



THE LIGHT OF MEMORIES

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

It came with a rush of remembrance and thanks. I opened the mornings email with the normal boredom reserved for shuffling through the tens of adverts and trivia that seems to be the norm for electronic mail these days. "Delete", "delete", one is reminded when mail came through the door and meant something, "Delete", "delete", why ever do so many bother sending so much empty content which I can't begin to believe anyone reads. Then it arrived, the email that awoke within me so much of my being. The front page was a full-size picture of a dignified Chasidic Rov, whose nobility shined forth coupled by kind soothing eyes. It was a shock because I hadn't seen this image in close to fifty years. It was my first Rov, HaRav Yosef Gelernter Ztl who survived the churban and arrived in Kew Gardens Hills Queens New York in 1950. I was a youngster, and it was this tall dignified Yied that caught my heart and opened it to a Yiddishkiet born in another world yet was being replanted in new shores. His was a magnetic force that coaxed you to come closer without any false shtick. His Yiddishkiet was created from truth and compassion, born of generations of tzadikim. We youngsters didn't know what these survivors had witnessed, nor what the impact of the losses wrought to their lives. We thrived in their realm of real vibrant Torah, built on caring for others and holding another's hand through all difficulties. Rav Gelernter had been a Rov in Poland before the war and in keeping with the low-key greatness of his holy ancestors his demeanor was dignified to a fault. His gadlus in Torah was founded on years learning in the famed Mesivta of Warsaw. I

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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
כ"ק מרן אדמו"ר מפאסצנה
הרב קלונימוס קלמן שפירא
זצוקלה"ה



לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
הרבנית הצדקנית
חיה שרה בת הרב שלמה
יחיאל רובין ז"ל



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remember whenever I saw him opening the huge volumes of Gemorah's, I felt drawn into the sea of what was obviously great scholarship. His excitement for learning was contagious. All this and more swam up into my consciousness when I saw his picture, but allow me to share the greatest part of the mosaic that was his greatness. This sweet Yied hardly spoke a word of English, yet he captured the souls of Yankee born kids who barely read Hebrew. How? His eyes, his smile radiated the music of kedusha that has always served Klall Yisroel wherever Golus led them. More than all this however was the sense of respect the Rav had for everyone he encountered. Here was a foreigner, dressed in strange garb, speaking with a thick accent, yet his sheer respectfulness for others opened up their hearts. I remember a tableau that has lived with me all these years. It was Simchas Torah, by hakofos, and the Rav was lost in the throes of the Kedusha that we mere mortals can only aspire to. The Rav was crying, he was hugging another Yied, also a survivor, and he was screaming "Hashem Meilech! Hashem Moloch! Hashem Yimloch Leolem Voed!".

"Hashem is King, Hashem, was King, and Hashem will be King forever!" with that, this American kid had his heart ripped opened. I wasn't yet bar mitzvah but those two holy Yieden rushed into my soul. I went to the back of the shtieble, and found myself handling a 'gartel' (Chasidic sash worn during prayers) in my hand, its silky woven pattern captured my soul, and Hashem took my heart into the Rav's safe keeping. Years went by, the Rav became ill, Parkinson's tried to rule him but he was still that Gerrer Chassid of old that would never give in. I visited him and we spoke of tzadikim he had known, he could hardly speak, but those lessons were so vibrant that they spoke beyond his physical strength.

As I share these stories, on and on they spill forth. I realise they come because I was gifted to be born at the beginnings of post churban Klall Yisroel. My stories are yours, and they must be shared because our present Golus seeks forgetfulness whilst in truth we must never allow these moments to be lost. The generation of the survivors did so much for us, and gave of themselves to their very limits. In the beginning of Parshas Tetzaveh, Aharon and his sons were told how to kindle the Menorah and we are told, "Aharon shall arrange it, with his sons, from evening until morning...." (27:21) Rashi explains that it is speaking of the measure of oil that was put in in the morning and evening. Holy seforim speak of yet another level; surely the preparing of the light didn't take a whole night, so why does it specify from 'evening until morning'? Aaron and his sons were so taken by the mitzvah of bringing light into the world that it occupied their thoughts the entire night. Those survivors, Rabbonim, were always ready to ignite the illumination of our hearts, and their fire is what brings us closer to Hashem till this very day.