



RABBI MOSHE YANOFSKY *zt"l*

BY MRS. TSIVIA YANOFSKY

My father-in-law, Rabbi Moshe Yanofsky *zt"l*, the larger-than-life personality and longtime principal and educator, was *niftar* this past Thursday, 15 *Kislev*. Astonishingly, he reached the status of “*gevuros*” — he was 80 years old. Astounding, if one contemplates the myriad illnesses that ravaged his body, some of which he battled for decades.

Rabbi Yanofsky, who began his career at the age of 25 as girls’ principal of Bais Yaakov at the behest of Rebbetzin Kaplan, and concluded his glorious career upon retirement at the age of 68, was a rare breed of educator. As his student, I had the unique vantage point of observing him in the classroom, the arena he dominated with wit, skill, and genuine devotion for his thousands of *talmidos*. Although math was not my forte, I was irresistibly drawn to his calculus class. Exposed to his creativity and pedagogical genius, a seed was planted in fertile soil — teaching is a joy and a pleasure to be savored.

Although since his passing many of the accolades that are pouring in refer to him as a humble giant, towering personality, quintessential *baal chesed*, and legendary principal, I believe that the title “teacher” resonated with him the most.

Born in Brownsville, Brooklyn, to Chaim Tzvi and Miriam Yanofsky, he and his sister Chani were referred to as miracle children, as their mother was older. His birth was truly both a miracle and a blessing for the thousands of people whose lives he impacted. Prophetically, his parents called him Moshe, perhaps sensing that he would shoulder the responsibility for his brethren selflessly and with trademark humility.

His beginnings were humble — his father was a simple tailor, barely able to eke out a living. He spent a short time in pub-

lic school, until the benevolent Alex Fruchthandler fortuitously sponsored his education at Yeshiva Chaim Berlin. Fortuitously,

that is, for generations of *bnos Yisroel*. Later on, he became a *talmid muvhak* of Rav Yaakov Moshe Shirkin, insisting on remaining

in his *shiur* for three consecutive years. How his eyes would gleam when recounting those magical years in Rav Shirkin’s *shiur*! Many a time, he confided in me that he incorporated his *rebbe*’s methodologies in his own classroom. His *rebbe*’s passion enkindled him for a lifetime of *chinuch*. He also merited developing a close relationship with the *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Yitzchok Hutner. “Rav Moshe is a *pikeyach*” — an apt description from Rav Hutner that was relished for a lifetime and oft repeated by family members.

As a teenager, he spent his summers at Zucker’s hotel, in an effort to supplement his parents’ meager funds. He spent the next six decades waxing eloquent about these summers, nostalgically recalling the interactions he enjoyed with Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Leizer Silver, Rav Tuvia Goldstein, Rav Avigdor Miller, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, and Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman. He considered this a most coveted and honored position, serving the *gedolim* of yesteryear. He would regale children, grandchildren, and students with anecdotes that spoke volumes about his *kavod rabbonon*. His narratives were laced with respect and sprinkled with good humor and human interest.

At the age of 21, he married his life’s companion and partner, Sharon Sinensky. Rabbi Sinensky, a *talmid* of Rav Shabsi Yogel and a celebrated *lamdan*, saw extraordinary strengths and abilities in the engaging and determined young man. Throughout his life, my father-in-law would acknowledge that marrying his wife was the best decision he had ever made. Together, they embarked on a life’s odyssey that would span decades and enrich countless lives.

As a relatively young man, my father-



in-law, a brilliant mathematician, was offered several lucrative positions which he declined, a decision that greatly affected the landscape of *chinuch habonos* in America. At the age of 23, he began teaching Bais Yaakov students and subsequently became a youthful college professor at Kingsborough, so that he would not have to tax the Bais Yaakov for a more substantial salary. He would juggle both of these positions for many years, a veritable powerhouse of an educator.

After many years of working closely with Rabbi and Rebbetzin Kaplan in Bais Yaakov, in 1986 he decided to open his own high school. His mission statement was to create a grand edifice where each student would emerge a star and where all talents and aptitudes would be cultivated. With his characteristic humility, he elected to take a partner the legendary Rabbi Yehuda Oelbaum. Machon Bais Yaakov pulsated with Mr. Yanofsky's (he shrugged off the "rabbi" title) heart, which throbbed with *ahavas Yisroel*. Students fondly recall their principal on *Shabbatons*, manning the kitchen and encouraging his students to join in the cooking. His intention was to provide them with a *Shabbaton* experience that would linger for all the *Shabbosos* of their lives.

His wife, a force to be reckoned with in her own right, was always at his side, staunchly supporting his every endeavor. Certainly, those years of building required forbearance on the part of my mother-in-law, as he would go to such drastic extremes as to mortgage his own home in establishing his fledgling school.

A major component of Mr. Yanofsky's version of *chinuch habonos* was the magic of the *Shabbaton*, a phenomenon that literally transformed a generation of high school students. Penina Horowitz, a graduate of 2002, related at the *shivah* house that she recently shared photos of a Machon *Shabbaton* with her children, connecting them to a halcyon time in her life. She had looked forward all year to the *Shabbaton*, and it added a tremendous dimension to her school experience. "We just loved the *Shabbaton*, and I still remember Mr. Yanofsky when he underscored the power of *Racheim in Birkas Hamazon*. Every time I *bentch*, I see his face in my mind. This past *Shabbos*, I looked through my yearbook, and characteristically, there were no photos of this master *mechanech*. We loved him and felt so connected to him all the years."

Years ago, my father-in-law sent his young wife, accompanied by the children, to Camp Morris, to set up for the *Shabbaton*. Following her husband's directives, she went to a nearby farm to purchase three cases of eggs with 36 dozen per case. When she arrived at Camp Morris, she entered the kitchen, determined to soft-boil some eggs for her hungry brood. The eggs refused to allow themselves to be peeled, and aghast at the thought of three cases of difficult eggs, she called the farmer. The farmer duly informed her that the eggs were fresh — only aged eggs were peel-worthy — and he advised her to lay the eggs out in the sun where they would age appropriately. Students clambering off the bus that Friday were



Speaking at a Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin function. Rav Aharon Schechter is at right.



With Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel.



With his son, Rav Eliyohu Yanofsky.

greeted with the sight of hundreds of eggs lying in the sun. Such was the devotion of my beloved mother-in-law. The subsequent lesson that was shared by her proud husband would inform generations of students about the power of a wife's dedication to her husband's ideals.

As Rav Aharon Kahn mentioned at the *levayah*, a central theme of Rabbi Yanofsky's life was *achrayus* — responsibility. As a principal, he keenly felt responsible for his faculty, providing them with subsidized foodstuffs before *Pesach* and refusing to take a paycheck before ensuring their remuneration. His legendary commitment to his students was not confined to their four years under his tutelage. A successful matchmaker, he and his wife were responsible for over 100 *shidduchim*, a staggering amount for any individual, let alone a busy principal. This incredible feat was a byproduct of his persistence and the ambition he had for his students. His efforts were blessed with a hefty dose of *siyatta dishmaya*.

In today's climate of *shidduch* incentivization, it is difficult to fathom a principal who encouraged his students to give him token acknowledgment and save their money for their own needs. His pride and joy in their accomplishments were akin to the feelings of a parent. For many years to come, he would provide wise counsel and support, carrying them in his heart. And throughout the years, as he invested herculean efforts, his wife stood faithfully at his side, raising her children. "Mr." Yanofsky took a meager salary from the school, yet devoted his life and energies to develop rich and enduring educational models for *chinuch*.

The Yanofsky family fulfilled the dictum of *Chazal* that one's home be widely open to the public. The spectrum of their guest list spanned luminaries such as Rav Aharon Chodosh who was hosted in their home with his *rebbetzin* whenever he came to America, as well as the downtrodden and most needy members of the community.

I vividly recall my sister-in-law's wedding day. The saintly Ribnitzer Rebbe would be arriving, in fulfillment of a promise made many years before. As the van (with the *rebbe*) approached, eager family members stood in line, clamoring for an opportunity to see the *rebbe*. My father-in-law intervened and firmly insisted that a disabled student stand first in line.

Chagrined but proud, we understood the implication: All his students were his daughters. His home was a haven for students and their families who experienced *shalom bayis*, financial, or health difficulties. A student whose sibling died in the middle of the night called Mr. Yanofsky. "I was unsure whom to call, and Mr. Yanofsky's face rose unbidden. I felt that he could deal with the difficult situation. I called him and without hesitation he came over to help us."

He had no sense of privacy or entitlement. He forswore vacations and never stopped to smell the roses, erecting a Taj Mahal of *chesed*, an outgrowth of 80 years of building and accomplishment. The many hours, days, weeks, months, and years of his life that he devoted to the *klal* bore eloquent testimony to his love for his fellow Jew and his huge

capacity for giving. The modalities included *Shabbatons*, fundraising, classes, personally serving lunch in the school's cafeteria, *shidduchim*, counsel, providing wardrobes for needy students and brides, supporting faculty members, and so much more, but the underlying principles remained constant: love them and care for their needs.

An alumna who today is a well-respected literature teacher vividly recalls that one day, a generally law-abiding student walked into school with sneakers, in contravention of school rules. Discerning that this particular young lady must be violating school rules for a reason, he gently inquired. She ruefully confessed that she had worn out her shoes and could not afford another pair. Before long, she walked out of his office, gratefully clutching an envelope with an ample sum of money to purchase shoes and other wardrobe staples — “Mr. Yanofsky saw beyond the sole to the soul.”

The last few years were difficult. Wan, enfeebled, and battle-scarred from surgery, he would often look at me pleadingly and say, “Tsvivie, you remember the real me.”

Rabbi Moshe Yanofsky is survived by his devoted wife and helpmate, Mrs. Sharon Yanofsky, and his children, Rabbi Shimon Yanofsky, Dr. Noson Yanofsky, Rabbi Meir Leib Yanofsky, and Mrs. Golda Baila Feigenbaum. He was tragically predeceased by his eldest son, Rav Eliyohu Yanofsky, a brilliant *talmid chochom* and *menahel* and a giant in his own right, who was the acknowledged leader of the Yanofsky clan. Rabbi Moshe mourned the death of his son until the day he died, although nary a word of complaint left his lips.

Today, I am a principal, and while my panoply of exposures over the years includes many esteemed *mechanchim* and *mechanchos*, my lighthouse is “Mr. Yanofsky.” It is his unwavering belief and optimism in the power of *chinuch* and students that animates my career and informs many of my decisions.

Above all, it is his expansive heart that continues to beat in countless numbers of *mechanchos* that dot the landscape of our nation. Our best expression of gratitude is living up to the ideals of *chinuch* and pure *chesed* that he embodied. In an era that touts faculty and student empowerment, we can look back fondly to a consummate educator that believed in all of us, teachers and students. With good cheer and zest for living, he encouraged us and prodded us to become our best selves.

Recently, Blimi Frank, a former Machon student, reached out to her fellow alumnae and requested of them to send her their memorable reflections of a principal who lingered on in their minds and in their hearts. They heard that Mr. Yanofsky was hospitalized and they were hoping that these communications would restore the familiar smile to the beloved face. I spoke with Blimi during *shivah* and she shared the following: “It was absolutely worth the effort. When I connected with Mrs. Yanofsky, she invited me to visit her husband. I was the last student, parent, and teacher (a unique fusion and status) to enjoy a visit with an iconic educator, our Mr. Yanofsky. I will treasure

that experience for a lifetime.”

To quote but a few of the excerpts:

“You taught us that if you have self-respect, you will be respected by all. You

our *Yiddishkeit* and worldview tremendously. Only now that I am a school leader myself do I recognize that he spoke the language of truth with courage, clarity, and

not sure if anyone else in my 1996 alumni class remembers this incident, but I went on to become a high school IT instructor, web developer, project manager and currently a data engineer and lead analyst at Credit Suisse. It is because of you, who provided Machon girls with the possibility of a career in computer science, that I am where I am today — still enjoying a career in data analytics and programming. I’m extremely grateful to you, and I tell this story to young and old alike about my favorite principal, Mr. Yanofsky.” (*Aviva Klugmann Spitzer*)

“Here is a very abridged update on my life, and hopefully a *nachas* report: *Boruch Hashem*, I am *zoche* to be a full-time mommy. The experience I had in the Machon play helped develop my musical abilities, and I write lyrics for different *frum* composers (mainly Boruch Levine and Simcha Leiner) and for different organizations and institutions (the Mir, Yeshivas Darchei Torah in Far Rockaway, Cleveland Bikur Cholim, etc.). I try to use my ability to inspire people and bring *nachas* to Hashem. I wrote a song for Rabbi Dovid Newman’s V’haarev Na program, which was viewed over 1.7 million times and has helped expand his incredible Gemara program throughout the world. Any of my *zechusim* and my children’s *zechusim* are YOUR *zechusim*, Mr. Yanofsky. I hope that all of this brings you tremendous *nachas*.” (*Ruchie Torgow, 2000*)

“You are in the hearts, minds, and prayers of your dear Machon alumni. There are thousands of us, but only one Mr. Yanofsky whom we always speak of with a smile.” (*Dassy Waldman, 2007*)

“My name is now Mrs. Streicher and my daughter attends Manhattan High School for Girls, so I feel like I’m back with the Yanofskys! Mr. Yanofsky, your smile is something that greeted me every day for four years of high school! You were the voice of reason at Bais Yaakov, always so practical, so warm and loving, and always with the best jokes!” (*Devoiry Pollack Streicher, GO president, 1985*)

“He said what needed to be said, chastising us when necessary; but we always knew in our heart of hearts that he loved us.” (*A grateful alumna*)

“Mrs. Yanofsky, thank you for being the amazing *eizer kenegdo* to our special principal and allowing him to be there for us.” (*Batsheva Flagler*)

I thank you, Batsheva. I must confess that this was my favorite submission. As a former student and daughter-in-law, I can bear eloquent testimony that this expression of gratitude is richly deserved.

A grandchild shared a very telling story with me, that I feel encapsulates the sentiments of many of his former *talmidos*, hailing back to the Bais Yaakov days and reaching to the present. Amid the hustle and bustle of *Purim*, back in the day, when Mr. Yanofsky was principal at Machon, one visitor turned to the grandchild and said, “You don’t know me, but your grandfather saved my life. I can never repay him.”

I echo that sentiment, as do thousands of other *talmidos*.

Yehi zichro boruch.



With Rav Dovid Schustal.



With Rav Yisroel Neuman.

treated us like adults, when we were in fact shy, insecure adolescents. And for those who didn’t have self-respect, you tried so hard to give them something about which to respect themselves. I always made sure to be prepared for your classes, mostly because I loved what and how you taught, and the fantastic energy with which you taught it.

“In 2011, with a family of six children, I graduated as an RN from Ocean County College. Since then, I have been working in the field of Clinical Reimbursement in Skilled Nursing Facilities. Remember, I always loved my numbers! The *Ribono Shel Olam* has a job for everyone, and for me the synthesis of my nursing knowledge and my love of math allows me to feel productive daily. You would *shep nachas* from my ‘aha’ moments! *Boruch Hashem*, today I oversee 15 high-level RNs in eight nursing homes and continue to crunch my numbers every day.”

“Despite the fact that Mr. Yanofsky was our General Studies Principal, he influenced

warmth. Perhaps that is why he succeeded in making such a lasting impact on me. Mr. Yanofsky, you held us to very high standards and we greatly desired to meet your expectations for dignity and refinement.” (*Estee Friedman-Stefansky, 1994*)

“I also really appreciated the way you went to bat for your students, always trying to *redt shidduchim* well after we graduated. I was dating someone for a while, probably at least five years after graduating, and Mr. Yanofsky heard that I was dumped, with no warning. I remember my mother speaking with Mr. Yanofsky and his fury and his assurance that he wouldn’t let that guy go out with any more of ‘his girls’ ever again — he wouldn’t let a guy treat us like that!” (*Michal*)

“It was either 1994 or 1995, and we were in Mrs. Fleisher’s computer class. Most of the class was goofing around. You walked in, and I don’t recall everything you said but one phrase stuck. You said with such gusto, ‘Computers are the wave of the future!’ I’m

