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Rav Eliyahu Yanofsky ז"ל - A
Living Example of ShleimusBy **Rabbi Yossi Rosenberg** - Mar 14, 2018

We live in an age of ever-increasing polarization and extremes. Groups with different opinions or ways of doing things look more and more at other groups as enemies or evil, rather than simply as people with another opinion or way of life. People involved in communal affairs or organized *chesed* are often looked upon as not having been successful in the world of Torah learning, while many steeped in learning seem to feel that getting too involved in the broader *tzibbur* will inevitably take them away from their learning.

Just as the professional and medical worlds have evolved into specialists and sub-specialties, so too, it seems, have we become a community of individual – and seemingly exclusive – specialties. Yes, we have *maggidei shiur*, *shadchonim*, counselors, *mechanchim*, *askonim*, *poskim*, *baalei mussar*, those versed in *machshavah*, *baalei tzedakah* and so much more. Everyone seems to have his particular niche, his specific area of expertise and excellence.

All of this is good, but what about an *adam hashholeim*, a person who could not be described by any *one* particular area of strength, but rather as someone who does *whatever* Hashem expects of him at the moment? Such a person would be almost impossible to imagine – had I not known Rav Eliyahu Yanofsky ז"ל, an unassuming, yet unforgettable, personality who lived just a block away from this writer.



Reaching For Eternity

Mar 14, 2018

The Lakewood community – and its *bnei hayeshiva* especially – was dealt a numbing blow this week with the *petirah* of this prince amongst us. Rav Eliyahu was a multi-faceted person whose life encapsulated far more than this writer can ever hope to even touch upon. He was first and foremost a *ben Torah*, a *talmid chochom* who was fluent in virtually any *sugya* or area of learning one might wish to discuss with him. He was also a master *mechanech*, an accomplished *shadchan*, a *baal tzedakah*, a *baal chesed* and a *baal eitzah* whom thousands turned to over the course of his too-short life.

A son of Rabbi and Mrs. Moshe and Tzivia Yanofsky, Eliyahu attended the Karlin-Stolin elementary *cheder* in Boro Park, Brooklyn, after which he went on to Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin for *mesivta*. The truth, however, is that Rav Eliyahu did a lot more than simply “attend” these *yeshivos*. They became a part of him. As became his manner for the rest of his life, any person, *rebbe* or *yeshiva* from whom he was *mekabel* became a part of his very essence.

Not surprisingly, then, he kept up with his *rabbeim* and *menahalim*, even from his youngest years, into his adulthood and beyond. Anything he learned, he *lived* with, and how can one forget his *hakoras hatov* to someone whose lessons you live with until this very day? As Rav Eliyahu’s brother mentioned at the *levayah*, it was only natural for Rav Eliyahu to ask Rav Pilchik ז”ל, his elementary school *menahel*, to be the *sandek* at his own son’s *bris*. And of course the *bris* was held in Brooklyn so that Rav Pilchik would not have to travel and be in any way inconvenienced.

When Eliyahu just turned sixteen, Rav Yitzchok Hutner ז”ל had already been living in Eretz Yisroel, but had come back to the United States for *Pesach*. Eliyahu’s *rebbe* took him, along with 5 or 6 other *bochurim*, into Rav Hutner’s study to speak with him in learning. The next morning, Rav Hutner summoned Eliyahu’s parents to tell them that when he would be returning to Eretz Yisroel after *Yom Tov*, Eliyahu simply had to come along with him. He did indeed go to Eretz Yisroel when he was only sixteen, and even at that young age he gained the respect of his peers who were far older than he.

Rav Eliyahu eventually married and settled in Lakewood, where he became a part and parcel of Bais Medrash Govoah. His *aishes chayil*,

Mrs. Chayala Yanofsky (née Lerner), became his full partner and supporter in everything he did and accomplished from that time until the last moment of his life. Together, they built a beautiful home of Torah, *avodah* and *chesed*, and everything was done with the greatest *simcha shel mitzvah*. Both of them, as parents and as *mechanchim*, were role models who taught more by example than any other way.

Rav Eliyahu was a very busy person. He was a *shadchan* who not only *redd shidduchim* but who assisted parents and singles alike every step of the way with patience, wisdom and sensitivity. Together with his wife, he eventually opened The Lakewood Seminary, into which he put his heart and soul as well. Then there were the myriad other endeavors, both known and unknown, to which he gave his time and efforts on a constant basis.

Yet, this author will forever have one picture of Rav Eliyahu in my mind. That is of Rav Eliyahu sitting at his *shtender* on his front porch, engrossed in a *sefer*. Be it afternoon, evening, or quite late at night, walking past the Yanofsky home so often brought with it the heartening image of Rav Eliyahu sitting and learning as if he had nothing else to do. Because indeed, whether it was five minutes, twenty minutes or one hour that became available to him, for those moments he *had* nothing else to do.

Until the end of his life, nothing brought him more joy and contentment than another *daf* of *Gemara*, another *siman* in *Mishnah Berurah*, another *vort*, another *shtickel Torah*, another *chiddush*. He could have been busy with a hundred other things, but they were all outgrowths of his being a *ben Torah mushlam*, a *ben Torah* who not only learned Torah, but *lived* Torah. To sit near him at a *simcha*, a *seudah*, or just when riding with him in a car was to experience a virtual non-stop flow of Torah in any area of interest. All his daily accomplishments – and he accomplished many great things – were as nothing as he sat and shared one *vort* after another. His scope and grasp were breathtaking, yet all shared with utter simplicity and humility.

Rav Eliyahu was unassuming because despite the awesome things he accomplished in life, he made nothing of it. He was merely doing what he felt he had to do. He was a gifted speaker who could share a thought with wit, humor and uncanny insight. He was well-versed in *p'sak halacha* and many turned to him for guidance. He had *talmidos* from seminary throughout the United States and Eretz Yisroel, as well

as numerous families who credited their very existence to his *shadchanus* and guidance.

None of that changed the soft-spoken, easy-going, non-pressured and unpretentious Rav Eliyahu in the least. Indeed, had one not known how busy Rav Eliyahu really was and how many things were dependent on his guidance and active involvement, one would have been forgiven for thinking that here was man who led a quiet and unremarkable life.

For many years, Rav Eliyahu was the *gabbai* of one of the main *minyanim* of Bais Medrash Govoah, first in Bais Eliyahu and then in Bais Shalom. As Rav Yeruchem Olshin, *rosh yeshiva* of Bais Medrash Govoah, mentioned during his *hesped*, Rav Eliyahu held this position *because* of his unpretentious manner and the fact that everyone loved and respected him. He was sensitive, intuitive – and could be shrewd when necessary – and was thus ideally suited to be in charge of such a large and respected *minyan*.

Rav Eliyahu's *hashkafos* were rock-solid, and he shared a healthy skepticism for many “new” ideas and trends whose origins and propriety were questionable. Yet, even these *hashkafos* were given over with wisdom and wit, with positivity for what we believe rather than negativity for what we don't. Both in his personal life and in his seminary, everything was done with an unquestioning fealty to *daas Torah*.

Common sense (not so common anymore) and *seichel hayoshor* could be found in abundance by Rav Eliyahu as well. He had an incisive grasp of the world and of people, and was able to utilize that knowledge in helping others and in articulating the Torah viewpoint in various matters. His inner peace, an outgrowth of his absolute *emunah* in the righteousness of *Hakadosh Boruch Hu's* ways, and of his desire to do the *ratzon Hashem* – nothing more and nothing less – made him *the* address for family, friends and acquaintances in search of a listening ear and steady shoulder.

Nothing demonstrates the extent of one's true inner level of attainment as when one is tried, *Rachmana litzlan*, with mortal challenges and unfathomable *yissurim*. During the last number of years, Rav Eliyahu was stricken with an illness that slowly robbed him of his health. As time went by and the situation progressively grew worse, Rav Eliyahu

suffered both physically as well as from the knowledge that he may not be able to be with his family and loved ones much longer.

Throughout this terrible *nisayon*, however, family and friends relate how Rav Eliyahu was unflinching in his acceptance of his situation, as well as his continued commitment to Torah and *avodas Hashem* – through *simcha* no less. A son related at the *levayah* how any time Rav Eliyahu became wracked with pain, they immediately brought him a *sefer*. It was the only thing that helped to alleviate his pain. When people visited him and he was in agony, drained and could hardly speak, if he managed to still share a *vort*, he was visibly calmed.

That quiet and unassuming *Yid* was suddenly showing awesome *medreigos*, the results of a lifetime of quiet but steady work.

Only a few short months ago, when the dreaded disease had already ravaged much of Rav Eliyahu's body, this writer was witness to the awesome sight, a few days in a row, of Rav Eliyahu making his calm way to his beloved seminary down the block from the Yanofsky home. His post-seminary daughter – whose dedication to her father was unparalleled and who helped keep the family running during these trying times – drove him the few short houses down the block, because clearly Rav Eliyahu was in no position to get there any other way. Surely, he could have remained at home, perhaps *should* have remained at home, reserving his strength and resting.

That wasn't how Rav Eliyahu did things, though. In his eyes, whatever he was going through was beside the point. If he still had the strength – however minimal – to give one more class, speak to one more person, or do one more *chesed* for another, he would never think otherwise. His brother mentioned in his *hesped* how whenever they called and asked Rav Eliyahu how he was doing, the response was always to flip the question. "I'm fine, *boruch Hashem*," Rav Eliyahu would say, and then immediately, "And how are you? How's the family?" He would ask after whatever was going on by the other person at that time, leaving no room for dwelling on his own plight.

His *bein adam lachaveiro* thus shone through during these trying times. Another son related how once, after a surgery or treatment, Rav Eliyahu was discharged from the hospital but could barely be brought into the car to take him home. He was utterly drained and in pain, and could barely walk or keep his eyes open. Then, in the car on the way

home, someone called his cell phone. It was a father seeking to discuss a *shidduch inyan* with Rav Eliyahu. The man clearly had no idea that Rav Eliyahu's physical situation had so deteriorated, and surely did not realize that he just caught Rav Eliyahu at a most inopportune time.

Despite all this, relates the son, Rav Eliyahu spoke with this man for about an hour! Never satisfied with merely answering someone's question, Rav Eliyahu led him through all the ins and outs, the possibilities and areas of concern, pertinent to him in that particular *shidduch* situation.

"To this extent?" Rav Eliyahu's son asked him incredulously, knowing how difficult it was for his father simply to keep his eyes open, let alone conduct an involved conversation.

"That man once did a favor for me," was Rav Eliyahu's response. "I have *hakoras hatov* to him and owe him my attention and assistance if at all possible."

Such is the level that can be reached by a *ben Torah* whose life is one of constant growth and search for *shleimus*.

When Rav Eliyahu came home from the hospital on *Erev Yom Tov* of the last *Sukkos* of his life, his family did not imagine that he would be able to go out to the *sukkah*. Yet, Rav Eliyahu said, "*Af al pi kein*," and, summoning unknown strengths, went with the assistance of his sons into their *sukkah*. As soon as he entered, he smiled and said, "*Nu*, we must dance," and indeed the family danced around the *sukkah* in a demonstration of unquestioning *ahavas Hashem*, *ahavas hamitzvos* and *kabbolas yissurim b'ahava*. It wasn't a sad event, but a joyous one. Another *Yom Tov* Hashem had given him with his family. Could they not be joyous?

Though Rav Eliyahu was ultimately taken from us, his family – who lived through every step alongside him – no doubt has the legacy he left them to share and give over to others for many years to come. His *aishes chayil*, who never left his side throughout his ordeal and whose unceasing *emunah* in Hashem's goodness was an awesome example for family and friends alike, as well as his children and their spouses and *their* children, along with his *yedidim* and all who knew him, are now left broken, bereft, but with a living legacy of how one *Yid* can

accomplish so much and reach so high with the unshakeable power of Torah and *mitzvos*, and all with a smile, with joy and with true inner happiness.

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