often he would cite a pasuk in Parshas Vayera to underscore this concept: Avraham said to his two young servants. "Remain here with the chamor (donkey),"



Chazal tell us that when Avraham approached Har HaMoriah he saw an aura of holiness suspended in a cloud over the mountain. He turned to his beloved son and asked him, "what do you see?" Yitzchak replied that he, too, saw a holy cloud hovering over the mountain." Then Avraham turned to his son Yishmael and his servant Eliezer and asked them if they too saw a cloud. They did not. And so Avraham responded, "Remain here with the chamor".

Rav Schach, would stress the timeless lesson: "If a person fails to see the holiness of Har Moriah, if a person fails to perceive the greatness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and his Torah-it is a sign that he is too attached to chomrius, materialism, similar to the proverbial symbol of chomer,-the chamor, the donkey"

## **SLUTZK-KLETZK**

After the war Rav Schach traveled to Slutzk to learn in the famed yeshiva of Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer.

Rav Isser Zalman was known throughout Europe as a Gaon in Torah and in midos. His warmth and care for his Talmidim was legendary and Rav Schach greatly desired to bask in the glow of his influence.

However, the young Talmid Chacham was faced with a great dilemma. He literally had no clothes in which to appear before the great gaon. His wanderings through Europe, left him with one set of garments all of them severely worn and torn in several places.

Embarrassed to appear in such a disheveled state before Rav Meltzer, Rav Schach decided to wear his pants backwards since there were less holes on the back of his trousers than on his knees.

Rav Meltzer realized the enormous poverty that the young gaon had suffered and after speaking in learning with Rav Schach for only a few moments he

realized that the talmid he knew as a youth in Slobodka had emerged from the tribulations of the war years as an even greater talmid chochom.

Rav Isser Zalman immediately welcomed Rav Schach into the yeshiva, and the first action that Rav Isser Zalman took was to buy his talmid a brand new set of clothes. The Rosh Yeshiva took his protzġgġ into his home as a ben bayis and came to love him as a son.

World War I had ended with Europe in a state of shambles. The communists had already seized power in Russia and their methodical plans to eradicate any semblance of Yiddishkeit was taking hold across the country. It was only a short while before the communists reached closer to Slutsk. The Yeshiva and bochurim fled over the border to Kletzk about 30 kilometers east. Only the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Isser Zalman, who also served as the Rav in Slutsk, remained behind with his kehila and less than a handful of talmidim, amongst them Rav Schach and his chavrusa Reb Dovid Meisels.

The Bolsheviks marched into the yeshiva, arrested Rav Isser Zalman and hauled him together with his two talmidim to a makeshift courtroom somewhere in the town. They were placed in front of a tribunal, three ersatz judges, who just days before were common laborers. Unfortunately, they all were Yidden who had forsaken their faith in the rush to embrace the false promise of Communism.

When the Rosh Yeshiva, flanked by his talmidim entered the courtroom, the three spurious judges began to mock Rav Isser Zalman.

"Rebbe," they began, "we want you to recite something for us. You might as well say it with enthusiasm, for you and all your students will be saying it for the very last time." They then broke into the very same sing-song chanted by cheder children for generations, "Braishis, In ohnfahng, Barah Elokim, hut G-t bashafenIn the beginning Hashem Created."

"You see Rebbe," they laughed, "this is going to be the very last time you will ever hear this tune, as we Communists will close down every single yeshiva and cheder!"

Rav Isser Zalman sprang to his full height.

"You are mistaken!" he declared. "Yiddisher kinder will learn that posuk forever! And as for you," he exclaimed with fire in his eyes, "there will be no remnant!"

Rav Schach, some 80 years later, would think of the thousands of Yiddisher Kinder the world over, singing the song of Braishis, In ohnfahng, Barah Elokim, hut G-t bashafenas tears welled in his eyes. He would cry remembering the strength and fortitude with which his holy rebbe made that prediction, which was to be fulfilled in every aspect.

Rav Isser Zalman was eventually released and joined his revered son-in-law Rav Aharon Kotler in Kletzk. Rav Schach at the time had no official position in the Yeshiva but was acknowledged as an integral part of the Yeshiva leadership by dint of his brilliance and fiery enthusiasm in learning.

Rav Schach would repeat Rav Aharon's brilliant shiurim for the talmidim. He would explain to them the difficult aspects of the shiurim and was constantly consulted regarding the difficult passages in other seforim as well. Rav Schach was totally fluent in the sifrei haRishonim and Achronim on the sugyos. He could recite them verbatim.

Years later, with his vision failing, an optometrist visited Rav Schach's home to fit him with prescription glasses to ease his difficulty reading. After fitting him with a trial prescription, the doctor asked one of the grandchildren to bring a sefer with small print to see if the prescription was accurate. He held a Shev Shmaittsah before Rav Schach and asked him to read. Rav Schach read from it quickly and fluently. The doctor realized that it was not due to the perfection of the glasses, but rather because Rav Schach knew it by heart. They brought a

K'tzos, a Nesivos and various seforim in order to test the prescription. But it was to no avail. The Rosh Yeshiva breezed through all of those seforim as if he had perfect vision. Finally they brought the Yated newspaper, from which the doctor was able to fine tune the lenses!

In Slutzk Rav Schach came to revere Rav Isser Zalman as a father, a feeling which was clearly mutual.

Once, when Rav Schach was a young bochur in Slutzk, he sat around the table with several talmidim listening to Rav Isser Zalman's words. Soon the conversation changed to current events and Rav Schach got up and left. When the bochurim began to query Rav Isser Zalman on the import of various world happenings, he said, "go to Reb Lazer and ask his opinion."

"But Reb Lazer never listens to current events," they protested. Whereupon Rav Isser Zalman replied, "there will come a time when all of Klal Yisroel will ask his opinion on world news."

Indeed at the height of his leadership of the Torah world, Rav Schach felt the need to keep apprised on developments in the world. His longtime gabbai, R' Rafael Wolf, would bring him the daily newspaper to scan for a few minutes after shacharis.

On one occasion, while perusing the paper, Rav Schach suddenly jumped up, ran to the seforim shrank, and took out a Rashba. Even while superficially he was reading the paper as part of his responsibilities to the klal, his deeper thoughts remained focused on Torah.

Rav Isser Zalman included many of Rav Schach's Torah chiddushim and comments in his sefer, "Even HaAzel," and penned his own comments in the margins of Rav Schach's notebook, which later became his sefer, "Avi Ezri." Rav Isser Zalman also played an important role in the publication of Rav Schach's sefer, as he encouraged him to push the process forward despite the

considerable costs and difficulties involved. He went to great lengths to find the paper needed to publish the great work, even though that commodity was rare in Israel at the time, during the war years of 1948.

Rav Isser Zalman would say about Rav Schach, "If you would cut his veins you would not see blood flowing. Instead you would see Rashbas and Rav Akiva Eigers flowing!"

Many years after Rav Isser Zalman died, the family asked Rav Schach to write a preface to one of the volumes of Rav Isser Zalman's classic *Evan HaAzel*.

Rav Schach writes, "I am too small to even put words on paper that could describe anything about my uncle and teacher, Rabbi Isser Zalman Zt'l. I was raised by him as a son raised by a father for many years and I know how great his righteousness and his humility were. And no matter how great he was, he would take in everybody with a smile. It was through those actions that the honor of heaven was glorified."

Rav Isser Zalman arranged for Rav Schach to meet his niece, Gittel, the daughter of his sister, Fruma Rivka Golomovsky and her husband, Rav Benzion Golomovsky a native of Mir.

As a young girl, Gittel had displayed tremendous *yiras shamayim*. Once she actually drank kerosene instead of water and quickly ran to her house and asked her father if you make the same *bracha* over kerosene as you would make on water. She was more concerned about perhaps having made an improper blessing than about any possible damage to her health!

Rebbitzen Gittel Schach was one of two daughters. During the early twenties, when Gittel was away from home, her mother Fruma Rivka took sick and called her to come back home. As she felt death approaching she begged her daughter for just one thing-that she should marry a Torah scholar.

In those days parnasa was hard to come by and few girls were ready to accept the hardships that were inherent when marrying a Ben Torah. Nevertheless, Gittel decided to fulfill her mother's wishes. She turned to her uncle, Rav Isser Zalman and said that, "if I'm marrying a Torah scholar, I want to marry the best."

Rav Meltzer answered, " In that case, I am going to give you Rav Elozar Menachem Schach.

In 5684 (1924), between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, Rav Lazer Schach married Gittel Golomovsky. Rav Isser Zalman was the Messader Kiddushin and the only 'family' in attendance.

Rav Schach's parents were no longer alive and his remaining relatives could not come to the wedding. Just as he had celebrated his bar mitzvah as a lonely boy in Ponevezh so too was his wedding to be a bittersweet affair. Another heart wrenching episode in Rav Schach's journey to greatness.

Immediately after the wedding, Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer confided in his niece, "Gittel, when I was young I made your mother a lot of trouble, but now I have paid her back by giving you such a wonderful young man. You should know", he continued "that if you had a house of twenty rooms, you would still not be able to hold all the people who will one day extend honor to your husband due to his greatness in Torah."

Many years later, when Rav Schach and his Rebbitzen were already living in Yerushalayim, Rebbitzen Schach came to visit her uncle Rav Isser Zalman who had become Rosh Yeshiva of Etz Chaim. He told her that when he was a child, the brothers who were born before him did not live very long. As a young child, his parents watched him very carefully.

"My mother and your mother, who was my sister," said Rav Isser Zalman, "would watch and make sure that I was always kept clean and well. When I was

three years old, I did not want to stay in the school by myself and your mother sat with me for a number of days until I got used to it and therefore because of your mother, I became a Talmid Chacham. I never knew how to pay her back. I want to tell you that now I feel my debt is paid since I gave her daughter to Rav Elozar Menachem Schach.

The next day Rav Isser Zalman was niftar.

Rav Schach would often speak of his rebbetzin's tzidkus, and how she enabled him to dedicate himself completely to Torah while she worked to sustain the family.

"Even after my wedding," Rav Schach would say, "I would go away to learn Torah from Pesach until Sukkos, and then from Sukkos until Pesach. It was all thanks to her. All of my Torah is on her merit," Rav Schach would say about his Rebbetzin.

There was a period of time which Rav Schach spent in Radin. The Chofetz Chaim would take walks with him and discuss many aspects of kehila life; how to deal with difficult issues in the light of the communal needs of Klal Yisrael and Torah hashkafa. Rav Schach would later note how he never understood why the Chofetz Chaim discussed matters that seemingly had no relevance to him, a young man who was totally immersed in learning and far removed from the world at large.

It was only years later that many of the Chofetz Chaim's directives became apparent to him in Rav Schach's dealings with life and death issues of Klal Yisrael.

During the next five years of his life, Rav Schach dedicated himself to learning with tremendous hasmadah and mastered a tremendous amount of Torah knowledge. He learned literally without interruption, by day and by night, periodically taking a brief nap to refresh himself. Rav Schach would say that it

was during this period of his spiritual development that he “broke his yetzer harah” and crossed a new threshold in his life-long objective of attaining a state of total spiritual purity.

Rav Gedaliah Schorr Zt”l was an American bochur who had traveled to Kletzk to learn. He later recalled how Rav Schach would climb a ladder to reach seforim on the highest shelves of the bookcases. Rav Schach would spend literally hours perched on a rung-immobile, in total concentration.

Rav Mendel Kaplan Zt’l related how Rav Schach once visited the Mir and stood next to the seforim shelves in the back. A queue of the best bochurim, the “lions” of the Mir, waited to speak to him. He spent the entire day responding to everyone and with fiery enthusiasm answered every one of their issues all over Shas.

The power of his enthusiasm in Torah did not waver nor diminish from the time he was a young bochur, to the day he eventually stopped saying shiurim some 85 years later. Even as the zkan Roshei HaYeshivos, he would shout his Torah, and argue vehemently with young bochurim, as if he was merely their chavrusa, and not the Gadol HaDor.

He constantly reviewed his learning and could not imagine others who would rely on their memories when teaching talmidim.

Rav Schach said that he never gave shiur in a Mesechta until he finished reviewing the entire Mesechta during bein hazmanim. He said he did not understand how it was possible to say shiur any other way.

In his final years, it would take him a long time and much effort to walk up the stairs to the yeshiva and reach his place in the Bais Medrash. Yet as soon as he opened his mouth to talk, the Rosh Yeshiva sounded like a young man, with enthusiasm and excitement. His entire composition would change when he was saying divrei Torah.



Rav Dovid Povarski Zt'l related that had he not seen the following story with his own eyes he never would have believed it.

Rav Schach was under anesthesia for a procedure. His lips were moving the entire time repeating divrei Torah. But that was not all. His arms were moving with the sevaros he was saying, so much so that he had to be strapped down!

When Rav Schach lived in Yerushalayim, he once was missing for several hours. No one was able to find him, and they sent out a search committee. Towards evening he was spotted at the entrance to Yerushalayim on the road leading to Moza by a nephew of the Chazon Ish, Reb Shlomo Shimshon Karelitz, who ran over to him and shook him.

"Reb Lazer! Where have you been? Everyone is looking for you!"

Rav Schach looked up at Rav Shlomo Shimson as if waking from a trance. He smiled and joyfully took Rav Karelitz's hand and began shaking it up and down. "Ir hert pshat in der Rashba?-Do you hear the explanation of the Rashba?" And he went on to share with him the brilliant explanation he had formulated while walking aimlessly, further and further away from home, totally engrossed in his thoughts.

About twenty years ago, one of the bachurim in the yeshiva was very close with Rav Schach. One night he noticed that after Rav Schach turned off the lights for the night he would turn them back on after about half an hour and then turn them off a few minutes later. This went on throughout the night.

The boy thought this to be only a one-time occurrence but later discovered that every night Rav Schach's lights went on and off like that.

The boy decided to find out why this was happening, and spent an entire night peeking into Rav Schach's window. He saw that Rav Schach would suddenly get

up from his sleep, run to look into a sefer, and then return again to his bed. He was so immersed in his limud that even in his sleep, he mind was at work.

When Rav Schach's wife, Gittel, was still alive, she was concerned that her husband was not sleeping enough, and late one night turned off all the lights and told him that it was time to go to sleep.

He respectfully listened but a few hours later, she noticed that he was not in bed. Gittel discovered him in the living room, learning Torah.

The following night, Gittel decided that she would remove the fuses, that way he would not be able to study and would get a good night's sleep. But once again, a few hours later, she found him studying by the small red light of the water heater.

Every minute of learning was precious. Rav Schach had a chavrusa, Rav Dovid Zimmerman, who learned with him every morning till mincha at one o'clock in the afternoon.

Once the Philadelphia Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Elya Svei came to speak to Maran about a certain matter, and Rav Schach discussed the matter until 12:45 PM.

As soon as Rav Svei left Rav Schach began searching. "Where is Zimmerman?" he inquired, "we have time till mincha to learn!".

Rav Dovid rushed back into the house in wonder. "There are only a few minutes left to our seder. Is the Rosh Yeshiva certain he wants to sit down and learn?"

Rav Schach was emphatic. "A few minutes learning is eternity," he declared.

In 1927 Rav Aharon Kotler asked Rav Schach to serve as a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Kletzk, a position he accepted and held for five years. During this time, he produced dozens of talmidim who went on to become extraordinary talmidei

chachamim in pre-World War II Europe. During these five years in Yeshivas Kletzk, he developed a close relationship with the Mashgiach Ruchni, Rav Yechezkel Levinstein Zt'l, who would later become Mashgiach Ruchni of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Poland and Shanghai and eventually become Mashgiach of Yeshivas Ponevezh in Bnai Brak. It is said that at one point during his tenure in Kletzk, the Brisker Rav offered Rav Schach the position of Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Toras Chaim of Brisk following the petirah of Rav Moshe Sokolovsky, author of "Imrei Moshe." However, Rav Schach declined the offer.

His sense of responsibility for his fellow yid was already well developed at this point in his life as illustrated by the following story.

Reb Yankel Zaretzki, who spent the last years of his life learning in Kollel Chazon Ish, after spending the post-War years in Lakewood and later in Boston, told Rav Henoch Plotnick, how he came to become a Talmid of Kletzk.

"I was a young boy in the Russian town of Lechovitz, a major switching station for trains to and from Russian towns. One day a young man who had a few hour layover between trains, entered the Bais Medrash in which I and my friends sat around a table.

"The avreich mentioned that he had time before his train departed for Kletzk and asked our melamed if he could test us on our Gemarah. The rebbe said yes, and the test went well.

Then the yungerman asked our melamed about our future; would we continue to learn or go for trades. The rebbe said he had no hope for any of us to continue learning. We would probably end up the usual shoemakers, carpenters and peddlers.

The young man asked if he can immediately meet our parents. It was arranged, and the avreich spoke passionately about the importance of imbuing a new generation with Torah. Our parents were convinced and six of us were allowed

to come to Kletzk. We followed him to Kletzk and later followed Rav Aharon to Lakewood and on to lives immersed in Torah.

That youngster was none other than Maran Rav Elozar Menachem Schach.

This amazing midah, of caring for every single individual child and the unique ability to bring out the best in others and to help them fulfill their potential, was a hallmark of Rav Schach throughout his century of leadership and harbotzas Torah.

Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin, a talmid of the Chevron Yeshiva, was among a group of yeshiva avreichim who moved to Netanya in the 1980s. At the time, Netanya had little in the way of a religious school system, and as the avreichim's families grew, the issue of education became a big problem.

Rabbi Sorotzkin, whose oldest child was 4 at the time, went with several avreichim to ask Rav Schach whether the group should remain in Netanya or, in the interest of their children's chinuch, move to larger Torah communities.

"Rav Schach began," recalled Rabbi Sorotzkin, "by telling us everything we already knew-how chinuch was the most important thing. But then he surprised us by telling us that we should build a Talmud Torah in Netanya.

"When we protested that we only had a few children between us, he responded by writing a letter-and by telling me to head the Talmud Torah!

"When I left, I wasn't the same person that I had been when I walked in. I felt like I had a tremendous burden on me."

Over the next several months, Rabbi Sorotzkin and the other avreichim visited Rav Schach regularly, asking all kinds of technical questions, such as which children to accept and how to develop the curriculum.

“Whenever Rabbi Sorotzkin would go to him, he would remember exactly where we left off the time before. He would ask, “Nu, what’s happening with that child, the one you asked about two months ago?” At that time thousands of people came to him with an endless array of issues and questions, yet he remembered the boys of the new cheder in Netanya!

Rav Schach encouraged others to start new endeavors and not be discouraged.

A rebbi in Yeshivas Kol Torah once went to Rav Schach for encouragement and advice on a project he was trying to launch.

Rav Schach told him, “Do you know how Rav Yisroel Salanter started the Mussar Movement? He finally found someone in a little town, Memel, to rent him two rooms. Then he started with a chavrusa, then a chabura, then he went to Kovno, and then it spread to the whole world. Imagine what it will be like when that fellow who rented Rav Yisrael the room goes to HeavenOne person can turn a yeshiva around.”

And like the children he saw in Lechovitz, Rav Schach was able to see the potential for young children whose families had hardly experienced Yiddishkeit, but were willing to satiate themselves with new-found mesikas haTorah.

One family had a son in the second grade at a state-run religious school. The boy had started to wear a yarmulke and tzitzis, and the parents were anxious to put him in a cheder. But Rav Schach had instructed Lev L’Achim personnel that generally they should not put such children into cheder but rather into a Chinuch Atzmai school.

In this instance, the family insisted that the child be enrolled in a cheder, and they told Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin of Lev L’Achim that they wanted to see Rav Schach and discuss the matter with him personally.

"I finally got them an appointment," said Rabbi Sorotzkin. "The whole family came for they wanted to be there saying Tehillim while the shaila was asked. I was sure the Rav would say no, since these were his own rules, but I figured they would feel better if they heard it from him directly.

"I went in to see Rav Schach and the gabbai told him that there was a family waiting outside saying Tehillim. Rav Schach was so touched that he asked that the child be brought in. When he saw him, he told me the child belonged in cheder.

"What is his family crying about?" Rav Schach declared. "Not for parnassa or refua, but for Torah! This boy will be a big talmid chacham."

Today, that boy is learning in Kol Torah.

His interest in helping yidden grow was not restricted to children.

Rav Schach once went to the seaside for health reasons. As he walked near the shore with his companion, they saw an elderly man sitting alone. Rav Schach asked him if he was religious, and he shook his head. "Do you have any meaning in your life?" asked the Rosh Yeshiva. The old man admitted that his life was empty. Rav Schach assured him that if he keeps Shabbos, his entire life will be transformed. Then and there, the man committed himself to keeping Shabbos. Rav Schach, his gabbai, and the stranger got up and danced at the seaside, out of pure joy!

Following his years in Kletzk, Rav Schach went on to serve as a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Novardok, a position he held for two years. Rav Aharon Kotler, in a letter addressed to Rav Chaim Ozer, asked of the latter to "use his influence to support Yeshivas Novardok, especially in light of Rav Elozar Schach's decision to serve as Rosh Yeshiva therewho is a great sage in Torah, and who is equally knowledgeable in imparting Torah knowledge to others."

Rav Schach became close to Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, the Vilna Rav, and would talk to him in learning for hours on end.

Once, during a meeting of Europe's Gedolei Torah and chassidus, he burst into the room and, oblivious to everything, walked right up to Rav Chaim Ozer and declared with joy, "About the kasha (difficulty) you brought up yesterday, there is a simple answer."

One of the Admorim stared at the impetuous intruder, saying, "Young man, a little derech erez!" At this point the young man, realizing what he had done, asked everyone for their forgiveness, and quickly exited the room.

The Admor of Karlin, who had watched the entire exchange with great interest asked, "who was that young man?"

Rav Chaim Ozer answered, "His name is Elozar Menachem Man Schach. To him, relating a teretz was a matter of utmost urgency."

The Admor of Karlin declared, "I need a Rosh Yeshiva like that! And so with the guidance of Rav Chaim Ozer, Rav Schach became the Karlin Rosh Yeshiva in Luninyetz, a city centered between Minsk and Pinsk in White Russia

While serving as Rosh Yeshiva in Karlin, Rav Schach imparted an enthusiasm for learning that the bochurim had rarely seen. But his fire did not stop at the Gemara. Rav Schach was arrested and spent two days in jail for protesting an open chilul Hashem.

In a letter he wrote to the Gedolei Yisroel of the time, this is how he described the incident that led to his arrest.

"On Friday, the morning of Shavuot, all of us davened kevasikin after staying up to learn all night. It then came to my attention that two fishmongers had opened their stalls and were selling their wares, and that Jewish women were

buying it. I went to the marketplace and I strongly rebuked the women for violating the sanctity of Yom Tov in public. Immediately two policemen arrived and charged me with interfering with the trade of non-Jewish merchants. They kept me in jail for two full days before the efforts of the Pinsk community bore fruit, and I was finally released.”

His strong and unwavering stance for Torah and Mitzvah observance was evident when Rav Schach was still a young bachur. He once went to hear a drasha in the local beis medrash. Within a short time, it became clear to him that the speaker was talking words that were laced with heresy. Rav Schach stood up and prevented the speaker from continuing with his talk. In fact he protested so strongly that the speaker ran from the Bais Medrash.

When the Slonimer Rebbe heard this story, he told his chassidim that in the zechus of standing up for Emes, the bachur who interrupted the apikorus would be blessed with arichas yomim—a long and fruitful life.

Rav Schach himself had a different take on the story. Many years later Rav Schach was walking into the K’nessiah Gedolah when a person who sided with those who opposed Rav Schach on a certain issue, gave him a push. This impudent act was done publicly and Rav Schach’s talmidim wanted to mount a strong protest.

Rav Schach told them not to do anything. “In fact,” he said, “I was waiting for this potch since I was a young man.”

He related the story of the apikores whom he had driven from shul and then added an unknown fact. “True I did what I had to do, but the speaker’s father was there. I am sure that I caused him embarrassment. I waited all these years to be publicly humiliated and receive my due. Now that I have received it, I am content.”

The pain of Chilul Hashem shook Rav Schach to the core.



Rav Eliezer Sorotzkin relates how, some eighty years later, Rav Schach still felt the pain of open transgression of r'tzon Hashem. Toward the end of his years in one of his last meetings before he was no longer able to speak to anyone, he called in the Rav of Natanya, Rav Yisroel Meir Lau. He took Rabbi Lau's hand in his and started to cry loudly.

"I heard," said Rav Schach, "that there are forty stores that sell pig in Netanya, that there is a problem in Ashkelon with chillul Shabbos, and that they want to institute secular reforms in Tel Aviv.

"I'm over one hundred years old, I have no strength, and people are not listening to me. The only thing I have left to do is to cry."

Rav Schach continued crying for a few more minutes and then while crying for Klal Yisrael his strength gave out and he fell in to an exhausted sleep.

## **WORLD WAR II- VILNA EMIGRATION TO ERETZ YISROEL**

When World War II began to rage in late 1939, Rav Schach fled to Vilna and stayed with Rav Chaim Ozer. The two gedolim became very close and learned together regularly. That year Rav Schach's daughter, Miriam Raizel, o"n, passed away.

As the family went to the levaya, Rav Chaim Ozer himself stayed behind to watch over Rav Schach's infant son, Ephraim, holding him on his lap and playing with him until Rav Schach and his wife returned from the cemetery.

It was not long before the Russians invaded Vilna, forcing the Torah community to flee to the nearby town of Yanove. Together with Reb Aharon, Rav Schach continued to learn with super-human hasmadah.

But they soon realized that the noose was tightening and escape from Lithuania would be the only alternative. Rav Schach's uncle, Rav Aharon Levitan who had

emigrated to America, helped get visas for Rav Aharon Kotler to come to America . At the same time Rav Schach's uncle Reb Isser Zalman who had been serving as Rosh Yeshivas Eitz Chaim in Yerushalayim helped Rav Schach and his family get certificates to go to Eretz Yisrael, which at that time was known as Palestine, under the British Mandate.

There was a question whether Rav Schach, like Rav Aharon, should go to America, but it is said that both the Brisker Rav and Rav Chaim Ozer foresaw that there will come a time that the Yidden in Eretz Yisrael would need Rav Schach's vision.

At the time Rommel was poised to attack Palestine and many tried to dissuade Rav Schach from his plans. Together with other Rabbanim and Gedolim, the Schach family set sail for Turkey. On the boat were Rav Laizer Yudel Finkel, Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, Rav Shabsi Yogel, and Rav Chizkiyahu Yosef Mishkovski. A second boat took the Brisker Rav and his family.

The Turkish Authorities refused to let refugees off the boats and on to their soil, but a Jewish merchant vouched for the families and paid for their hotel. Without this mysterious individual, these great families may have been lost.

Finally after circuitous a train ride through Syria and Lebanon, they arrived in Eretz Yisroel.

## **THE ERETZ YISROEL YEARS**

Rav Schach and his family arrived in Eretz Yisroel absolutely penniless, without even enough money for a day's worth of food. Their few meager possessions had been seized by Lithuanian border guards. From the port, they headed directly to the home of their uncle, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, who had emigrated from Europe a few years prior to assume the position of Rosh Yeshiva of Etz Chaim in Yerushalayim.

They moved in to a one room apartment at Rechov Modi'in 10 in the old Kerem section of Yerushalayim where they lived in abject poverty.

At this point Rav Schach had no livelihood and the outlook was bleak. Still he would learn day and night forging closer ties with his uncle, Rav Isser Zalman and with Rav Velvel Soloveichik, the Brisker Rav. He could be found at all hours in the Kerem Shul or talking in learning with the Brisker Rav.

The Rav once mentioned to a close talmid that since his father Rav Chaim Brisker, was niftar, he had no one with whom to talk to in learning until he met Rav Schach.

Throughout those first difficult years without a livelihood, Rebbitzin Schach stood by his side. She worked tirelessly to support the family and allow her husband to learn without interruption.

When she became ill, Rav Schach cared for her, trying his best to do the chores around the house. He would go shopping, standing in line like everyone else to pay for groceries.

After a while, Rav Schach was introduced to a Rav who had a Yeshiva in Tel Aviv, who offered him a job. All Rav Schach was to do was sit and learn and give shiurim in the Yeshiva. The Rav offered him a respectable salary and gave him enough money to furnish his tiny apartment in Yerushalayim. Rav Schach accepted the position.

The Yeshiva in Tel Aviv had no other outside limudim, there were no secular studies in the Yeshiva, but Rav Schach soon discovered that the Zionistic leanings of the Yeshiva administration made him uncomfortable. Despite the fact that he had no other parnassah and despite much cajoling from the dean of the Yeshiva, Rav Schach decided to give up this sure parnassah and return to Yerushalayim.

He appeared before the Brisker Rav with the news that he was once again jobless.

"Ashrecha!" the Rav declared, "Praiseworthy are you Reb Lazer! You have made a decision to forego parnasa on a matter of principle! I have a kabalah from my father that those who forego parnasa because of a true Torah principle will only see blessings!"

The Rav then undertook to help support Rav Schach until he could find parnasa. Eventually he was offered to join the many great European Talmidei Chachamim, refugees from Europe, who were learning in the Lomza Yeshiva in Petach Tikva. It was at this time that he developed a close relationship with the Chazon Ish who lived in nearby Bnai Brak.

## **STRIVING FOR TRUTH**

The Chazon Ish was greatly impressed with Rav Schach's Bikush HaEmes. He said of Rav Schach, "haemes ahuv etzlo, truth is dear to him," very powerful words from the Gaon known for his uncompromising pursuit of Emes.

The Chazon Ish first noted this great midah of Rav Schach when one of the talmidim in the yeshiva in Petach Tikvah related to him that once Rav Schach regretted a nuance of his shiur and made sure to approach every single student with the correction.

Indeed, anyone who knew Rav Schach or heard his shiurim, knew that the emes was all that mattered. When I learned in Ponovez, one Elul the Yeshiva was learning the tenth perek of Nedarim. Rav Schach never gave shiur Klali on that perek.

That year Rav Schach decided that he was going to give a shiur Klali on that perek. The maareh m'komos were posted and the yeshiva was abuzz. All were anticipating a remarkable shiur.

Rav Schach was in his seat speaking to his Talmid Muvhak Rav Dovid Zimmerman, when all of a sudden he stood up, went to the bulletin board outside the Bais Medrash and took off the small paper upon which the ma'areh m'komos were posted and canceled the shiur.

Later Reb Dovid explained that he decided that although a brilliant shiur had been prepared, a last minute question weakened the y'sod and Rav Schach would not say a shiur if he felt it was less than one hundred percent.

On more than one occasion a bochur would ask an innocent question which Rav Schach felt sufficiently weakened the point of his shiur. The Rosh Yeshiva would simply say "er iz gerecht," close his gemora and the shiur was over.

Rav Schach remained in the Lomza Yeshiva in Petach Tikva and by invitation of the Rav, Rav Reuven Katz, began to say shiurim in Yeshiva Degel Reuvain.

Eventually Rav Schach felt that it was time to move on. He took a position with his cousin, the son of Rav Isser Zalman in Yeshivas HaDarom-Kletzk in Rechovot.

Throughout his years as a magid shiur in Eretz Yisrael, Rav Schach would only come home on Shabbos. He would spend the rest of the week in the Beis Medrash, immersed in the study and teaching of Torah.

When Rav Reuven Grozovsky took ill, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky traveled to Eretz Yisroel to invite Rav Schach to become Rosh Yeshiva in Torah Voda'ath in New York. The Brisker Rav dissuaded him from accepting this tempting offer with the prophetic declaration that "Rav Schach will one day lead Klal Yisroel in Eretz Yisroel. He is needed here!"

## **Bais Brisk**

After a short stay in Rechovot, Rav Schach returned to Yerushalyim where he served as Maggid Shiur in Yerushalayim's Yeshivas Beis Yosef and continued learning by the Brisker Rav.

They would learn for hours on end, the Brisker Rav showing him his writing and watching Rav Schach's every nuance as he read them, asking over and over what he felt. The Brisker Rav's demeanor would change when Rav Schach would come into the room. If he would be speaking to talmidim and Rav Schach would shake his head or make a sudden movement, the Brisker Rav would stop and ask, "Vos iz Reb Lazer? What is bothering you Reb Lazer?" Such was his influence in the Bais HaRav.

The Rav chided his other talmidim, comparing their reactions to his Torah with that of Rav Schach. Once when relating a chiddush on Megilas Rus some of the talmidim were quiet. This disappointed the Brisker Rav who said, "Wait till I tell this to Rav Lazer. He will understand its depth and react with enthusiasm!"

Rav Velvel told Reb Ahron Kupschitz that no matter which sugya you choose to ask Rav Schach about, he is holding there. Even at the wedding of one of his sons, the Brisker Rav spent a full hour talking in learning with Rav Schach.

The Rav's haskama on 'Avi Ezri', Rav Schach's sefer testifies to the tremendous esteem in which Rav Schach was held. "Who am I to give an approbation on Rav Schach," he wrote, "he is one of the Gedolim of our time and certainly does not need my haskamah!"

Though the Rav gave him one of the most powerful haskamos he ever wrote, Rav Shach almost did not know it. The story goes as follows: Rav Shach wanted to print his sefer and came to the Brisker Rav to show him the work. All Rav Shach wanted, was to ask if the work was worthy of printing. Upon seeing the writings, the Rav penned the celebrated haskama, and handed it to him. Rav Shach didn't look at the words of the letter, rather he pocketed it and kept on asking the Rav, if it is worthy to print.

After constant reassurances from the Rav that the chidushim are worthy of publication, Rav Schach left the house.

The Rav sent his son, Reb Yoshe Ber, to chase Rav Schach and tell him to read the letter and print it in the sefer.

Rav Dovid Finkel commented on that haskama, "It was not an approbation. It was a coronation!"

One year the Brisker Rav felt unwell on his father's yahrzeit, the 21st of Av. He asked Rav Schach to daven before the amud in his stead and learn mishnayos lilui nishmoso.

The Brisker Rav attested that Rav Schach sees things that other mortals do not. "Rav Schach's far reaching vision spans forty years," he said.

On one occasion the Brisker Rav was learning with Rav Schach until late at night. As the hour was growing late Rav Schach returned home. At 1:00 AM, the Rav thought of a different approach to the problem and sent his son, the famed Brisker Rosh Yeshiva Rav Yoshe Ber, to relate it to Rav Schach. When Rav Berel hesitated saying that Reb Lazer is sleeping by then and the answer could wait till the next morning, the Brisker Rav assured him, "It cannot be, Rav Schach won't be able to sleep until he hears a terutz." And so it was.

As Reb Berel approached Rav Schach's humble abode he saw him walking back and forth in his room deep in thought. He knocked on the door and brought great joy to Rav Lazer as he told him over his father's p'shat.

Rav Schach felt such a great simcha when he read the Brisker Rav's chiddushim, that the Brisker Rav told some talmidim that he actually looked forward to finishing the chiddushim in order to see Rav Schach's enthusiasm.

Once the Brisker Rav was sitting with talmidim and saying a shiur. He asked a difficult kushya and worked on finding a solution.

Rav Shach walked into the room and all of a sudden the Rav's eyes lit up and he delivered a brilliant answer. When Rav Shach left the bochurim turned to their rebbe and asked why he didn't tell them the answer before Rav Schach's entry. The Brisker Rav responded to them that the teretz was Reb Lazer's. They looked on in astonishment as he said "I want you to know that the kasha is Reb Lazer's, the teretz is Reb Lazer's; it is all Reb Lazer's! The questions are his and the answers are his! Because when I learn through a sugya there are times that I think that I have no solution to a difficult question and am prepared to go on. But then I think how much enjoyment Reb Lazer will have when I am able to offer a pshat. So I work harder and harder till I solve the problem. It's all Reb Lazer's."

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapira, Rosh Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov, tells of a freezing winter day in Yerushalayim. He was walking toward the home of the Brisker Rav. The streets were nearly empty. Snow had covered the ground and everyone was inside trying to keep warm. From a distance Rav Shapira saw a man hopping back and forth, up and down, in front of the Brisker Rav's home. He thought the man was waiting to go in and was moving about to keep warm. As he approached he realized that it was none other than Rav Schach.

"Why don't you go in," he asked. "Why do you stand here, hopping up and down in the freezing cold?"

Rav Schach laughed. "I am not hopping from the cold. I am jumping for joy! I just heard a beautiful pshat from the Brisker Rav and felt I must make a rekida! I figured since it is snowing outside no one will see me dancing."

A different time upon exiting the Rav's house, Rav Schach to a talmid and said "I don't know if I would have merited Olam Habah, but if I had, I just ate it up with enjoyment I had from the vort the Rav told me."



Throughout the first decade that Rav Schach was in Ponevez he still maintained an extremely close keshet with the Brisker Rav. For the last three months of the Brisker Rav's life, the months of Tamuz, Av and Elul, Rav Schach stayed with the Brisker Rav in Yerushalayim. Though one of those months was during a summer bain hazmanim, the Brisker Rav asked permission of the Ponovezer Rav for Rav Schach to stay with him. At the time, Rav Velvel no longer gave shiurim but continued to speak every day for hours on end, with Rav Schach.

The Rav asked Rav Schach to daven for him at the kever of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meiron. This was the one and only time that Rav Schach traveled to Meiron.

Before Rosh Hashanah, of that final year, Rav Schach excused himself from being with the Rav for Yom Tov, explaining that he felt he had to return to the Yeshiva for Rosh HaShana. Only later when he heard that the Brisker Rav sighed, saying to his children that "a Rosh Hashana without Reb Lazer would be a different Rosh haShana," did Rav Schach regret his return to Bnai Brak.

## **PONEVEZ AND THE WORLD**

In 1951, Rav Schach accepted an offer by the Ponovezer Rav, Rav Yosef Kahanamen to join Rav Shmuel Rozovsky and Rav Dovid Povarski and become a Rosh Yeshiva in Ponovez. It is was to be from there that the entire world learn of the greatness only scores of individuals had previously known.

Rav Schach remained in Ponovez for the following 50 years, teaching generations of talmidei chachamim who are now at the forefront of the Torah community in Eretz Yisroel.

It was there, from his humble apartment in "Kiryas HaYeshiva", that he would go on to serve as the generation's greatest Torah leader.

It was from Ponevez that the Rosh Yeshiva became well known in the Torah world, prompting Klal Yisrael to take advantage of his greatness in Torah and learn from his vision of the future, his Ahavas Yisrael, his uncompromising ideals and perhaps most importantly, from his mesiras nefesh for the Ribono Shel Olam's will.

During Rav Schach's first years in Ponovez, The Chazon Ish would send ask a talmid to listen to Rav Schach's shiur and say it over to him during the bain hasedorim lunch break.

One day Rav Schach chose to ask a very strong question on a chiddush in the Chazon Ish's sefer. When the bachur returned that day to the Chazon Ish, he was afraid to repeat the shiur. After the Chazon Ish convinced him that he would not be upset, the boy explained his reluctance and then finally said over the question.

The Chazon Ish thought for a long while. He mulled over the problem and eventually told the bochur an answer.

The boy later approached Rav Schach. Without relating to him that he had discussed the issue with the Chazon Ish, the boy offered the Chazon Ish's teretz to Rav Schach's question.

Rav Schach thought for a long time, walking back and forth in bais medrash, amazed at the brilliance of the answer. He turned to the boy and exclaimed incredulously, "Only the Chazon Ish himself could have said such an answer." Ashen faced, the boy admitted the obvious truth.

His quest for learning and growing in Torah was not diminished with his rise to prominence.

One day Rav Schach walked into Bais Medrash on a wintry day. He looked extremely exhausted. His talmid, Rav Chaim Berman, a son-in-law of Rav Yaakov Galinski, asked him why he looked so forlorn.

“To tell you the truth,” said Rav Schach, “last night I tried to go to sleep. It was very cold and very dark. And then I realized that one day I will be in a place that is very cold and very dark and I will not even have a candle with which to learn a blatt gemara!

With that thought on my mind I jumped out of bed and learned the entire night. That is why I am so tired.”

Rav Chaim Berman relates how Rav Schach’s mesiras nefesh for learning was so extraordinary. Once, Reb Chaim came to discuss something with Rav Schach at the Ponevez Yeshiva. Rav Schach motioned with his hands that he was not feeling well and was too weak to speak. Rav Chaim insisted that Rav Schach return home to rest, but the elderly Rosh Yeshiva refused to leave the beis medrash.

Reb Chaim, however, would not take no for an answer and continued to plead with Rav Schach to return home and rest. Finally, Rav Schach turned to his talmid and told him that being over 80 years old I must consider that my end will be sooner than later. Feeling so ill I thought this might be my time to leave this world. If so, it would be better to leave while bent over a shtender than while lying in bed.

There is a section in one of the Sifrei HaGra that deals with the yom hamaves as well as the depth of din in the world to come. Rav Schach used the sefer often, the pages that dealt with the severity of judgment were well worn. Someone asked Rav Schach if he studies that section of the sefer often. He responded that he looks at it at least twice a day.

But whether filled with strength or drained with emotion, there was no opportunity lost to talk in learning. On the way back from the levaya of the Chofetz Chaim in 1933, the train car was filled with bochurim from Yeshivas Mir who had attended the funeral. Though most of them were talking about the levaya and the hespeidim, Rav Schach went from one person to then next talking with them in learning. Rav Mordechai Schwab would relate the story decades later, stating that the sight made such a dramatic impact on him that he never forgot it.

Rav Schach's enthusiasm and total immersion in learning was imparted in so many ways to his talmidim.

His shiurim were filled with fire and brimstone. He would walk in to the room, pose a question and revel in simcha as the bochurim battled with each other and with himself! Then he would say his answer and again the room would spontaneously erupt. To an American bochur coming from a shiur where the Rosh Yeshiva would sit by a table and nary a sound was heard from the talmidim, this was a total shock.

When Rav Schach would have a question in his learning he would turn to his young students in the beis medrash and ask them to help him find an explanation. Every time a bachur would try to give a teretz, he would listen as though he were revealing secrets.

When Rav Schach was already over 80, he would sit in the beis medrash and was willing to speak in learning with any bachur who came over to him. He gave each and every one of his talmidim a feeling of belonging and that he was special.

Talmidim would come to Rav Schach with their personal problems without embarrassment. He gave them the feeling that they could open their hearts to him. He was so in touch with the emotional needs of others that he understood the feelings of bachurim and small children.

From the answers Rav Schach gave to his students, it was obvious that he understood the question better than the person who had asked it. He never told a person what to do, but voiced his opinion in a way that allowed the person to do what he wanted while gently urging him to choose the right path.

Rav Schach was particular to never voice an opinion to one who did not want to hear it. He was a genius in understanding each person's individual needs.

He was forever strengthening his talmidim's resolve to continue in their limud and amaylus baTorah.

Rav Yitzchok Dovid Grosbard relates about a yungerman who approached the Rosh Yeshiva with the idea that he had an opportunity to work in the evenings. The Avreich said that he would sit and learn all day and at night he would spend some time working. Rav Schach tried to dissuade the yungerman from the prospective idea. He felt that this particular talmid should not leave the yeshiva at this particular time. However, it seems that the avreich did not come to ask an opinion. He came to tell the Rosh Yeshiva about a plan that he was determined to fulfill. A few months went by and the talmid came back to Rav Schach in amazement. "Rebbe," he sighed, "I began my evening vocation and davka, I was making quite a bit of money. But every month as I tally up my expenses, I still fall short of what I need. The amazing thing is that when I was full time in Kollel, though things were tight, I met my obligations, Now, however, even though I bring in more money, not only do I have nothing left over, but I owe more money than I ever did!

Rav Schach turned to him gently and explained. When you do the ratzon Hashem the washing machine doesn't break down. The children don't rip their clothing. The car does not break down. There is so much more siyata d'shmaya that you end up with more money while earning less!

## **THE GEDOLIM'S GADOL**

As Rav Schach emerged as the foremost Rosh Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael he was revered by the Gedolei Yisrael in B'nei B'rak, in Yerushalayim, in America and across the world as one of the foremost spokesman for Torah hashkafa.

For many years a Yid named Rav Shlesinger, son-in-law of Rav Shlomo Lorenzce, lived in Bnei Brak and served as an emissary between Rav Schach and the Steipler.

He personally attested that the Steipler said about Rav Schach "Yad, yad, peh, peh. His hand is my hand and his mouth is my mouth. Everything he says and writes is like it was coming from me."

On many occasions, when Rav Shlesinger would bring the Steipler documents and letters from Rav Schach to sign, the Steipler would sign them without even reading them. Such was his trust in Rav Schach!

There are countless stories that demonstrate the tremendous love and respect that the Steipler and Rav Schach had for each other.

A Talmid Chacham once approached the Steipler with a severe and serious question. The Steipler told him that he should ask the question to Rav Schach. Then he continued. "Rav Schach will tell you what he thinks b'hashkafa rishona, (at first thought) then he will tell you to come to me. You do not have to. I assure you that Rav Schach's hashkafa rishona is exactly the halacha! Follow that directive and you will be successful."

The Steipler constantly said that since Rav Schach did not move daled amos without Torah, the Ribono shel Olam gave him the ability to pasken in every aspect of this generation's needs.

All over the world, Rav Schach's opinions on all matters became the Da'as Torah for all B'nei Torah.

Rav Schach's reverence and love for Gedolei Yisroel were legend. His relationship with my Zeide, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky Zt'l, was warm and mutual.

In the early 1980s Rav Yaakov suffered an angina attack and his doctor strongly recommended that he undergo an angiogram, a difficult and sometimes dangerous procedure for a man of his advanced age. At the time my brother Reb Zvi was a talmid in Ponovez. He immediately resolved to approach the Rosh Yeshiva with a request to pray for Reb Yaakov's welfare. My brother knew he had to present Rav Schach with his grandfather's name, Yaakov and the name of Reb Yaakov's mother. That was no easy feat for my brother Zvi had no clue of her name. Reb Yaakov was over 90 years old at the time and in excellent health. Reb Zvi could not recall a time where he had mentioned our grandfather's name in the Mi Shebairach for the sick. He simply was embarrassed to approach Rav Schach without Reb Yaakov's mother's name, so he went on a search expedition through B'nei Brak attempting to contact people who would know the name of Reb Yaakov's mother. Finally he went to a nephew of Rav Yaakov who lived in Bnai Brak who told him that Rav Yaakov's mother was named Etká. Armed with the information and an update on my grandfather's condition he approached the home of Rav Schach. The elderly gaon invited my brother into his sparsely furnished dining room and asked him to take a seat.

When he inquired about the welfare of our grandfather, Rav Yaakov, my brother turned white. "That is exactly why I came," he stammered. Immediately Rav Schach's face filled with consternation. My brother continued, "you see, my grandfather was not feeling well and must undergo a procedure. I came to inform theÉ" Rav Schach jumped up from his chair and exclaimed. "We must say be mispalel for Reb Yaakov ben Etká!"

My brother stood opened-mouthed and could not contain himself. "Rebbe," he began meekly. "The last 12 hours I have been trying to find out my

grandmother's name in order to present it to the Rosh Yeshiva. Now I see that the Rosh Yeshiva knows the name of my great-grandmother. How is that?"

Rav Schach explained. "Years ago your grandfather visited Eretz Yisrael. After meeting him I asked him for his mother's name. I could not imagine a Jewish world without a healthy Reb Yaakov and there is not a single day that goes by that I do not say a special prayer for his well being!"

Rav Schach's love for Gedolei Yisrael extended to an excitement in the mere possession of their seforim.

One of Rav Schach's grandchildren received multiple copies of Chidushei Rav Akiva Eiger for his bar mitzva and told his grandfather that he was planning to exchange them for different seforim. Rav Schach was aghast.

"What!" he exclaimed in wonder, "how can you give back a sefer of Rav Akiva Eiger?"

The Gedolei Torah totally subjugated themselves to his Da'as Torah.

On the day Rav Schach declared that the Olam HaTorah must work for Degel HaTorah, a delegation representing Rav Chaim Kanievski, Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkovitch and Rav Asher Lichtshtein, came to see him. "Whatever the Rosh Yeshiva needs in terms of help. We are here."

Rav Michel Yehuda explained to his talmidim, if Rav Schach can close his Gemara, then we must close our Gemaras as well.

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapira explained that fulfilling Rav Schach's will is fulfilling the will of the Vilna Gaon. Rav Schach is a Talmid muvhak of the Brisker Rav who is the Talmid muvhak of Rav Chaim who carried forth the Mesora of Volozhin as propagated by Rav Chaim Volohziner the Talmid muvhak of the Vilna Gaon.



Rav Schach spoke about that mesorah, not only in declaring daas Torah, but in strengthening others as well. A boy from a traditional home came to Rav Schach and told him that he desperately wants to learn in yeshiva but his father won't permit him to do so. Rav Schach told him to bring his father to him. The father came with his son to Rav Schach and later said, "I only had two sons, one was killed in army and if this son will go to yeshiva, my life is not worth living."

They came to a compromise: the boy would go to college during the day and at night he would hire someone to learn three hours of Gemara with him. The boy began to cry because he saw that he would not get into yeshiva and he did not like the compromise.

Rav Schach got up and kissed the boy and said, "This is a kiss that I received from the Chofetz Chaim and now I am giving it to you."

The father was so moved by Rav Schach's warmth that he decided to develop a keshet with the Rosh Yeshiva.

After a half a year the boy was studying full time in yeshiva. Today he is a mashgiach in a yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel.

During the Gulf War, some talmidim approached Rav Schach to ask whether they should adhere to the directives of the government and use gas masks in Bnei Brak. Rav Schach thought for a moment and said that it would be the right thing to do.

Later, they met Rav Chaim Kanievski who told them that he felt it wasn't necessary. When told that his opinion seemed to contradict that of Rav Schach, Rav Chaim smiled.

"I know something that Rav Schach does not know?"

"And what can that be?" asked the astonished talmidim.

"I know that we have the z'chus of Rav Lazer Schach here in Bnai Brak! I am sure that as long as he is here, nothing will happen to our city!"

Rav Schach's influence was felt by the entire world.

Often decisions that would determine the makeup of Israel's government, the balance of Knesset power and thus relations with Arab countries and the United States rested on his shoulders.

During the period when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat visited Israel, the bochorim were enthralled by the amazing and startling events. Some would sneak out of Bais Medrash to hear news tidbits and morsels of information about the goings and comings of the leaders and politicians.

Rav Schach sat and learned with total immersion. His shiurim were given with extreme passion and excitement. I was there and cannot remember that he even left his seat in the Bais Medrash.

I cannot forget how during that period, government officials had to come to the Bais Medrash and asked Rav Schach if he can please step out as they wanted to ask him some weighty questions. They stood in the upstairs anteroom before the Bais Medrash. Rav Schach took a few minutes to step out and perhaps, help shape world history and then returned to his place in the Bais Medrash as if nothing had occurred. For us, it was the greatest lesson in the supreme reverence and importance of Limud Torah.

A Rosh Yeshiva, a talmid of Rav Schach, was once asked by his own student if the bracha, specifically designated for unparalleled Talmidei Chachomim, "Shechalak maychachmaso l'yiraiav, Blessed is He who has imparted from His wisdom to those who fear Him," can be recited over Rav Schach. The answer

came back quickly in the affirmative. Indeed, the Rosh yeshiva added with a smile, you can make the bracha, "Shekocho U'Gevuroso Malei Olam, as well!

Rabbi Asher Bergman, Rav Schach's grandson, relates that Rav Chaim Kanievsky would appear in Rav Schach's apartment every thirty days to recite anew the bracha of "Shechalak M'Chachmaso L'Yraiov".

Actually, in 1993, Rav Chaim Kanievski, once said that although the bracha of Shechalak maychachmaso l'yiraiv, was designated for those with Torah wisdom of those whose capabilities exceed anyone in recent generations, one can still make a bracha with Shaim U'Malchus on Rav Schach. The Gadol haDor, has a special siyata d'shmaya and is always worthy of that bracha. "Rav Schach," said Rav Chaim, "is the Gadol HaDor."

## **DA'AS TORAH**

Rav Schach's Daas Torah was so methodically meted. Each situation was analyzed and dissected. A yes to one person could be a no for another.

Some people were told to battle, while others were directed to quietly accept the antagonism thrust upon them.

He told teachers of some students who were becoming religious to go to certain schools, while other students were directed toward different ones.

Once a group of people in a frum section of Yerushalyim were protesting that their street should be closed on Shabbos because there was a religious majority living in the area.

Rav Schach stated that the concept of majority should not be used as an argument. They must fight for the truth because of its inherent value.

Otherwise, in the sections of Tel Aviv and Petach Tikva where transgressors are the majority, they will sell treifos and desecrate Shabbos openly with impunity!

To a group of Rabbanim considering the opening of a new type of yeshiva that would function half a day as a trade school, Rav Schach told the following story: Upon returning from a visit to Germany one of the Brisker talmidim came to Rav Chaim Brisker and described the culture schools that he saw there. These were Jewish schools that taught a minimum of Jewish religion, but were an improvement over the non-Jewish high schools where most of the Jewish students studied. He suggested that such a school be opened in Brisk, as an alternative to the totally secular gymnasiums.

Rav Chaim banged his fist on the table and exclaimed, "In Germany it is necessary and will not hurt, but in Brisk where it is not needed, it will only cause harm."

"From here we learn," continued Rav Schach, "that in every generation, in every point in time, one must evaluate the needs of that generation and whether or not it is possible to do something. Concerning the school you are interested in founding until now I would have said to stay away from this like one stays away from fire. But we have reached the point today where a twelve or thirteen year old boy who is not happy at home or in the yeshiva can disappear for three months at a time and no one will know where he is. Therefore, with the following conditions, open the school." Rav Schach proceeded to list several conditions.

His daas Torah was a part of every decision, chinuch, Klal and even medical.

A woman was very sick and the doctors told the family that there were two ways to save her life: One was put a trachea in her neck for her to breathe through. She would not be able to talk but would be able to eat and drink normally. In the second she would be able to breathe and talk normally, but would only be able to eat through a tube inserted into her stomach.

When the family spoke to Rav Schach, he answered that it is the power of speech that makes a person different from an animal. Therefore, that is what should be saved.

“My mother ate with a tube for the next fourteen years until she passed away,” recalled her daughter, “but she was able to daven and speak with us. During those fourteen years we were able to receive her guidance and be strengthened by her emuna. You could say that she really lived during those years.”

## **THE PERSONIFICATION OF HUMILITY**

In amazing contrast to awe and reverence in which he was held, the Rosh Yeshiva remained the paragon of humility.

Once a Talmid brought Rav Schach a sefer that included chiddushei Torah of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, the Chazon Ish and Rav Schach.

On the title page Rav Schach’s name was preceded by the title Maran while the names of Rav Chaim Brisker and the Chazon Ish were not.

Rav Schach was terribly upset. How can you use the title Maran for me on the same page where Rav Chaim’s name and the Chazon Ish’s name appear.

He asked the author how many copies were published and then gave him enough money to erase the word Maran from every single copy.

Rav Schach was extremely makpid never to take advantage of others. He would never allow the bachurim to help him find a sefer. It was not unusual to see the Rosh Yeshiva standing on a chair to retrieve a sefer from a high shelf by himself despite being surrounded by talmidim who would have considered it a privilege to get the sefer for him.

Every day before shiur he would look at his watch. Then he would strain to see the time on the Yeshiva’s wall clock. He did not want to extend the daily shiur into the bochurim’s lunchtime and so he synchronized his watch with the Yeshiva’s.

Even when he was close to ninety, he would regularly shlep 10 to 15 seforim from his home to the yeshiva and refused all offers of help.

## **FATHER OF A BATTERED PEOPLE**

Though Rav Schach's leadership of the Torah community was universal and his direction a beacon to other Gedolei Roshei Yeshiva, Rav Schach was still concerned with the simplest Jew no matter how far he may have strayed from Yiddishkeit. Even after 1995 when he grew weak and officially relinquished his position, declining to sign any more letters or issue further directives, thousands of people still came to him to seek advice.

About ten years ago, when Rav Schach was already in his 90s, he participated in an important meeting in Bnai Brak. After the meeting, one of the rabbonim ordered taxis for all in attendance. But when the taxis came, Rav Schach had already left. One of the other rabbonim ran after him, but Rav Schach insisted on walking home. He did not want anyone to serve him.

The Rav apologized to the taxi driver who was supposed to have driven Rav Schach home and offered to pay him for his time. But the driver, a secular Israeli, would not accept the money. "I used to drive Rav Schach home every day after he delivered a shiur in Tel Aviv," he said, "and I have some amazing stories to tell you about those trips."

The driver told the Rav how 40 years before, in the early 1950s, he once was driving Rav Schach home from Tel Aviv, when a horse and wagon driving next to them turned over. Although it was fiercely cold and pouring rain, Rav Schach—who even then was not a young man—insisted on helping the driver pick up his wagon.

"I will never forget it," continued the taxi driver. "Rav Schach returned home dripping wet and shivering from the cold. I knew that he would not have time to

rest-he had to quickly change and deliver another shiur in Ponovezh. But he could not bear to see another Jew suffering.”

Once, Rav Schach was riding around in a taxi and a watermelon peddler’s wagon overturned. Rav Schach immediately stopped the taxi, jumped out and started picking up the watermelons.

A rebbe once had a fine talmid, who, for some unknown reason, was having difficulty finding a Yeshiva Gedola that would accept him. Several months after the school year had ended, the rebbe happened to meet this boy on the street. The boy happily told his rebbe that he had been accepted into an excellent yeshiva in Bnei Brak.

The teacher asked him how he found a place that would accept him. The boy told him that he had gone to ask Rav Schach for his help. Although Rav Schach had never met the boy before, he tested him in learning and then told him to tell the Rosh Yeshiva of a certain yeshiva, “Rav Schach said you should accept me.”

But the Rosh Yeshiva was skeptical. He told the boy that there was no one for him to learn with, nor was there space available in the dormitory.

When the bachur returned to Rav Schach and told him what the Rosh Yeshiva had said, Rav Schach answered, “Tell the rosh yeshiva that there is no problem. I will become your chavrusa and you will be able to live in my home.” Shocked, the younger Rosh Yeshiva accepted the boy on the spot.

Several years ago, when Rav Schach was already well in his 90s, he helped a young couple who were experiencing marital difficulties. The husband often came to speak with Rav Schach but the wife never came with him.

Once, Rav Schach asked the man why his wife never came to their meetings. The husband explained that she was embarrassed to speak with the Rosh Yeshiva. Rav Schach put on his coat and personally went to visit her.

Rav Schach had a special affinity for American bochurim who chose to grow in Torah and remain immersed in learning.

American boys, dressed decidedly different than the Ponovezh bachurim, would often come to Rav Schach and receive warm embraces and chizuk to continue their Torah studies.

A girl from the United States suffered from an eating disorder. Her family brought her to Rav Schach for a bracha. Rav Schach spent quite a while speaking to her about the importance of eating properly and then called her regularly long distance to ask her what she was eating and to give her chizuk.

The pain of Klal Yisrael, from the entire nation to the individual, was his personal pain!

Once a prospective rabbi, interviewing for a position in a modern shul in New Jersey was derided by the interviewing committee for a strong stance he took against secular Zionism.

"You are from Rabbi Schach's school of thought," they said to him in a derogatory manner.

Not one to listen silently when the Gadol HaDor is being besmirched, he said to the group, "I just want to repeat two stories about Rav Schach and then I'll leave. These are the stories:

"When I was a bochur, I was in Rav Schach's house on a Monday, the day before his shiur klali. "When the doctor came in to see him, he sent everyone



out of the room except for his gabbai. Since I was curious to hear the conversation, I hid in the closet.

"I heard the doctor telling the Rosh Yeshiva that he has a growth in his foot that must be operated on immediately. Although the surgery would take a few hours the anesthesia would knock him out for the rest of the day.

"Impossible!" said Rav Schach. "I must give the shiur klali. If I cannot be back by Tuesday I refuse to have the surgery."

"There is only one way you can be done by tomorrow: if you agree to surgery without anesthesia, right here in your home."

"Rav Schach readily agreed. I came out of the closet and offered to help. The gabbai and I both helped Rav Schach to remain still as the doctor operated on him, cutting open his leg without any painkiller or anesthesia. Though Rav Schach was in tremendous pain, he didn't utter a sound. Soon the surgery was over and the doctor left. Rav Schach warned his two helpers not to tell anyone what occurred. The next day he was back in yeshiva with no one being the wiser.

"The second story: Once, while Rav Schach was sitting in the Bais Medrash, a man came over and whispered in his ear. Rav Schach began to cry, heartrending sobs. Later the man told the talmidim that he informed Rav Schach about a helicopter accident involving Israeli soldiers who were all killed. Rav Schach had such depth of feeling for every Jewish soul that he cried bitter tears over these soldiers he never met.

"These two stories happened to the same person," said the talmid. "Rav Schach was strong enough to handle surgery without anesthesia, yet sensitive enough to cry over the loss of soldiers he never met. I would like to know which Zionist cried over that tragedy!"

There was a particular European Yid who had been a man of tremendous means and an amazing Ba'al Tzedoka as well. Toward the end of his life downturns in the market and other financial changes, brought his fortunes tumbling. Terribly depressed, the Yid was almost despondent. The man hailed from a Chassidic background, but he was respectful of al Gedolei Torah and so his children took him to see Rav Schach for chizuk. They felt that if there was someone on this earth who could give him chizuk, it would be Maran.

The man and his children traveled to Bnai Brak to the address known by the great and downtrodden alike; the home of Rav Schach at 27 Ra'avad Street.

The man began to tell his story. In the course of the conversation, the man told Rav Schach that his family were chassidim of a particular 'Rebbistive'.

"Oy!" exclaimed Rav Schach, "that particular Chassidus have a beautiful niggun!"

He named the tune and implored the man to sing it with him. Rav Schach asked the children to join in and together they all began to sing. A few moments later, Rav Schach stood up and exclaimed again. "This niggun is not done justice with just singing! It needs a Rekida (dance) and together, the 90 year old man and his European guests danced around the rickety table in Rav Schach's tiny home. They continued to do so until a huge smile broke out across the poor visitors face. He allowed the realization to sink in that his travails were only a fleeting moment in this temporal world. The man was niftar soon after, content with his lot in life.

When Rav Schach founded Lev L'Achim the members of the Hanhalla told Rav Schach that they wanted Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin, a prominent Rav in Netanya and respected Torah activist, to assume leadership of the organization.

Rav Schach agreed that it was a good idea and prevailed upon Rav Sorotzkin to accept the monumental responsibility this position entailed. But then Rabbi

Sorotzkin posed the question that had been bothering him all along: "What about Netanya?"

"Rav Schach put his head down and it looked like he was asleep," recalled Rabbi Sorotzkin. "Then he raised his head and said, 'Efshar lekayem es shteiheim,' 'You can do both.'

"He shook my hand and ushered me out before I could argue. By the time I reached the door I had become a new person. Rav Schach's confidence was my assurance that we would be successful.

Rav Sorotzkin recalled another occasion in which he brought a newly religious family to see Rav Schach and was surprised at the Rosh Yeshiva's response to their situation.

Rav Schach had a special cupboard filled with treats to give to the children that visited his home. He always gave enough for them to have extras to share with their brothers and sisters.

Those candies were well known to all who visited Rav Schach. Rav Yaakov Bender related how a few hours after visiting Rav Schach he received a call from one of the grandchildren asking if he could come back. If it was not a big bother, Rav Schach wanted to send something to America with him.

Rav Bender ran back thinking that he was going to be entrusted with an important mission on behalf of the Rosh Yeshiva. Instead, Rav Schach gave him some candies and asked him to get them to a family in Flatbush that needed chizuk. It wasn't what Rav Bender expected but to Rav Schach it was indeed an important mission.

A youngster who learned in Ponevez had a child with Down's Syndrome. For his upsherin, the couple brought the child to Rav Schach for a bracha. Rav Schach gave him candy, but the child refused to accept it. Rav Schach said that

this was a very good sign-that he wanted greater things in life-and he gave beautiful blessings to the young boy.

This meeting made such a deep impression on the child that today, over 16 years later, he still talks about it.

Another woman told a similar story about how a neighbor of hers went with her young child to receive a bracha from Rav Schach on the day of his upsherin. Rav Schach's ahavas habrios was so great that he ran around the house searching for a candy to give to the child and only after he found some almonds did he return to sit with his guests.

Rav Schach's hakaras hatov had more ramifications than a simple thank you.

Ponevez tradition maintained that any bachur who would help build Rav Schach's succah would become engaged within the year. Girls who wanted to become kallos would help decorate the succah and would likewise receive the Rosh Yeshivas bracha to soon build a bayis ne'eman b'yisroel.

## **KIRUV RECHOKIM**

Dr. James David Weiss had been attending Rabbi Berel Wein's classes for a while and though he was not committed to Yiddishkeit in all its aspects, he was truly fascinated by the amazing insights and the spiritual impact that Torah study had made on his life. In fact, although he was a shiur regular and his wife was committed to Torah observance as prescribed by the Shulchan Aruch, the doctor had not yet made the commitment to observe Shabbos. Towards the summer, Dr. Weiss mentioned to Rabbi Wein that shortly he would be visiting Israel. The doctor had heard Rabbi Wein's stories of his experiences accompanying Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, the Ponovezer Rav, on his fund-raising missions in the United States. In many of his lectures, Rabbi Wein had related his close relationship with Rav Kahaneman and Dr. Weiss excitedly told Rabbi Wein that he would soon visit the Ponovez Yeshiva. Dr. Weiss did not know that the Rav

had passed away a decade earlier, so he enthusiastically offered to send Rabbi Wein's regards to the Ponovezher Rav. Not trying to discourage the visit, Rabbi Wein smiled enigmatically and said, "you could try."

Dr. Weiss arrived at the Ponovez Yeshiva and after marveling at the beauty of its gilded Aron Kodesh and nearly 1000 talmidim, he asked a boy to direct him to the Ponovezer Rav. Since the Rav had passed away a decade earlier, they directed him to the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Schach, who was surrounded by many bochurim talking with him in learning. Dr. Weiss waited until the revered gadol looked up and greeted him. Dr. Weiss stuck out his hand and with the remnants of the Yiddish he had salvaged from his youth, he addressed Rav Schach.

"Sholom Aleichem! My name is Dr. Weiss I study with Rabbi Wein and I come from America with regards from him." Rav Schach looked at him quizzically.

"I don't know a Rabbi Wein." "Don't you remember?" asked Dr. Weiss in shock. "Rabbi Berel Wein," he repeated. "He would often drive you when you visited Miami on behalf of the Yeshiva." Rav Schach smiled. "I don't know Rabbi Wein and I have never been to Miami. My name is Schach.

"I think you meant to see Rav Kahanamen, but unfortunately he has passed away."

Rav Schach then looked him in the eye and said, "Uber du, du bist ah yid? He answered "avadah, avadah, gevis." Rav Shach responded with a kind smile and said "Uber gedeinkt der iker zach mit a yid iz tzoo zein shomer shabbos. Doz is der iker zach." Rav Shach then smiled at the good doctor and said "Zulst doo zein ah gebentchter yid."

Dr. Weiss was speechless, "How did he know who I was and where I was holding. Although 93 at the time he had a penetrating intelligence and used it to size me up fearlessly but gently, telling me the truth about myself. I could not

be a Jew without Shabbos.” Dr. Weiss returned home and began keeping Shabbos and all the mitzvos. All because of an encounter with Rav Shach.

Rav Schach once visited one of the great Torah askanim who was ill, recovering from surgery in the Cardiac Care unit of the hospital. The chairman of the department approached Rav Schach and asked to be photographed with him. Rav Schach gladly acquiesced, but used the opportunity to converse with the prestigious professor and bring him closer to Yiddishkeit. Do you have a car, asked the Rosh Yeshiva.

“Certainly,” he responded, “in fact just last week I got rid of last year’s model and upgraded to a new one. It has the latest and most innovative technology! Rav Shach smiled as he held the doctor’s hand. “Tell me, if they were to give you a choice to upgrade your heart from the model created by the Creator since the beginning of creation, would you want to see a different model?

The doctor smiled in the realization that there is nothing that can compare with the handiwork of the Creator.

Rav Mordechai Gifter told the story of how a group of Conservative Jews who he knew from Cleveland, approached him before a trip they were to make to Eretz Yisrael. “Is there anyone you would like us to see or send regards to?” they asked.

“Yes,” Rav Gifter replied. I’d like you to visit a Rabbi Schach in Ponovez Yeshiva.

“What’s his address?” they inquired. Rav Gifter laughed. “You will not need an address.”

A few weeks later they came back to Rav Gifter. “We met your Rabbi,” they said. “What a wonderful man. He truly loves Jews.”

“What makes you say that?” asked Rav Gifter.

“Well we can hardly speak Hebrew or Yiddish and he surely knows no English. But when we mentioned your name, he brought us into his home and greeted us so warmly. Then he took out an apple and cut it into pieces and made a blessing together with us. He seems to be so busy, yet he had time to treat us royally!”

Rav Gifter’s face shone. Then he declared in his inimitable accent. “You think I’m a fanatic. Well according to your leaders, that Rabbi is the head of the fanatics. That Rabbi of whom you just said, ‘must love all types of Jews.’ He’s the one your Conservative Rabbis are railing against!”

The men’s attitude toward lomdei Torah and their Gedolim, was permanently changed.

Rav Schach’s ahavas haTorah transcended time and language. His Ahavas Yisroel likewise was apparent to all who were privileged to bask in the glow of his presence.

## **SUNSET**

During the last years of his life Rav Shach removed himself from the public eye. Tired, and spent after a century of ceaseless yegiah in Torah and mesiras nefesh for the Klal, he remained at home. He made no pronouncements and addressed no rallies but in his last will and testament he left us with a parting message:

“Since a man does not know when his time will come, I said that I should make an accounting with myself about everything that has come to pass, especially all of the hidden things regarding which it is possible to err and to cause others to err, whether for good or evil, to think that this is a mitzvah, when in fact, it is an aveirah. These deeds emanate from negative traits and are the cause of all sorrow. Woe to us from the day of judgment! Woe to us from the day of rebuke! Who can justify himself before You in judgment?”

"Therefore, I request of all the talmidim who know that they benefited from me, whether it be in Torah, or in Yiras Hashem, or in midos, that they be kind towards me and learn for the elevation of my neshama-even one mishna, or mussar thought. This will have made it all worth it, for I, too, dedicated myself completely for the sake of your success in learning and if I will be able to do and to advocate on your behalf, I will do so, bli neder.

"I pray that I will merit to stand before Hakadosh Baruch Hu in a state of teshuvah sheleimah.

"Yours,

"The one who parts from you, with love."

Elozar Menachem Man Schach

## **THE LEVAYA**

Torah Jewry was were overcome with grief as they learned of the passing Thursday night, 16 Cheshvan, of Rav Shach.

On Thursday night Rav Shach, who was already in critical condition, took a turn for the worse. Students in yeshivos throughout the world were asked to daven for his recovery. They responded by organizing Torah-study and tefilla shifts in his merit. Jew everywhere also tearfully recited prayers and Tehillim for his sake.

In Eretz Yisroel, a huge prayer rally was held at the Kosel, with thousands of Jews of all stripes davening that Hashem forestall the petira of the great tzaddik who had guided and steered Klal Yisroel for the last generation.



At 2:40 AM Rav Shach took his last breath. As his soul departed, his family and close students surrounded his bed in the Sheeba Hospital in Tel Hashomer and tearfully recited Shema Yisrael and Hashem Hu HaElokim.

The news of Rav Shach's passing quickly spread to Jewish communities throughout the world. At daybreak, the news reached all of Eretz Yisroel. The Ponovezh Yeshiva and the surrounding streets soon overflowed with people.

Tzetelach notices were posted throughout the country, calling on all Klal Yisroel to feel the pain of this great loss. Transportation was organized in all of the country's main cities and Torah centers, and hundreds of thousands of heartbroken and bereft Jews headed to Bnei Brak to accompany the gadol hador to his final resting place in the Netzivei Ponovezh cemetery.

Two hours after the petira, Rav Shach's mitah was brought into Ponovezh's heichal. His students tore kriya over their beloved mentor, who had taught in Ponovezh for over 50 years. The mitah was then placed on the bima, which was surrounded by yahrtzeit candles. Thousands of students, who had stood on their feet the entire night reciting Tehillim, sobbed bitterly.

As the time of the levaya approached, all the streets and paths leading to the yeshiva's heichal overflowed with mourners. Hundreds of buses brought tens of thousands of people from all over the country to Bnei Brak. All of the country's gedolim, poskim, roshei yeshiva, rabbanim, admorim and dayanim came to pay their final respects to the gadol hador. Bnei Brak was closed for many hours prior to the levaya, and the city's batei din ruled that no work could be done during the actual time of the levaya. An hour before the beginning of the procession, the mourners in the yeshiva's heichal began to recite Tehillim, while the throng that filled the area responded verse by verse.

The levaya began at 10:00 AM with a recitation of Tehillim, led by Rav Tzvi Eisenstein, Rosh Yeshivas Tiferes Tzion. This was followed by a resounding recitation of the Yud Gimmel Middos, Selichos, Ezkera Elokim, Shema Koleinu

and Hashem Melech. For nearly half an hour, heartrending cries pierced the air and resounded in the nearby streets. All Bnei Brak seemed to be at a standstill. Over 500,000 Jews wept the loss of the gadol hador and bemoaned the great void left in the world as the result of his petira tzaddik. Tears of a generation that had lost its glory, its grandeur and its splendor flowed like water.

After the recitation of Tehillim, Rav Chananya Chollak announced that, in accordance with Rav Shach's tzava'ah, no hespedim would be delivered. Rav Shach's son-in-law, Rav Meir Tzvi Bergman, spoke of his sorrow at the Rosh Yeshiva's passing.

In his stirring address, Rav Bergman described Rav Shach's greatness and cried, "Yesomim hayinu v'ein av," "We are orphans and we have no father."

"We have lost the gadol hador," said Rav Bergman. "We lack the tools with which to assess his greatness, such hasmada in Torah, such as his yegia, which transcended all natural bounds, such as integrity, such as lofty character traits.

"We have lost our rebbi, who was the student of the gedolim of the previous generation: the Chofetz Chaim, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, the Brisker Rav and the Chazon Ish. We have lost the most upright of men, one who scrutinized every one of his deeds. We have lost Rabbeinu Hagadol, who could truly lift his hands to Shamayim and testify that he never derived even the slightest amount of pleasure from this world."

Rav Bergman concluded by reading parts of Rav Shach's tzava'ah. During the reading, anguished cries were heard throughout the yeshiva's heichal. In the will, Rav Shach conducts a scathing cheshbon hanefesh.

"Since no man knows when his final day on earth will transpire," the tzava'ah begins, "I have decided to make a cheshbon hanefesh-to review my past, and to scrutinize every detail and every one of my deeds that might be interpreted

as mitzvos, but are really aveiros. Woe to us from Yom Hadin. Woe to us from the Day of Rebuke. Who will be considered upright before You in the din?

"I also ask that those students who know that they benefited from me in Torah, yiras Hashem or in middos do a chessed for my neshama and study at least one mishna or one mussar thought a day for my sake. That will be my reward, for I was also moser nefesh for the sake of your success in Torah study. Similarly, if I am able to intercede in Shamayim on your behalf, I will do so, bli neder."

Rav Shach closes his will, saying, "I pray that I will merit to stand before Hakodosh Boruch Hu after having done teshuva shelaima. I part from you with love."

Rav Bergman also noted those who loyally served Rav Shach in recent years, among them Rav Yechezkel Eschayek and Rav Shach's grandson, Rav Chaim Bergman.

Rav Bergman then asked that Rav Shach be a meilitz yosher on behalf of the Torah world and the entire Jewish Nation.

Following Rav Bergman's emotional words, Rav Shach's son, Reb Ephraim Azriel, recited Kaddish. The levaya then proceeded through Vilkomirrer, Saadya Gaon, Rav Dessler and Chazon Ish streets until reaching the Netzivei Ponovezh cemetery.

The procession moved slowly and the massive throng refused to leave the yeshiva's hill, in its desire to come close to Rav Shach's mitah. His many students didn't want to part with him and clung to his mitah in the bais medrash, refusing to believe that Rav Shach was leaving the yeshiva where he had learned and taught Torah for 50 years.

Finally, after the ushers pleaded with the throng to make way so that the mitah could be taken out of the bais medrash, the mourners moved aside. The

procession left the yeshiva at 11:30 a.m. It was headed by Rav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, the members of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah, hundreds of roshei yeshiva, marbitzei Torah, dayanim, morei hora'a, admorim, rabbanim and talmidim.

Talmud Torah children stood alongside their rebbeim. Thousands of women who had left their Shabbos preparations and tens of thousands of Bais Yaakov students also gathered in special sections.

Prior to the levaya, hundreds of policemen had been deployed throughout the city and had closed its entrances to traffic so that the entourage would not be disturbed. Police helicopters also flew above the procession, making valiant efforts to maintain order and to direct traffic in the main arteries.

The massive stream of mourners reminded many of the words of Amos, "In all the streets there is mourning." At a certain point, due to the ongestion, the bier could no longer be carried and was transferred to an ambulance that was followed by the throng until the cemetery.

The procession moved slowly along Chazon Ish Street, and many preceded the throng to the cemetery. The cries and wails could be heard nearby.

Rav Shach was buried in a special plot purchased by his son-in-law. Beside the grave, his son, Reb Ephraim, delivered stirring words of parting.

## **NISHBAH ARON HAKODESH**

"The angels and the tzaddikim of our generation were wrangling over the Aron Kodesh. Both wanted the Sefer Torah to remain with them." The malochim wanted the tzaddik's holy body to remain with them, while the tzaddikim on this world wanted the tzaddik to live amongst man.

The Aron Kodesh alludes to the holy body of the Tzaddik Hador, which contains the Sefer Torah, his pure neshomoh. His brilliant mind, encompassing the entire Torah, which was written "Black fire on white fire," burned within. This was the mesorah from Har Sinai until today.

This is the fire which was transmitted from one dor to the next, from one Torah giant to the succeeding generation. Yet we did not merit to keep this flame. Over the past few years, the pure flame flickered, preparing to return to its source. The neshomoh of the gaon hador wanted to depart from this world and join the giants of Klal Yisroel in the Olam HaEmes.

The gemara says, "The upper and lower worlds both wanted Rebbe Yehuda Hanasi to join them." The meforshim explain, "The nefesh of man desires to join its source. All man's inner kochos accompany him. Yet the talmidei chachomim on this world want the tzaddik and his Torah to remain with them."

Talmidei Chachomim, Marbitzei Torah, Roshei Yeshivos, were all mispalel, sensing that the holy Sefer Torah which illuminated the world, was about to depart. They yearned to have the tzaddik remain in this world. Tehillim was said, prayers at Kivrei Tzaddikim, combined with the tefillos of pure young children. All davened, "let the lower worlds triumph over the upper worlds." Yet the godol hador was taken from us.

The children's tefillos of "Yomim al yemei melech tosif," reverberated to the Shaarei Shomayim. "Ribono Shel Olam, leave the tzaddik with us. We cannot bear to part with him."

He was the ship's captain of Klal Yisroel, the sailor who guided the ship through the stormy seas. Children and yeshiva students across the world were mispalel, crying "Ribono Shel Olam, give the tzaddik additional years. Although we cannot benefit from his Torah, his kedusha still illuminates the world. When the tzaddik is in the city, his presence brings forth light and joy. Hu hodoh, hu zivoh, hu hadorohÉ"

As the Chovos Halvovos in Shaar Haprishus explains, "There are only a handful Gedolei Hador who guide the Torah world, who function as the role models and advisors. They are compared to the sun whose radiance illuminates the world. As the possuk says, 'v'nososi l'chol hamokom baavorum,' Hashem will forgive the entire city in the merit of the tzaddikim."

Dovid Hamelech says in Tehillim, "Lulei Moshe BechiroÉ" If not for the merit of Moshe Rabenu, "the world would have been destroyed." A tzaddik hador protects the world from Hakodosh Boruch Hu's wrath.

Klal Yisroel did not want to believe that the gaon hador, who raised thousands of talmidim, has passed away. He built the koach haTorah v'hakedusha throughout the world. Sadly, the malochim won the struggle. He was niftar on Erev Shabbos of the parsha where Hakodosh Boruch Hu assures Avrohom Avinu, "ki yodativ l'maan asher yitzaveh es baiso v'es bonov acharov v'shumru derech Hashem."

The Gemara says in Sotah, "Ruach Hakodesh calls out, 'mi yokum li im mirayim, mi yisyatzev li im poeli oven?'"

Who shall remain behind? Who can compare to him, to his k'vod haTorah? We are left orphaned and bereft.

He was a giant amongst giants, who encompassed three doros of talmidei chachomim. He fought against every change to the mesorah. He was steadfast in maintaining every minhag of the previous generations.

### **Shomer Hagecheles Haneeman-Keeper of the Flame**

The Gemara Rosh Hashonoh teaches, "In the days of old, when rosh chodesh was declared, a representative of Bais Din would go up on the mountaintop and light a torch. Whoever would see the flame would light their own flame, until the entire Eretz Yisroel was lit up by hundreds of fires."

Maran Zt'l was the shomer hagacheles, the giant who was left from the previous generation of giants, spent his life lighting the fires, fanning the sparks within us. He lit the fire that was dormant within our hearts, the fire of mesores avoseinu, the mesorah of "maatikei hashmuah," the gaonim of the previous generation; the Chofetz Chaim, the Brisker Rav. With holiness and trepidation he stood guard over every minhag, every spark of the mesorah.

He was ever vigilant, ready to guard against a breach of the age-old chinuch habonim v'habanos, limud haTorah, and every facet of Jewish life. He felt that he was appointed min hashomayim to be the roeh neemon. "Shomrim Hafkeid l'ircho kol hayom v'chol halaylo." "

All the Roshei Yeshiva and mechanchim who came to consult with him were told: do not move away from darkei avoseinu. Every drasha and public appearance had the same message: Let us keep the mesorah alive. Until the entire golah was lit up by a powerful light. Every single Jewish community was afraid to break away, to change anything, due to the influence of Maran Rosh HaYeshiva. This fire is transmitted from father to son, along with the aimah and yirah that characterized Maran Zt'l.

"Al Tigoo B'mishichai, Eileh Tinokos Shel Bais Rabon." Limud HaTorah, the age-old derech of transmitting Torah from generation to generation, may not be changed by a hairsbreadth.

There were no p'sharos, no halfway measures. Torah with purity, like the pach shemen of Chanukah, the pure cruse of oil which remained. Toras emes, without any foreign strain. He kept the pikodon entrusted to him, returning it in the same condition. He raised a mighty army-thousands upon thousands of Bnei Torah who carry the "aish tomid tukad al hamizbeach." Bnei Torah who will continue to carry the same mesiras nefesh to derech avoseinu.

The hundreds of thousands who followed the Aron Kodesh, crying bitter tears "al shelokach aron Elokim" cried "Ovi, ovi, revev Yisroel uporosh." We are all

orphans, having lost our father, our role model, the general who fought against those who wished to infiltrate our camps.

We were all mekabel to follow in his footsteps, to be mechanech our children with the 'charodas kodesh,' the sincere thirsting for Torah, and mesiras nefesh for Yiddishkeit.

We repeat the words of Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer Zt'l, who wrote to Rav Meir Karelitz Zt"l when he sat shivah for his brother the Chazon Ish. Rav Isser Zalman wrote, "Due to my failing health I was unable to be melave your dear brother the gaon Yisroel to his final rest. The hefsed that we all have lost with his petirah is 'ayn l'shaar v'ain l'haarich,' it cannot be described in mere words."

And he comforts himself with these words, "Our only hope is to Hashem, that in the zechus of this great neshomoh, let us merit the geulah sheleimah. May we see him again in the World of Truth." (Sefer P'ninei Chein.)

This is our tefilah and hope, that the zechus of the 'lochem milchemes Hashem' who was constantly concerned with Klal Yisroel, will not rest in the Olam Hoelyon, rather be 'maarish olamos' on our behalf. In his zechus, may we merit the geulah sheleimah without the tzoros of chevlei Moshiach. "*Mi Sheomar l'olomo dai, yomar l'tzorosainu dai.*"

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