

"The Excellent Saint and the Rosh Yeshivah"

an appreciation of

Rabbi Avraham Aharon Shatzkes

and Rabbi Yerucham Gorelick

of blessed memory

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The Sages teach us in the Midrash (Tanḥuma, Pinḥas 10; and in somewhat different form in the Talmud, *Ber.* 58a and *Sanh.* 38a):

כשם שאין פרצופיהן שווין זה לזה כך אין דעתן שוה
Just as people's faces differ from each other, so the *deirot* of each person are different from those of every other person. *Deirot* here means not only opinions, but also personalities. Similarly, when the Rambam writes about *Hilkhot Deirot*, he refers to a study of character and personality.

The world created by the Holy One is remarkably rich, not only in its natural diversity but also in its human variety. If this is true of ordinary human beings, then *a fortiori*, how much more so is it true for scholars whose *deirot* (in both meanings, that of intellectual outlook and of character attributes) are formed by the holy Torah. Just as *shiv'im panim le-torah*, there is no homogeneous, single approach to Torah but rather 70 different ways of interpreting it, so *shiv'im panim le'lomdei torah*, there is an enormous variety of types of scholars and we must not expect amongst them one idealized monolithic personality.

Of course, individual traits are clearly marked in Halakhah as desirable or undesirable: thus,

respect for human dignity (*kevod ha-beriot*) is desirable, and vengeance and vindictiveness are undesirable. But there is no one character type or personality structure that is inherently superior or more prevalent than any other. In the realm of Torah, one finds a plethora of personalities, a pluralism of types, and this makes the world of *Talmidei ḥakhamim* far more interesting and vital than if the Torah personalities were uniform, homogeneous, and monochromatic.

The two great Roshei Yeshiva whom we mourn and memorialize were in many ways directly opposed to each other in personality, cast of mind, and the form of their interpersonal relationships. Yet these two characterological antonyms were unified not only in the friendship they felt for each other and the *derekh erez* with which they treated each other, but also in their uncompromising commitment to Torah and their mutual dedication to our Yeshiva.



Rabbi Avraham Aharon Shatzkes ZT'L

Rabbi Avraham Aharon Shatzkes was restrained, irenic, introverted. Rabbi Yerucham Gorelick was stormy, ironic, extroverted. And each used his own individuality, his *tekhunot ha-nefesh*, for the purpose of furthering his own *avodat ha-Shem*. We at Yeshiva are fortunate that we were blessed with both these types: *Ha-Shem oze le'ammo yiten* —the Almighty gave us the power and the aggressiveness of Reb Yerucham, and *ha-Shem yevarekh et ammo va-shalom*, He gave us the peaceful and serene character of Reb Avraham Aharon.

Reb Avraham Shatzkes had his character molded by both nature and nurture. His father's

stepfather was the famous Reb Yitzhak Blazer, known in Yeshiva circles as "Reb Itzelle Peterburger," one of the three most distinguished students of R. Israel Salanter, the founder of the Musar movement. The ideology of Musar, the teaching of inwardness, of *anavah*, of introspection, of deliberate awareness of one's moral inadequacies, became a part of Reb Avraham Aharon's natural environment. It saturated the very atmosphere whose air he breathed.

Reb Avraham Aharon revered (as who did not?) his illustrious father, Reb Moshe Shatzkes, the "Lomzer Rav" of blessed memory. I had the privilege, when I was a youngster of 19, here at Yeshiva, of having him as my Rosh Yeshiva. He was a *gaon* of world class, a man of encyclopaedic knowledge, blessed with intellectual acuity, pleasantly absent-minded, and graced with a keen sense of humor. A man of patriarchal dignity and handsomeness, his very mien and visage reflected the aristocracy of Torah. His very appearance, let alone his conduct and his knowledge and his teaching, bespoke the majesty of Torah. And the Lomzer Rav had a profound effect on raising his beloved son to a life of distinction in Torah.

Reb Avraham Aharon learned in the Yeshiva of Mir and went with them in exile to Shanghai. Later, with the help of Rabbi Ahron Kotler, of blessed memory, he came to the U.S. and joined his father here at Yeshiva Rabbi Isaac Elchanan, teaching Torah and guiding his many students for forty years. He married the daughter of a great, well-known rabbinic scholar, Rabbi Hayyim Korb of Chicago, and they had two sons who gave their parents and us much reason to be very proud: Yecheiel, one of our own *musmakhim*, now a businessman in England, and Shaul, who learned at various Yeshivot; together they are the heirs of their distinguished family tradition.

Rabbi Avraham Aharon Shatzkes was one of the finest examples I have ever had the pleasure to know of how Torah shapes the personality, refines the attributes, and sanctifies one's divine Image. There are some people who teach Torah and who describe for a pupil the ideal traits that the Torah should ultimately develop, but the personal achievement of their characterological ideals in the course of their ongoing social relationships remains a life-long struggle for them as for others. Whereas, a gifted, blessed few succeed in achieving their goal almost at once, and

in what appears an effortless and almost uncomplicated way. They not only teach, but they live the *middot* that the Torah seeks to develop in us. The Midrash (in Lev. R.) teaches us:

רב אמר, לא ניתנו המצוות לישראל אלא לצרף

בהן את הבריות

The *mitzvot* were given to Israel to purify us, to temper our character and our personality. Some achieve this goal quickly and relatively easily. Others struggle grievously. Those of us who learned the 7th chapter of *Shabbat* know that *metzoref*, the tempering of metal, is a form of labor that requires putting metal through fire and then through cold water. When Rav says, therefore, that the *mitzvot* were given to temper and refine one's character, that means that one has to struggle and go through fire and water, that only at the cost of pain and suffering can he obtain a refined character. But no matter how this good character is achieved, it remains the same goal for everybody: the *mitzvot* lead to purity, goodness, and nobility.

The Rambam in chapter 6 of his *Shemoneh Perakim* poses the following problem: which is more valuable, the man of innate moral excellence, of saintliness and pure character (*he-ḥasid ha-meuleh*); or the man who, in order to attain this level, has to suppress his own id and urges and impulses, to master his own *yetzer ha-ra* (*ha-kovesh et yitzro ve'ha-moshel be'nafsho*)? The Rambam tells us that this matter was apparently in dispute. The Greek philosophers taught that the former is the favored type, whereas the Sages of Israel preferred the latter. For instance, the Sages said that he who is greater than his fellow is possessed of more powerful urges; or they taught that *le'fum tzaara agra*, that the greater the struggle to attain something of value, the greater the reward. We seem to have two conflicting views. But the Rambam taught that there is no controversy between Philosophers and Sages. Rather, both agree that for those elements of character that we define as *mitzvot sikhliot*, as rational, self-evident moral and ethical imperatives that operate usually in the social sphere, *he-ḥasid ha-meuleh* (the morally excellent saint) is superior; we must train ourselves so that our moral and ethical responses become almost automatic. Whereas, when it comes to *mitzvot shimiyyot*, the traditional or revelational or disciplinary commandments, such that without specific divine legislation we would not know them

(such as the forbidden foods), it is best that one not reject them out of habit, but rather confront temptation and master it anew each time. For instance, one should not say, "I can't bear non-kosher food", rather, "I would love it, but what can I do if my Creator forbade it to me?" In this case, "the one who represses his urges" is greater than the man of innate moral excellence.

If I had to find a title for Reb Avraham Aharon Shatzkes, it would be *he-ḥasid ha-meuleh*, the superb man of excellent saintliness. He was, if you will, a Torah gentleman of the most refined moral instincts and ethical dispositions. The great thinker, poet, and martyr, Hillel Zeitlin, once said, when writing about Hasidism, that it taught not only *Torah min ha-shamayim* but *Torah she'hi shamayim* -- not only does Torah come from Heaven, but Torah is Heaven. I would paraphrase that about Reb Avraham Aharon Shatzkes: He not only taught Torah, but he was a teaching of Torah. He was himself a *ḥeftza shel Torah* in teaching how Torah is *metzaref et ha-beriyot*, how it tempers people, refines them, elevates them, ennobles them.

He was always *me'orav im ha-beriyot*: a pleasant and undemanding man, cheerful, a welcome smile on his lips, sensitive to the feelings of others, considerate, a modest man who symbolized *Torah shel ḥessed*. Truly, he was *he-ḥasid ha-meuleh*.

But we must be careful not to oversimplify the Maimonidean typology. The man who controls his urges may have a longer, more open and obvious battle for self-control in order to attain his goals. But the "excellent saint" is not necessarily one who is *born* a saint, who never had problems in defining and directing his life. The whole brunt of Rambam's characterology in his *Shemoneh Perakim* and his *Hilkhot Deiot* is that our innate dispositions are haphazard and we must *rationaly* develop moderation and good character. The "excellent saint" too must struggle and suffer in order to train his moral reactions; it is only that his struggle is concealed rather than revealed. His cry of anguish is uttered in silence, and the emotional ravages of his wrestling match with his *yetzer ha-ra* are disguised behind a serene manner and a smiling visage. But the prize of such saintliness is attained only as a result of eternal vigilance, self-inspection, and ceaseless self-control. Success never comes easy.

Rabbi Shatzkes was a great *pashtan*: simple, straightforward, consistent, and apparently uncomplicated. But it is enormously difficult to attain such great simplicity. Even *he-ḥasid ha-meuleh* must exercise great depths of understanding to become such a *pashtan*. For example, the model of a *pashtan* amongst the Patriarchs is clearly our Father Isaac. He is simple: protected by mother and father from the blandishments and aggressiveness of Ishmael; listens to his father when he is brought to the Akedah; obeys his father without question when it came to a *shiddukh*; and always seems plain to the point of passivity. Yet the Midrash (Gen. R.) and the Kabbalah identify Isaac with the 5th of the Ten Seifiroth, with *Gevurah* rather than with *Ḥessed*. *Gevurah* means strength not in the ordinary sense of physical power and aggressiveness, but rather the strength of *tzimtzum*, of being able to curb and control one's self, to exercise self-restraint. *Gevurah* in this sense means to be able to turn your strength inwards:

איזהו גבור הכובש את יצרו (אבות ד"א)

Real *Gevurah* thus emerges as moral might and heroism.

Such *Gevurah* is no facile property. For an *am ha-aretz* it is easy enough to be plain and simple. But by *pashtan* I mean someone who has arrived at "simplicity" by means of great moral struggle and psychological complexity. Such a person appears simple in the outward results of his inner dynamics. He who succeeds in being simple, is not necessarily a simpleton. For a *talmid ḥakham*, whose intellectual life is spent mastering the complexities of a *sugyah*, traversing the tortuous byways and pathways and alleyways of halakhic reasoning and discourse, to be a *pashtan* is a heroic achievement. To attain such a result, a scholar of Torah needs enormous moral resources of *Gevurah*. He must curb his natural tendencies towards the complicated and the complex, the subtle and the barely detected nuance. He has to perceive and reflect the broad outlines of character that, outwardly, appear as the easy and simple and happy combination that is borne by *he-ḥasid ha-meuleh*.

Indeed, in order to achieve such *Gevurah* one must practice *not* to see, *not* to remember, and *not* to perceive. Permit me to explain. One of the greatest thinkers in the last several generations, the author of *Benei Yisaskhar*, comments on the

teachings of the sages

הוה דן את כל האדם לכף זכות (אבות א"ו)

that if your friend does something and you have two ways of judging him, either "realistically," attributing his actions to malice and bad motives, or charitably, seeking out the best interpretation of his deeds, you must do the latter and give him the benefit of the doubt. But how can one do this when one *knows* that a fellowman did indeed perform a transgression out of malevolence or at best indifferent motives? Knowing the psychology of human beings, and the nastiness that lies so close to the soul, are we indeed being truthful in judging another *le kaf zekhut*—charitably?

The Benei Yisaskhar answers by referring to another Mishnah in Avot (3:19)—

הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה

—the Almighty foresees everything, yet we are possessed of free will. But is this not a contradiction? Does not divine foreknowledge mean that I *must* do what He has foreseen, that I am denied free choice between good and evil? The answer of a number of Rishonim is that the Almighty practices *tzimtzum*, He deliberately curbs His own foreknowledge. He decides *not* to see, *not* to know, hence *not* to coerce man's choice. So, the *Benei Yisaskhar* teaches us, we must imitate the divine act of self-denial—

Imitatio Dei or והלכת בדרכיו —

and man too must refrain from knowing too much of the human proclivity for the base and the ugly. We must *not* see, *not* know, *not* understand our friend's "real" character; instead—we must judge him charitably, *le'kaf zekhut*. This is the essence of Jewish *Gevurah*: to know how to pull back, to know when not to look at another person's character, and to achieve "simplicity".

Rabbi Shatzkes, of blessed memory, a great *landan* who was raised on a diet of *Ketzot ha-Hoshen* and Reb Akiva Eger and Reb Hayyim, practiced that *Gevurah*. His simplicity was practical and deliberate and heroic. It was exercised so often that it became part of his very self.

No wonder that he left such a legacy of love and devotion in his own family and amongst his colleagues and his students. We admired him and we cherished him. He was loyal to us, especially to our Yeshiva. For forty years he resisted the temptation of moving away from this neighborhood because he wanted not only to teach in the "Beis Medrash," but to "daven" here as well. He was our *he-ḥasid ha-meuleh*, and his memory

will always be a source of blessing to all of us. *Zekher tzaddik li'verakhah*.

Rabbi Yerucham Gorelick appeared at all times to be engaged in some kind of titanic inner struggle. He was a cauldron of activity and movement, of perpetual motion. He was a man of striking, sometimes startling contradictions. He appeared to be moving in different directions simultaneously. He was a man of changing moods, of profound dialectical tensions, although he was at all times an *ish ha-emet*, a man of unshakable integrity. He was the Rambam's second type, *hakovesh et yitzro ve'ha-moshel be'nafsho*, the one who constantly wrestles with his own self and emerges triumphant.



Rabbi Yerucham Gorelick ZT'L

It appears to me that the most tragic contradiction in the life of this man of contradictions was—his death. For over a year, 15 months to be exact, he was immobilized, hovering in or near coma, suffering a lingering paralysis. What a stark and terrible contrast to his whole life, which was one of activity and movement, so much so that when you came into the presence of Reb Yeruchem you could almost feel a charged electric field all about him!

When King David eulogized Abner, the general of Saul's forces, we find two expressions that epitomize the grief we feel at Reb Yerucham's fate. Abner defected from Saul in order to help King David establish his throne, and David received Abner with open arms and friendship. A little later, the same Abner was assassinated by David's own general, Joab, silently, in the dark of night. We read David's eulogy:

ויקונן המלך את אבנר ויאמר, הכמות נבל ימות אבנר

ידיך לא אסורות ורגליך לא לנחושתיים הוגשו... ויוסיפו כל העם לבכות עליו (ש"ב ג' לג)
 "The king lamented Abner and said: Must Abner die so base a death? Your hands were not bound, and your feet were not fettered... And the people continued to weep over him." David was saying this: A military hero should have died leading a charge of his troops at the head of his army or, captured by the enemy, his hands and his feet in chains, dying as a hero before a loud and ranting mob, and not unsuspectingly mugged in the dark of night when he came unarmed. That was part of the tragedy of Abner.

So too for a man of Reb Yerucham's qualities. One should have expected that his end should have come dramatically and dynamically: in the middle of a great *sheur*, while he was arguing with the Rambam, settling scores with the Rashba, jousting with Tosafot, challenging a *Baal Ha-maor*—or, while delivering a blistering and polemical speech, for he was indeed a brilliant polemicist. Yet such was not to be. His hands were not bound, his feet unchained. Indeed, for all of us: "and the people continued to weep of him." His passing will always be a source of great grief and bereavement.

What was his background? It is terribly important for all his students to know who their "Rebbe" was—and for the younger students, to know what they are going to miss.

His parents lived in the United States since the 20's and 30's. His father was a well-known Rabbi in the Bronx. It was an important Jewish neighborhood, but during this time Reb Yerucham elected to stay in Europe and learn in the famous Yeshivot of Europe. He married the daughter of an illustrious family in Vilna soon after the outbreak of World War II. They came to the United States shortly before Pearl Harbor, together with the late and much lamented Rabbi Noah Bornstein, of blessed memory. They served together as Roshei Yeshiva in Mesifita Tiferet Yerushalayim. A number of Yeshivot competed for their services, but they elected to come to our Yeshiva, to Yeshivat Rabbenu Yitzhak Elchanan, in Elul 1943. And they stayed for 40 years.

While Rosh Yeshivah here, Reb Yerucham became the rabbi of a small shul, or perhaps *shtibel*. With his inexhaustible supply of energy, he built it into a large, imposing congregation, and immersed himself in the life of his people. He distinguished himself as a man of great *hessed*, of

compassion and sympathy and kindness. Indeed, he had performed great services of *hessed* for that great *gaon*, Reb Velvella Brisker, of blessed memory, whom he considered his "Rebbe" and whom he admired and revered enormously. He built a great girls' school, "Beis Yaakov-Beis Miriam," which became the largest girls' school in the Bronx when the Bronx was a great Jewish borough, a school that boasted of 600 students at its peak. At the same time, he built a boys' school, "Yeshiva Zichron Moshe," which reached a maximum of 700 students. When the Bronx began to decline, he moved it to Fallsburg where it remains to this day. Despite his restless and temperamental personality, he dealt successfully with all kinds of people, with laymen and with scholars, parents and teachers, people large and small, rich and poor, important and not-so-important. With all of them he was able to communicate. He was able to inspire them with his sense of mission and love of Torah.

As a *talmid hakham*, Reb Yerucham possessed great creative powers. He was a *mehadesh* and highly analytical. His learning was characterized by *bakashat ha-emet*, the search for halakhic truth. He respected talent and he was intolerant of sham. He did not suffer fools gladly. He did not hesitate publicly to denounce those people and views which he opposed. At Yeshiva, he was a focus of controversy and a center of dissension, even if sometimes he was a minority of one. As a result, his classes were, to say the least, interesting, challenging, scintillating. He possessed a sharp sense of humor, often self-mocking, because he did not take himself too seriously. This was a source of his great personal *hen*, his overwhelming charm. But despite his critical and sometimes contentious approach, his constant restlessness, Reb Yerucham was enormously dedicated to his *talmidim*, so much so that clearly he was a *great* Rosh Yeshivah.

Allow me to explain by means of a truly amazing and astounding passage in the Gemara, *Be-rakhot* 57a, where the Talmud devotes some 3 or 4 full folios to the interpretation of dreams. There we read one incredible passage. The Gemara tells us:

הנכנס באגם בחלום נעשה ראש ישיבה, ליער נעשה ראש לבני כלה. ר' פפא ור' הונא ברין דר' יהושע חזו חלמא, ר"פ דעייל לאגמא נעשה ראש ישיבה, ר' הונא ברין דר' דעייל ליער נעשה ראש לבני כלה. איכא דאמרי, תרווייהו לאגמא עיילי, אלא דר"פ דתלי טבלא נעשה ראש

ישיבה ר"ה בדר"י דלא תלי טבלא נעשה ראש לבני כלה.
 Whoever dreams that he is coming into a marsh, a kind of muddy pool, will become a Rosh Yeshivah. If he dreams that he is coming into a forest, this means he will become not a Rosh Yeshivah, but a Rosh Kallah—also a teacher of Torah, but on a lower level. The Gemara tells us that this actually occurred. Two Amoraim, Rav Pappa and Rav Huna brei De'Rav Yehoshua, each had a dream. Rav Pappa dreamt that he went into a marsh; he became a Rosh Yeshivah. Rav Huna dreamt that he was going into a forest; he became a Rosh Kallah. The Gemara then offers a second opinion: Both Rav Pappa and Rav Huna dreamt that they were entering a marsh. Indeed, you can't even become a Rosh Kallah without dreaming that you are going into a marsh. Then what is the difference between a Rosh Yeshivah and a Rosh Kallah? Rav Pappa dreamt that he was entering a marsh with a drum or tambourine on his neck; he became a Rosh Yeshivah. Rav Huna dreamt that he was going into a marsh, but without a drum hanging from his neck; he became merely a Rosh Kallah.

Clearly, this is a challenging Gemara. Here we must turn to Rashi who offers us some assistance. Rashi says that an *agam* is a shallow pool or marsh that has reeds, some large and some small, and they are all so close together that there is little room left to swim. This is a symbol of a Rosh Yeshivah, because a Rosh Yeshivah has all types of pupils, some big and some small, some more competent and some less competent, all of whom come to hear his *sheur*. Therefore, if you dream of getting into such a marsh, you become a Rosh Yeshivah. A forest, however, has trees, all of which are large and imposing. This is a sign that all of a teacher's students are on his own mature level: They are all tall, big, important, imposing and challenging. Yet this is the vision of a Rosh Kallah, not a Rosh Yeshivah! He remains on a lower level, subservient to a Rosh Yeshivah. His task is to review the *sheur* with the better pupils, those who are like a forest. They are on a homogeneously high level. They are not "close to one another." There is place to move.

Rashi tells us that a dream is a symbol, a disguise for one's basic ambitions that he does not admit even to himself, those that lie buried deep within his mind and his heart. Why, then, should one not believe that the dream of going into a forest is greater than that of a marsh? After all,

a marsh is a place of shallow waters, muddy, dirty, with no place to swim because you are surrounded and crowded by diverse reeds. Is it not a greater dream and ambition to walk into a forest, to make a pathway in the underbrush surrounded by giant birches?

Yet the Sages said that the opposite is the case. Whoever has a dream that he wants to master a forest will indeed become a "Rebbe," but only a Rosh Kallah—he will have students who will be sturdy trees, but nevertheless he will remain subservient to a Rosh Yeshivah. Because the *real* Rosh Yeshiva is not one who dreams of greatness for himself, of having only the challenge of first rate minds, of being able to ignore the lesser *talmidim* who trouble him and don't have the intellectual problems that he has. The real Rosh Yeshivah is he who goes into the marsh, who is willing to give up the opportunity of swimming freely and boldly in the *yam ha-talmud*, in an open lake or an ocean, and is instead content to struggle in order to move about in the shallow confines of a mere marsh, but at the same time has his "reeds," his *talmidim*, surrounding him. He is willing to sacrifice his own intellectual stimulation and prestige and status in order to raise them, develop them, enhance them, improve them, give them the *mayim hayyim* of the *yam ha-talmud*.

Permit me to digress to say something that all our Roshei Yeshivah would want our students to know. We are here for the primary purpose of becoming *benei Torah*. Sometimes, I hear a student tell me, "Yes, I know it's important, but I just don't have the talent for it. I don't have a *Gemara kop*." I offer two answers to that. First, you may be wrong. You have to learn Gemara, and if you can't go through Rishonim and Aḥaronim, then you have to try Rashi and Tosafot. And if you can't do that, then there is more to Torah. Become an expert in Ḥumash, Rashi, and Ramban. Try Ibn Ezra and Rashbam and Sforno. Go through the Musar and Jewish Thought literature. Learn Saadia Gaon, R. Yehuda Halevy, Rabbenu Yonah, R. Israel Salanter, Tanya; Rav Kook. There is no excuse for not becoming proficient in Torah. You may not be a big reed, but you can always be a small reed that grows into a larger reed than he ever expected to be. When you come before the Celestial Court "after 120 years" and you will be asked, "did you set aside time for the study of Torah?" there will be

no excuse that you had no talent. Even preoccupation with LSAT's and MCAT's will not be accepted as an excuse, because there is an absolute obligation for every Jew to go as far as he can and become as great as he can, even if he knows he can't be the tallest tree in the forest, or the tallest reed in the marsh.

This is what the Sages tell us concerning the function of the Rosh Yeshivah. His sacred mission is not only to lead and develop *gedolim* who are already *gedolim*, or are on the verge of becoming *gedolim*, but to be close to every *talmid*, large and small: to come to a "reed" who doesn't want to learn as much, who doesn't have as much talent, and to evoke out of him as much greatness as he does possess and let him live a life of Torah to the best of his ability. One can't ask for more than the very best. And one should not settle for less. That is the first opinion in our talmudic passage.

The second one tells us that the dream of a forest isn't a dream at all. Even a Rosh Kallah has to dream about entering a marsh. There is never an excuse for neglecting a poor student in favor of the very best. Even a Rosh Kallah has to dream of a marsh and has to be able to curb his own intellectual ambitions in order to be able to develop a slower pupil. In what way, then, is a Rosh Yeshivah greater than a Rosh Kallah? When a Rosh Kallah comes into a class he is devoted to his *talmidim*, accepting all students, the slower as well as the faster, the smaller as well as the larger; but, he does not involve himself adequately in the personal life of his *talmid*. The Rosh Yeshivah, as opposed to the Rosh Kallah, carries a drum with him. He carries the means of alarming a student, of waking him up, of stirring him, of inspiring him, of getting him moving, unsettling him, shocking him, demanding of him that he live up to his highest potential, not only of *talmud torah* but also of *yirat shamayim* and of *derekh eretz*.

Our Reb Yerucham dreamt of marshes. He was not a selfish man—not even intellectually. His dream was that of a Rosh Yeshivah—with a drum or tambourine. Reb Yerucham was a disturber of the peace. He was a challenger of the status quo. He was a human alarm clock, a walking drum. He was a holy irritant.

As soon as he felt that a student or even a colleague was smug and contented, he banged on his drums and shocked you out of your

lethargy and complacency and self-satisfaction. If in any way he detected in you something bogus, something false, he pounded on his drums until you were forced to listen. Sometimes in response to weaker but sincere and willing *talmidim*, the more delicate and weaker reeds of his classroom, he only tapped lightly on his tambourine—a light, gentle, encouraging beat that evoked out of his *talmid* self-confidence, love of Torah, and willingness to learn. But, frankly, the drum of Reb Yerucham usually sounded harsher tones: alarm, sarcasm, criticism, anger, provocation, indignation, outrage, argumentation. But never did Reb Yerucham bang on his own ego merely to draw attention to himself. He was utterly devoted. The overtones of his particular drum were always *le'shem shamayim*, and its undertones were part of a love song, the music of *ahavat-ha-Torah* and love for his own *talmidim*.

Towards the end of his days, Reb Yerucham felt that our Yeshiva had succeeded. His efforts were vindicated far beyond his early dreams, his fears, even his skepticism. We had a warm relationship, especially during the past seven years. I genuinely loved and cherished the man, even though he and I did not often agree on all issues. How often he told me, "Ich bin getrei die Yeshiva"—I am very loyal to our Yeshiva. And indeed, he was. Those who cavalierly speak of him now without mentioning his profound association and identification with our Yeshiva, deny what he believed and felt and experienced. They callously erase what he creatively invested in two generations of our *talmidim*. This is an injustice to him. He would never have tolerated it. He was too much a man of truth for that.

He was privileged to raise a large family of children and grandchildren who learn *Torah Lishmah*, and are teachers of Torah. In our Yeshiva, he had a profound impact on hundreds and hundreds of young men. He saw the marshes expand, and the reeds become Roshei Kallah and even Roshei Yeshivah. Indeed, most of our own Roshei Yeshivah, our own *musmakhim*, were his *talmidim* and acknowledged him as their "Rebbe" and had their lives shaped by him.

Reb Yerucham elevated all of us with his dreams of entering the marsh, surrounded by human reeds of diverse sizes and talents, inspiring them to a life of Torah by liberally using the drum of his effervescent personality. His dream came true and we are the richer for it. He was a

true Rosh Yeshivah.

How sad that the drum of Reb Yerucham Gorelick has now been silenced. His particular marsh is now empty, and the reeds wait for the master who will no longer come. Yet his dream and his vision endure. And the rhythm of his dream sings within each of us who had the privilege to know him.

In the *Piyyut* that some of us recite on *motzaei Shabbat* right before *havdalah*, the concluding passage says of the Prophet Elijah:

אשרי מי שראה פניו בחלום ונתן לו שלום
והחזיר לו שלום

"Happy is he who saw Elijah in a dream, who gave him the greeting of *Shalom* and returned his greetings." Fortunate is he who pondered and deeply understood and sympathized with Reb Yerucham's great dream. Happy is he who extended a helping hand in greeting and assisting this great teacher and master of Torah. And happiest of all are those who, challenged by Reb Yerucham and his unique drum, had the wisdom and the courage to respond to him and grow and flourish in Torah and *yirat shamayim* because of him. *Yehei zikhro barukh*.

Two great *talmidei hakhamim* and teachers of Torah have departed from us and left this Yeshiva impoverished and bereaved. But they will not only not be forgotten; they will continue to exercise their healing influence upon all of us.

I conclude with a relevant thought (even if a Hasidic interpretation may be thought a bit inappropriate for two committed *Mitnagdim*) from the Apter Rav, "the Ohev Yisrael", who asked about the very first verse in the book of Joshua:

ויהי אחרי מות משה עבד ה'

"And it was after Moses, the servant of the Lord died." True, the Apter Rav says, Moses was an *eved ha-Shem* while he was alive. "Servant" implies work, servitude, obedience, the carrying out of a message or mission. But once a man dies, there are no longer any *mitzvot*, no *avdut*, no mission of *shelihut*; why then does the Torah refer to Moses, even after his death, as an *eved ha-Shem*?

He answers by referring to a passage quoted in Rashi to the last sidra of the Torah. Towards the end of his life, the Holy One takes Moses to the top of the mountain:

ויעל משה מערבות מואב אל הר נבו ראש הפסגה ויראהו ה' את כל הארץ את הגלעד עד דן ואת כל נפתלי

את ארץ אפרים... עד צוער. ויאמר ה' אליו זאת הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב לאמר לזרע אתננה, הראתיך בעיניך ושמה לא תעבר

The Holy One shows Moses Eretz Yisrael from the east to the west, from the north to the south, all of it, and says to him: this is the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying: to your seed will I give it. Look at it, because you are not going to get there. And here Rashi says:

...כדי שתלך ותאמר לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב, שבועה שנשבע לכם הקב"ה קיימה

Go and tell Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: I have kept my promise to you!

This, then, is the reason Moses is referred to as an *eved ha-Shem* even after his death. He still had an assignment to execute, a mission to perform, a message to deliver, a service to offer. The report he was charged to bring to the Fathers earned him this encomium even posthumously.

Rav Shatzkes, the "excellent saint," *he-ḥasid ha-meuleh*, and Rav Gorelick, the *Kovesh et Yitzro* and the ideal *Rosh Yeshivah*, remain *avdei ha-Shem*, even after their death. They still have a task to fulfill on behalf of all of us who loved them, admired them, respected them, and miss them so terribly. We charge them to report back to the Kovner Rav, Reb Yitzhak Elchanan, whose name we bear; to Dr. Revel and to Dr. Belkin who sacrificed their lives on the altar of this Yeshiva; to the Meitcheter Illuy, to Reb Moshe Soloveitchik, to all the *geonim* and *gedolim*, *zikhronam li'verakhah*, who invested so much in us.

Tell them that what they worked for and what they dreamt of, what they symbolized and what they hoped for, has a *kiyyum*: We, their spiritual children, their disciples, their *talmidim* and their successors, are determined to continue our Yeshiva on the highest level of *talmud torah* and *yirat shamayim*, enhanced and not contradicted by *madda* and *hokhmah*.

Inform them that their heritage is our high resolve, that we are and shall always remain a preeminent *mekom Torah*, that we will continue to raise generations upon generations of *talmidei hakhamim* and *yirei shamayim*.

In this manner, the *Gestalt* of Rav Shatzkes and Rav Gorelick will remain alive with us, and will continue to remain alive for years and years to come, because

צדיקים אף במיתתם נקראים חיים

the righteous remain alive even after they have expired.