

Rav Eliyahu Yanofsky zt"l

Divrei hesped delivered by Rav Elimelech Mitnick at Bais Medrash Govoah

Lakewood and the entire Torah world suffered a crushing blow with the *petirah* of Rav Eliyahu Yanofsky zt"l. While there are many words that can be used to describe Rav Eliyahu, there is no better way to understand him than by using his very own words, the words he used in the *hakdamah* of his *sefer*, which he wrote four years ago. While his *sefer* gives us a glimpse into his *ameilus baTorah*, which gave him his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah, the *hakdamah* provides a look into his *derhoibener neshamah*.

He begins with a note of *hakoras hatov* to his parents, starting with his father, Rabbi Moshe Yanofsky, longtime principal of Machon Bais Yaakov High School in Brooklyn. Reb Moshe is what *Chazal* describe in *Yoma* as a walking *kiddush Hashem* - someone, they tell us, who *sheim shomayim misahev al yado*, who brings people to *ahavas Hashem*, both as a master *mechanech* and through his actions and deeds.

The *Gemara* says. “*Ashrei aviv shelomdo Torah.*” Rabbeinu Yonah has another *girsas*: “*Ashrei imo shelomduhu Torah.*” Rav Eliyahu learned from both of them. From his father he learned how to learn, how not to rely on the incredible gifts Hashem gave him, and to constantly strive for the truth. From his mother he gleaned a quiet but resolute sense of *emunah*, an unyielding *simchas hachaim*, and incredible fealty to *gedolim*.

Rav Eliyahu, upon hearing from the doctors that they gave up all hope, could only react in one way. He told me, “You see where I’m holding in the world. I don’t have a long time. Go speak to Rav Chaim Kanievsky and ask him what to do.” That’s all. I went, and Rav Chaim told us that no matter what the situation was, we should *daven*. And that’s exactly what we did.

He goes on to thank his wife, who stood at his side for 30 years. He calls her his right hand— that she dedicated her life to do the *ratzon Hashem*. And what is that? He explains what it is: “that I should be able to sit and learn without any hindrances,” showing his incredible *chashivus* for *limud haTorah*.

His wife didn’t leave any stone unturned. She followed up every avenue, and we were witness that she did every possible *hishtadlus* that was within her power to do. As a true right hand, she emulated her husband in that way, doing whatever was possible when circumstances called for it.

With Rav Chaim’s *p’sak*, and with Rav Aryeh Malkiel Kotler’s direction, the name Refoel was added. But *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* had a different plan. As Esther Hamalkah exclaimed, “*Rachok m’yeshuasi divrei shaagosi* - Your salvation is very far from my cries.” And the more *tefillos* that were *davened* for Rav Eliyahu, the further away the *yeshuah* seemed to be. His health got worse and worse. The answer to that question lies just two *pesukim* later: “*V’Atah kadosh yosheiv tehillos Yisroel – Hakadosh Boruch Hu is kevayachol sitting on the tefillos.*”

Hashem took all the thousands of hours of heartfelt *davening*, the untold amount of extra *sedorim* that were begun in his *zechus*, and, together with Rav Eliyahu's *neshamah*, He brought them right up to Him, right by the *Kisei Hakavod* itself. They are *kadosh*, a *korban* that remains by Hashem.

Rav Eliyahu was truly an *olah temimah*. His sickness ravaged his body, slowly robbing him of physical *chein*, his *komah*, and soon his *bosor*, *giddin v'atzamos*. And, through it all, he was *mekadeish sheim Shomayim*, never stopping from learning Torah. *Sheim Shomayim misahev al yado*. He made an impression on people that had an indelible impact.

Rav Eliyahu wouldn't second guess whether or not he could have done more. When he got the news, his only focus was to ask the *gedolim* what to do. Because, through it all, he must have recognized that he was this *korban*, and having improper *machshavos* is something that makes a *korban posul*. We, too, must not have these pernicious *hirhurim*, wondering if we could have done something ourselves to forestall this *gezeirah*. *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* wanted Rav Eliyahu, a developed yet unblemished *neshamah*, as a *korban* for the rest of us.

The amount of work he put in to *chinuch* was remarkable. His children are able *mamshichim* of his ways. Every *Shabbos*, after *davening* at Bais Medrash Govoah's Bais Shalom Bais Medrash, where he served as *gabbai*, he would sit and learn with his son. Over the years, when he was ill, he put even more work into making sure that his son Yechezkel Baruch was ready to carry on taking care of his *mishpacha* after he was gone.

Chazal tell us that a person's essence is revealed through three mediums: "*bekiso, bekaaso, ubekoso* – in how he deals with money, how he acts when angry, and how he acts when inebriated."

I was brought up together with Rav Eliyahu. I remember his parents' home. It was a simple home where every dollar spent was accounted for. People who are brought up that way tend to have a certain sort of mindset when it comes to money. But not Rav Eliyahu. After his marriage, he was able to do things differently. So he began by taking small steps to break out of what he was used to, and to use his circumstances for other people's benefit. He set up a ladder that was *mutzav artza* – he was a realist, always grounded, but by taking one rung at a time - *verosho magia hashomaymah*, and he made it all the way to the top.

He wasn't busy with *gashmiyus*. The house he created was a simple one, and the life he lived was a simple one. The way he dealt with money for his family and his children was without being *medakdeik*. But that did not suffice for other people. With them he became a *malveh*, a *mechanen*, and a *meitiv*, always looking to give.

The *Gemara* in *Maseches Bava Basra* (11) tells us that Munbaz Hamelech gave away all his storehouses of gold and silver to others. His family came down to make some sense of what he was doing, of his not being *medakdeik* with the family finances. They told him that he was mismanaging his money and wasn't *achra'i*. They told him, "A family as wealthy as ours is supposed to be trying to amass more wealth, not give it away!"

He told them, “I am amassing wealth, but not for this world. For the next one!”

Rav Eliyahu was the same exact way. Any *yungeman* who was sitting and learning knew that he didn't have to worry about the cost of seminary for his daughters, because Rav Eliyahu wouldn't be *medakdeik* on the tuition. His love for others transcended money as well. He began to make *shidduchim* because that was another way to help people.

Once, he was involved in a *shidduch*, matching up two people who had very serious medical issues. As the *shidduch* played itself out, everyone involved recognized that to get the couple married, it would cost upwards of \$100,000. The people he approached refused to give him money. They felt that it was like throwing money away, and besides, they said, who said you even have to make the *shidduch*? It reached a point where the *shidduch* was about to be broken due to lack of funds. Rav Eliyahu, who was just a *yungeman*, opened up his personal bank account and loaned great amounts of money for those expenses. He understood that if people would see that he, a *yungerman*, does it, those who are more well off will feel somewhat obligated to pitch in and help out. That is exactly what happened, and today, because of him and him alone, there is a wonderful large family.

That was who Rav Eliyahu was, and that is what we must continue to perpetuate. The giving, the kindness, the *ibergegebenkeit* all came from the same source. He was a man who lived a life of *derhoibenkeit*, of service to Hashem and Him alone, without any other calculation.

Yehi zichro boruch.