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Parshas Mishpotim / Vol. 28 No. 6

**Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky zt"l**

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# תורת המלך



**The Yated**



A Gaon In Torah And Chessed



Rav Chaim  
Yisroel Belsky *zt'l*

PHOTOS: TSEMACH GLENN MATTIS GOLDBERG JDN AVROHOM ELBAZ TZVI BLUM YISSOCHER DUNOFF FLASH 87 SHULEM GOLDRING



# Editor's View

The most joyous occurrence in our world is a wedding. People whose children have gotten married know that following the emotional highs and joy experienced at the wedding, there is an entirely different delight as they watch the new couple go about life together when *sheva brachos* is over.

After the music, noise and laughter have faded, the supreme *nachas* takes over as they watch the couple adopt the blessings, happiness, hope and optimism that have been expressed over the prior week and transform them into their new lives together. The excitement of potential is replaced by the exhilaration of realization. They descend from flying in the clouds to living in the real world.

In last week's *parsha*, *Yisro*, we experienced the drama, thunder and roar of *Kabbolas HaTorah*, as Hashem's nation was presented with a gift that would change them and their identities for all time. Hashem and *Klal Yisroel* entered into an eternal bond.

This week, in *Parshas Mishpotim*, the glory and splendor of *Har Sinai* is distilled into concepts as perfect and precise as creation.

are many smart people whose intelligence is squandered on trivialities and never develops, eventually withering due to passivity. He worked hard to utilize his gift to grow and advance in Torah study and dissemination.

He accomplished much and was involved in many different organizations and causes, but Torah was his calling.

From his youth, he was seen as a prodigy destined for greatness. Despite that, he always remained a simple, humble person, with time for everyone who sought him out. The same giant who could rule on the most intricate issues would spend much time explaining *sugyas* to *talmidim*, elucidating complicated concepts for young people seeking to grow and excel in Torah.

He was so kind and sweet, and nothing was beneath him. No person or situation was irrelevant. No matter what it was, he was prepared to discuss it and explain it to anyone. The man who knew all of Torah and could point out every star, figure out complicated mathematical calculations, play every musical instrument, write and appreciate *piyutim*, would also *daven* for the *amud* and *lain*.

What could they ask? Anything. Any *shaylah* or *halachah* or *p'shat* in *Shas* or the *dalei chelkei Shulchan Aruch*. In his weakened state, he sat there, answering questions from across the landscape of Jewish law. He addressed so many issues that day. Though his body was weakened, nobody could detect any weakness in his knowledge and ability to incisively analyze all types of situations through the prism of Torah.

It wasn't the *shiur* they were expecting. It was a lesson in *gadlus ha'odam*. They got to see how high a man can reach if he lives a Torah life.

My son once attended a *shiur* delivered by a leading contemporary *posek*, who discussed whether turning on a fluorescent light on *Shabbos* is a *melochah d'Oraysah* or *derabbonan*. The *posek* concluded that it was a *sofeik*.

My son told Rav Belsky about the *shiur* and the conclusion. The *rosh yeshiva* smiled and shrugged. "You should know that there are things that are *sefeikos*, situations where you cannot achieve clarity, but this isn't one of them.

producing the crunchy delight.

There is *Elokus* everywhere, and everything can be understood from the Torah.

Rav Belsky knew that every component of the *briah* is an expression of Hashem's will and that there are *halachos* that govern every particle of the world. Thus, *halachah* tells us which *brochah* to recite on thunder, which to say when blossoms sprout, how to be *mekadeish* the *levonah* and the *chamah*, and how to approach so many aspects of the world, because everything in creation is, in reality, a *sugya* cloaked with holiness by the *ratzon* Hashem. The Torah we received on *Har Sinai* is the oxygen of the universe. To understand Torah is to understand the world as well.

Someone who studies all of Torah comprehends that stars, flowers, apples, fields and oceans are all part of a *bais medrash*.

Rav Belsky studied the stars and heard them sing about Hashem's magnificence. He couldn't help but share his knowledge with all who fell under his wing. During the summers, he would sit across the grassy expanse of lawn at Camp Agudah surrounded by



The magnitude, scope and depth of Torah are filtered down to reflect the realities of this world.

How can it be? How can a celestial Torah be constricted to human limitations?

Had you ever spoken to or just observed Rav Yisroel Belsky *zt"l*, you would have the answer.

In an age when *talmidei chachomim* and *gedolei Torah* are regularly vilified, Rav Belsky was an example of a person with expansive understanding of the entire Torah, with no personal agenda or bias, who could not be bought or cowed into a position. Blessed with a brilliant mind and sterling character, he ignored other opportunities and chose to spend his life in the *beis medrash*, where his brilliant mind and *hasmodah* gained him comprehensive *yedios* and *havanah*.

Though he was smarter than most others, his greatness wasn't arrived at through superficial study. Rather, he immersed himself in Torah and spent every free minute *horev-ing* in learning. Hashem blessed him with a superior mind, but that is not enough. There

It was said that the only things he didn't know was how to braid *challah* and repair cars. Everything else was revealed to him and understood by him to the degree that he could patiently explain anything to anyone. His mind was always engaged. He never stopped thinking until his final sickness.

He didn't just learn *halachah*. He didn't only *pasken shailos*. He knew and understood the issues better than most. He understood the practical implications of every *halachah*. When he would learn something, he would immediately figure out how to adapt and apply what he had learned, along with the limitless flow of information in his mind.

Once, although he was ill, he arrived at a scheduled *halachah shiur*. Apologizing, he explained that his illness left him too drained to prepare a *shiur* for that day. He told the *talmidim* that he regretted that he could not say the *shiur*, but he didn't want to leave them without imparting Torah knowledge. Instead of saying *shiur*, he asked if they minded asking him questions on *sugyas* that troubled them.

"When there is a *machlokes haposkim* and there is no accepted way to rule, that constitutes a *sofeik*, because the matter is really in doubt. But if one can take apart the light bulb and study it and see how it works, then the *halachah* is not in doubt and it is not a *sofeik*."

With total humility, Rav Belsky nonchalantly said that he had done that, and proceeded to explain to the young man how a bulb works and at what conclusion he arrived after studying fluorescent electricity.

When he looked at a chicken, he saw Hashem's creature. He saw *dapim* of *Gemara*, *Rambam* and *Shulchan Aruch*. He saw *halachah* and *Shas* in full display. And when he would teach *Shulchan Aruch*, it was with the fascination of a genius who had thoroughly examined every aspect of the chicken. His knowledge was overwhelming. He seemingly knew everything there was to know and so easily conveyed it.

When he looked at a potato chip, he didn't see a snack. He saw *hilchos brachos*, and *bi-shul Yisroel*, and everything else involved in

wide-eyed campers, teaching all types of lessons about the constellations. It was an eye-opening experience for the campers. Here was a man they knew as a *rov*, the camp's *posek* and spiritual guide, yet he was also the source of so much knowledge and wisdom about Hashem's creation. Early on, they learned that it was all one.

*Mah eilu miSinai, afeilu miSinai.*

One night, during a star-gazing walk, Rav Belsky noticed a cluster of stars forming a pattern in the sky that he had never previously witnessed. The next morning, he called NASA to report what he had seen and ask them if they could explain it. Scientists there told him that they had also noticed the formation and were as perplexed as he.

The Camp Agudah administration noticed - how could they not? - that he rarely got to eat his meals without numerous interruptions. They arranged for him to take his meals in a private dining room. He rejected the offer, explaining that he wanted to eat together with the campers. He understood that his presence in the dining room would encourage young





ב"ה

## תורה תורה חגרי שק

רבנן ותלמידהון בהיכלי התורה דישבתינו הקדושה  
מבכים מרה יחד עם המוני ישראל בכל קצוי תבל  
את הסתלקותו לשמי רום של רב האי גאון על ישראל הדרתו  
ידיו רב לו בהרבצת התורה והוראה ולהעמיד דת הכשרות על תילה  
עיניו כיונים על אפיקי הש"ס והפוסקים וכל מקצועות התורה

## מרן הגאון רבי חיים ישראל בעלסקי זצ"ל ראש ישיבת תורה ודעת

קול נהי נשמע מציון אוי מי יורה דעה ומי יבין שמועה  
אבל יחיד עשי לך ישיבת מיר  
עוד יזכור לנו אהבתו האיתנה לישיבתנו הק'  
והערצתו המופלגת למרן הגאון ראש הישיבה זצ"ל

תנחומין ישעשעו נפשינו לכבוד הני קרואי מועד אנשי שם  
משפחתו הרוממה שליט"א  
יתהפך אבלם לששון וישכון באהלם אך שמחה ואורה  
ובאו ציון ברנה ושמחת עולם על ראשם בביגוא"צ בב"א

ישיבת מיר ירושלים



people to approach and ask their questions. They asked the usual “What *brochah* do you make on corn flakes?” questions, as well as, “How many pretzels do I have to eat for a *shiur*?” and, “Should I wash on pizza?” By seeing him sitting there in such an approachable fashion, they were empowered to ask questions that had been lying dormant and find answers for things that bothered them.

Rav Belsky, like the most accomplished *rabbeim*, understood that the *avodah* Moshe Rabbeinu faced following *Ma’amad Har Sinai* was “*Vayeired Moshe el ha’am - Moshe descended to the people.*” The master of *halachah* sat among the people hungry for counsel in all matters of Torah, allaying their concerns and providing guidance and direction.

Rabbi Menachem Genack of the OU described at the *levayah* how Rav Belsky would calculate *shiurim* for *bittul* without use of pen, paper or calculator. He would figure out the area and circumference of a large barrel in a moment and issue his ruling.

He would also just as quickly size up the nuances of a person.

Rabbi Duvie Frischman recalled entering Rav Belsky’s office in Camp Agudah. As he approached the room, he noticed a young *bochur* running out and Rav Belsky was sitting at his desk with tears in his eyes. He asked why the *rov* was so pained. Rav Belsky told

him, despite his self-effacement. *Gadlus ha’odam.*

The next summer, the boy returned to camp and Rabbi Frischman noticed that he had been cured of his stutter. Remembering how upset he had been at the end of the camp season, he went to Rav Belsky and shared the good news with him. “Remember that stuttering boy you were feeling so bad about? He’s back and he is cured. I thought the *rov* would want to know that.”

Rav Belsky smiled broadly. It later turned out that the boy had gone to Rav Belsky throughout the school year for speech therapy.

The *rosh yeshiva* who delivered *shiurim*, sat on *botei din*, was a *rov*, served as a *posek* for the largest international *kashrus* agency, and was a *mohel*, *shochet*, *baal tefillah*, *baal kriah* and father and grandfather to many *talmidim* and a large family, carved out time to administer speech therapy as well.

He comprehended greatness where it was, and had compassion and understanding for all of Hashem’s beings. He cared for all, loved all, and was treasured by all who knew

Rav Binyomin Wilhelm’s eldest grandson was Rav Belsky, who inherited his *achrayus* and strength. No challenge was too intimidating, no charge too daunting. He trained young *mashgichim* in the complexities of machinery and equipment, taught young *shochtim* and *mohalim* how to excel in their *melechahs hakodesh*, answered the most complicated and thorny medical *shailos*, and helped doctors understand the interface between medicine and *halachah*.

He and his wife had the courage to travel to the Soviet Union when such a journey was fraught with danger, sharing *Toras Hashem* with desperate *neshamos* locked behind the Iron Curtain. In time, when the walls would fall and a stream of Russian Jews would arrive in New York, the connection would be revealed as Divinely ordained. Many new immigrants settled in Kensington, near the *rosh yeshiva*’s home, and he and his wife would emerge as their surrogate parents. For several years, the *rosh yeshiva* led his *Pesach Seder* in three languages - English, Yiddish and the Russian he’d taught himself - in order to accommodate the many guests at his table.

His *rebbe*, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky *zt”l*, the consummate *ish emes*, showered upon this *talmid* the ultimate praise, referring to him as an *ish emes*. His devotion to the truth empowered him to be able to withstand pres-

sure and personal attacks. He was rooted in the words of the *Shulchan Aruch*, his actions defined only by what he saw there.

As strong as he was outside of the classroom, he was soft, gentle and caring when dealing with his *talmidim*. For despite all he did and accomplished, teaching *talmidim* was the crown of his many achievements and

what he viewed as his main obligation in this world. He tolerated their questions, welcomed their difficulties, and was *metzamtzeim* his brilliance to joyfully help a mediocre *bochur* understand *p’shat*, just as he brought his brilliance and encyclopedic knowledge to bear when he would discuss complicated rulings with distinguished colleagues.

His comprehension was so clear that he was able to transmit the knowledge precisely and clearly in a way anyone could understand. He loved people and he loved to learn, so what could be better in life than learning with people and teaching them and explaining the beauty and depth of Torah, *halachah* and *maasei bereishis*?

Following the Second World War, a Holocaust refugee arrived in Bnei Brak with the gold bars he had hidden throughout the war. He related that he was wondering what to do with the gold bars and where to keep them.

“I was walking one night down the street that would come to be named Rechov Chazon Ish, and I met an elderly man who I recognized to be the *Chazon Ish*. I had never met him before, but I had heard that he was a person people went to for *brachos* and *eitzos*, so I decided to ask him what to do with my gold bars.

“He picked up his cane and pointed in the



him that the *bochur* had a severe stutter. The camp’s *rov* had overheard him speaking and approached him, saying, “I can help you. Come to my office.”

Rav Belsky explained that if the boy would come to his office every day, he could cure him from the speech handicap. Camp being camp, as much as the boy wanted to

him, despite his self-effacement.

*Gadlus ha’odam.*

The Satmar Rebbe once commented, “*Oib nisht fahr di alte Vilhelm,*” if not for Rav Binyomin Wilhelm, who established Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, “*volten aleh farvisht gevoren,*” *Yiddishkeit* in America would have been wiped out.

direction of an empty mountain. He said to me, ‘Reb Yaakov Halpern is going to be selling lots on that mountain. Take as much gold as you have and buy property from him.’

“I had come from a different world and didn’t really know who he was. I was furious about his advice. What? Take the gold I risked my life for and invest it in an empty,

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# נפלה עטרת ראשינו

נשארנו המומים ורצוצים,  
על אבידה הגדולה שנאבד ממנו בפתאומים,  
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מורינו ורבינו רועינו ורועה ישראל פאר ראשינו וראש ישיבתנו

## מרחן הגאון האדיר הרב חיים ישראל הלוי בעלסקי זצוקללה"ה

לדאבוננו ולדאבון כל בית ישראל, ה' נר לדגלנו ואור לנתיבתנו מורה דרך החיים לאלפים  
בכל העולם ובפרט לתלמידיו הרבים מהם רבנים ודיינים ומורי הוראה והיו קשורים אליו בלב ונפש,  
ועכשיו נשארו כיתומים ואין אב, כל אחד מהם אבל יחיד עשי, על אבידה שאבד נהי, מי יגלה אורים,  
ומי יתרץ קשים, מי ישדד מעמקים, ומי יראה סתרים, מי יסתת בהרים, ומי יפרק הויות הרבים,  
מי ילחום מלחמתנו וישוב לשערים, מי יגדור גדר ויעמוד בפרץ, ומי ידריך את התלמידים וילמדם דרך ארץ.



אבל בכל צערנו לא שכחנו את משפחתו של הראש הישיבה שיבדלו לחיים טובים,

**האלמנה החשובה תליט"א**

**והבנים והחתנים החשובים שיחיו כל אחד בשמו יתנחם ויבורך,  
מהם רבנים, ראשי כולל, מגידי שיעור, מורי הוראה, ותומכי תורה באופן נפלא  
והבנות והכלות נשי חיל החשובים שיחיו'**

והם מתפלשים באפרים, מרותחים וקרועים, נשברים לשברי שברים,  
המקום ינחם אותם, ויחזקם ויאמצם, שיוכלו להמשיך דרכי אבותם הגדולים, בתורה ועבודה וגמילות חסדים,  
עד שגזכה כולנו יחד לראותו שוב בחיים חיותו בקיום הפסוק הקיצו וירגנו שוכני עפר בביאת גואל צדק  
ובבנין הבית במרום ההרים במהרה בימינו אמן ואמן.

**הרב יוסף סאוויצקי**  
**הרב ישראל הלוי רייזמאן**  
ראשי הישיבה

יצחק הכהן גוטדינער  
מנהל כללי

חיים לעשקאוויטץ גדלי' וויינברגר  
בשם וועד הדירקטורין





dusty hill?

“I didn’t argue with him. I said, ‘Thank you,’ and walked away.

“Halpern was selling property there for next to nothing, but I didn’t buy even one acre from him. Instead, I tried all types of investments, none of which panned out. Had I listened to that old man, oh how wealthy I would be today! I’d be worth millions upon millions.”

The Torah advises us what to invest in, how to live our lives and how to spend our time. Those who follow the Torah and its *gedolim* lead productive lives and merit happiness and *nachas*. The Torah stands as a light post, as a guide in the dark. Those who excel in Torah, the *Chazon Ishes* of every generation, calmly convey its lessons to those fortunate enough to listen.

This *Shabbos*, we read about a people fresh from the inspiration of Sinai learning to incorporate the lofty ideals into the practicalities of monetary dealings, of boundaries and damages. They were given the tools to elevate themselves so that they would approach widows and orphans with *halachah* as their guide, the *dinei haTorah* teaching compassion and heart.

To encompass the fullness of Torah and the grandiosity of *Ma’amad Har Sinai* is to recognize that what we have is a gift from Hashem. It is our duty to use those gifts to perfect the world by studying Torah, living Torah lives, and being affected by it, treating all of humanity as we want to be treated, loving all and being loved by all.

Rav Belsky’s ability to grasp the massive picture never precluded him from seeing the small parts of the intricate puzzle that is Torah. The greater a person is in Torah, the more humble he is. Rav Belsky was as humble and simple as can be. As great as he was in learning, as brilliant as his mind was, that is how diffident he was.

How appropriate for Rav Belsky’s soul to return to its Maker during the week of *Parshas Yisro* and for his *kevu'rah* to take place during the week of *Parshas Mishpotim*. The *parshiyos* that deal with the receipt of the Torah and its practical application to man so typify Rav Belsky.

He was deathly ill four years ago on exactly the same date on which he passed away. But he was spared and given exactly another four years to live, teach, guide, learn and rise. Four years later, 208 *Shabbosos* from when he was clinically dead, he left this earth as we learned the *parsha* of *Kabbolas HaTorah* and *naaseh venishma*.

Life is a matter of perspective. Ours is formed by Torah and *gedolei Torah*. People such as Rav Belsky, who forsook all other careers, had no use for any of life’s pleasures and dedicated themselves to farming in the vineyard of Hashem, propagating his Torah, teaching and guiding others with humility, simplicity, kindness and grandeur. It is people such as he who make our people great and ensure that we remain a *mamleches kohanim vegoy kadosh*.

Rav Belsky wasn’t a throwback to a past generation. He lived here with us until last week. He demonstrated that human greatness can be attained here and now. He showed that we can be humble and walk with Hashem and with all types of people. He raised a generation of children and *talmidim* like he, great and distinguished, dignified and noble.

The story of our nation, the story of our greatness, is the story epitomized by the *rosh yeshiva* of Torah Vodaas, Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky. May his memory be a source of *brochah*.



## A Bris of Chesed

A *talmid* was scheduled to eat the *seudas Shabbos* at the Belsky home. That morning, *rebbe* was to be the *mohel* at a *bris* in the neighborhood, which of course was to be held in the baby’s home. Since the *seudah* would be delayed anyway, the *talmid* accompanied *rebbe* to the *bris*.

As they entered the home, the poverty of the family was painfully obvious. The room where the *bris* was to take place served as the dining room, living room, den, homework corner, and quite possibly as a bedroom, too. The lighting was extremely poor, since the meager fixture was set off to one side of the room, yet it sufficed for the *bris*, since sunlight poured through the window.

The next day, a local electrician showed up at the house, and told the family that Rav Belsky had hired him to pull a new electric line for a light, and he told him exactly which area to place it in which would be optimal for the children to do their homework. The entire job, including the cost of a fixture adequate to light the room for the children’s homework, had been paid for by Rav Belsky.





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MAY HE BE A MEILITZ YOSHER FOR HIS FAMILY,  
FOR HIS TALMIDIM WHOM HE HELD SO DEAR,  
AND FOR K'LAL YISROEL.

*Rabbi Mordechai German*  
Dean

*Rabbi Yaakov Gifter*  
Executive Director





# Our Debt to Rav Belsky zt"l

Although it is forbidden to give a *hesped* on *Shabbos*, each time I tried to speak of something else this past *Shabbos* (four times), my words involuntarily returned to Rav Yisroel Belsky zt"l. I know that there are many biographical articles this week, many uplifting anecdotes and stories. They should all be read and studied, for each one is a *maaseh rav*, an example of how to live like a Torah Jew, how to make a *kiddush Hashem*, how to treat people, how to teach Torah, and so much more.

Last summer, after spending a *Shabbos* with Rav Belsky at Camp Agudah, I wrote in these pages about the great *zechus* of watching him in his glory, answering *shailos* and giving *hadrachah*. I cherish those moments ever more now that he is gone, as many of his *talmidim* have confided in me this week as well about their own experiences. The practical lessons in *kashrus*, *shechitah*, spotting the constellations on a clear camp night, learning *dikduk* just from hearing his magisterial *laining*, even remembering how to be a color war general the Torah way, are lessons thousands will never forget. His mastery of scientific fact, such as astronomy, when filtered through a *daas Torah* mind, was quite unique in our time and remains a living lesson to many in understanding Chazal's words that "istakel b'Oraisa ubara alma – the Torah is the blueprint of the world."

I will leave the biographical material to the biographers and the reminiscences to those who were privileged to know him well. I am not capable of an evaluation, nor is anything I write here meant to detract from any of his multitude of other accomplishments and extraordinary *middos*. I would merely like to help us all define the loss and what we can possibly do to restore some of the ways in which we have been diminished. Perhaps doing that will also be an *aliyah* for his great *neshamah*.

Rav Belsky harkened back to an era when the *poskim* of the generation on practical matters of *halachah* were also the *roshei yeshiva* who said *shiurim* to *talmidim* and wrote *chiddushei Torah* on *Shas*. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, who published his masterful *Igros Moshe* series on *halachah lemaaseh*, was also the author of *Dibros Moshe* on *Shas*, comprising his *shiurim* at Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim. In Eretz Yisroel, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l was a leading *rosh yeshiva* and one of the acknowledged *poskei hador*. Although in recent years it has been less common for one person to incorporate these two disciplines, Rav Belsky gave us a glimpse of how the grandeur of knowing *Shas* had always been followed by the phrase "and *poskim*." The Dirshu movement and other trends in the popularization of learning *halachah* have begun to restore the ancient glory of being able to learn virtually every aspect of Torah from one person.

The loss of Rav Belsky is a clear blow to the newly rediscovered need for every *Yid* to know the basics of everyday *halachah*. We know from many of our *gedolim* (*Mesilas Yeshorim*, beg. of chapter 12, Rav Yisroel Salanter, *Iggeres Hamussar*, *Mishnah Berurah*, introduction to *Hilchos Shabbos*, *Chazon Ish*, *Emunah Ubitachon* 4:18) that one who has not learned a particular area of *halachah* is doomed to transgress its laws. Furthermore, they all point out that even

from a *mussar* standpoint, there is nothing like *halachah* to sensitize us to the gravity of a particular *aveirah*. It is not for me to, *chas veshalom*, comment upon the decisions of *gedolei Yisroel* who choose not to engage in the special area of *p'sak*, but it is clear that we each must achieve a certain baseline of knowledge that will guide us when asking a *shailah* is impractical or impossible. In that area, Rav Belsky taught us all the importance

**Rav Belsky gave us a glimpse of how the grandeur of knowing Shas had always been followed by the phrase "and poskim."**

of learning *halachah lemaaseh*.

Of course, Rav Belsky was extremely demanding of his *talmidim*, his *mashgichim*, and most of all himself. The knowledge had to be complete, understood not just superficially, but in depth and breadth. He taught us

help produce a generation of knowledgeable *baalei batim* and thoroughly trained *poskim*.

As some (see *Even Sapir*, page 216) have interpreted the word *va'atzumim*, from the phrase *otzem einov upiv* – to close one's eyes and mouth, Rav Belsky watched our society with keen eyes and never hesitated to speak his mind when he felt that *tochachah* or condemnation was necessary.

Along similar lines, there is a Chassidic interpretation of a well-known *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 114a, *Taanis* 10b): "Who is considered a *talmid chochom*? One who is asked about any *halachah* and he answers." The Kotzker Rebbe is reputed to have explained dryly, "It does not say that he *knows* the answer. The *Gemara* stresses that he is actually willing to take a stand and give the answer. That was Rav Belsky, unafraid to give an answer and to stand by its ramifications. These are traits that we can each attempt, with care and sensitivity, to emulate.

The fact that Rav Belsky paved a road for himself, which we can all follow in some way, should not be a surprise. The *Zohar Hakadosh* (1:175b) teaches that the verse we recite at every *siyum* on a volume of *Gemara*, "behishalechecha tancheh osach – when you go forth it will guide you," refers to "everyone who works hard to learn Torah, when he leaves the world, his soul will travel along those roads he toiled in Torah in this world... Those who have not worked hard in Torah and have not discovered the paths of the Torah will be lost when they reach the next world and calamities will befall them." Rav Belsky was not only a builder, but a trailblazer in many areas, charting roads and avenues from which we have all benefitted. Indeed,

zt"l, Rav Aharon points to the ascension of Eliyahu Hanovi to heaven as a paradigm for the *petirah* of all future *tzaddikim*. Just before Eliyahu ascends, he offers his *talmid*, Elisha, the fulfillment of a request. Elisha asks, "May twice as much as your spirit be mine" (*Melachim* II 2:9). Eliyahu answers that while he is still in this world, he cannot grant him this request. However, "if you see me taken from you, it shall be so for you." Rav Aharon derives from here and other sources that "not only does the passing of *tzaddikim* require contemplation, it affords a tremendous opportunity to cleave to their *madreigah*" (*Mishnas Rebbe Aharon* 3:212). Not *despite* the tragedy, but ironically *because* of it, we can and must seize the opportunity to identify with the work and teachings of Rav Belsky.

My *rebbe*, Rav Yitzchok Hutner zt"l, also noted this phenomenon upon the *petirah* of his own *rebbe*, the Alter of Slabodka zt"l. Writing from Chevron in 5687 (1927), he relates that "During the past year, many basic matters of *hashkafah* that he [the Alter] had labored to explain to me and that I was unable to absorb properly suddenly became absolutely clear to me upon his passing" (*Pachad Yitzchok*, *Igros Ukesavim*, page 251). In another letter of the same time (page 253), he references the saying of Chazal (*Chulin* 7a) that "Tzaddikim are even greater in death than they were during their lifetimes."

On the *yahrtzeit* of the Brisker Rov, Rav Aharon added that people make the mistake of thinking that someone who is surrounded by the "four *amos* of *halachah*" (*Brachos* 8a) is limited in his scope and "locked into a particular perspective." He forcefully reminds us that those who spend their lives



all, by example, the lesson of the *Gemara's* (*Sotah* 22a) interpretation of Shlomo Hamlech's wise words (*Mishlei* 7:26): "For she has felled many victims; *va'atzumim* the number of her slain is huge." The *Gemara* explains "many victims" to apply to one who gives *halachic* rulings but is not yet ready, and "the number of her slain" as those who are capable of giving a ruling but refrain from doing so. These two counterparts define in many ways what Rav Belsky tried to correct with our system.

Rav Belsky did not suffer unprepared *talmidim* or *rabbanim* for that matter gladly. On the other hand, he worked valiantly to

as the earliest *seforim* write, his name – our name – Yisroel, stands for "yeish shishim ribui osiyos laTorah – there are 600,000 letters in the Torah," corresponding to the basic six hundred thousand souls comprising the nation. Each one of us occupies a unique and distinct section of the Torah, which we are obligated to develop and nurture until it grows to its full potential. That was another lesson from Rav Belsky that we should all attempt to emulate.

Finally, we may take direction from Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l concerning how to relate to the *petirah* of *gedolim*. In his *hesped* on his father-in-law, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer

immersed in *halachah* gain a *halichos olam*, a clear field of view of everything in the universe (*Brachos* 64a). That was certainly Rav Belsky. Whether looking into a telescope or a microscope, his vision was that of the eternal *einei ha'eidah*, the elders of *Klal Yisroel* who see far and guide us accordingly.

At this point, by concentrating on *halachah* in all its detail, attempting to emulate Rav Belsky's multiple teachings, we can grow exponentially in our own *Yiddishkeit* and hopefully help his *neshamah* ascend to the *Kisei Hakavod*, where he will surely be a powerful *meilitz yosher* for all of us.

*Yehi zichro boruch.*





## הורם הנזר והוסרה העטרה

בחרדת לב ודאבון נפש  
הננו מעטרפים לאבלו הגדול של עולם התורה והיהדות הנאמנה  
בהסתלקותו של אחד מגדולי הדור ופאריו  
אשר קיבץ וריבץ ועשה הרבה פעלים לתורה ולביעור חומות הדת  
הגאון המופלא, תמים בדרכיו וחסיד במעשיו

## מרן רבי חיים ישראל בעלסקי זצ"ל ראש ישיבת תורה ודעת

הוא הגבר הקים עולה של תורה והוראה  
וזכינו שבין שאר פעליו המרובים שם לבו  
לסייע ולעודד את עבודת הקודש של "שובו"  
כאשר ראה וקיבל מרבו – מייסדנו מרן הגר"א פאם זצוק"ל

תנחומינו שלוחים בזה למשפחתו הרוממה, לאלפי תלמידיו  
ולכל אשר דבר ה', תורתו וחכמיו, יקר בעיניו

ויה"ר שמיתת עדיק תכפר על כל בית ישראל  
ובגן-עדנו יליץ יושר שנראה מהרה בעחמת ציון וירושלים  
בשוב ה' שבות עמו

הרב אהרן פאם – הרב דוד פאם – הרב אשר פאם  
אברהם בידרמאן ויוסף האך  
בשם הנהלת שובו חזון אברהם



# Shouldering a Nation's Burdens

Upon graduating high school, Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky *zt"l* received a full scholarship from New York State to attend college and was under tremendous pressure to take advantage of the opportunity. His higher education would have been fully paid for, but he wished to learn in *yeshiva*, so he sent a letter to the state requesting a one-year deferment. While such scholarships at the time were use-it-or-lose-it offers, Rav Belsky, recognized for his absolute brilliance, was granted the deferment. Twelve months later, wishing to learn for another year, he again requested a deferment. This time, he was turned down by New York State.

[It was due to Rav Belsky that the scholarship board ultimately changed its rules, and instituted that those who choose to focus on Talmudical studies in a post-high school program can be granted a deferment until they are ready for college. An employee of the Board of Education later

discovered that Rav Belsky's name is actually referenced in the recording of this rule change.]

As his son, Reb Tzvi, described at the *levayah*, in exchange for not pursuing higher education, Rav Belsky acquired *kol haTorah kulah*: *Tanach, Shishah Sidrei Mishnah, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, Tosefta, Medrash, Rambam, Shulchan Aruch, Rishonim, Acharonim*, and other *si-frei kodesh*. He became a master of Torah, one of the great Torah minds of his day.

At the same time, ironically enough, Reb Tzvi pointed out, Rav Belsky also acquired biology, chemistry, physics, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, astronomy, botany, poetry and other subjects in the realms of science, math, English, and history.

Legend had it that Rav Belsky earned a perfect score on his SAT exam. When my friend, Rabbi Elli Bohm, asked Rav Belsky if this was true, Rav Belsky just smiled and

said humbly, "They had a different point system back then."

Interestingly, as Reb Tzvi attested at the *levayah*, Rav Belsky's children never saw their father studying these subjects. He was always observed learning Torah. All he was interested in was Torah. His extended knowledge was an outgrowth of his *ahavas haTorah, ahavas Hashem* and Torah brilliance. Everything he knew came from his wide-ranging knowledge of Torah, which he had mastered at an astoundingly young age.

Beyond acquiring his vast knowledge, when he passed on his scholarship for higher education, Rav Belsky took a path that led to him becoming a *gadol b'Yisroel*, a Torah giant of epic proportions, a leader of men, whose courage and *ehrllichkeit* complemented his unbelievable *yedios haTorah*.

Friends of mine who were close *talmidim* of his often told me that they always

hear people commenting on Rav Belsky's brilliance, breadth of knowledge, and grasp of every *sugya* imaginable, but they felt strongly that his *tzidkus* was no less remarkable. He was a *tzaddik yesod olam*, whose every move was governed by *halachah* and whose every decision was dictated by what would ultimately increase *kavod Shomayim*, come what may.

He was a *gadol* in Torah.

He was a *gadol* in *tzidkus*.

And when Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky *zt"l* was once asked about Rav Belsky, he described him to Rav Bezalel Rudinsky with two words: *ish emes*.

A man of truth, perhaps the greatest appellation of all.

I feel somewhat strange writing this tribute, because I was never a *talmid* of Rav Belsky. So many people learned by the *rosh yeshiva* and spoke to him on a regular basis. I was not fortunate to be among them. Yet, in so many ways, he *was* my





כסא דנחמתא  
אל השמועה המחרידה כל לב ישראל  
כי נצחו אראלים את המצוקים ונשבה ארון הקודש  
בהסתלקותו לשמי מרום של  
רב האי גאון אדיר בתורה, צדיק נשגב מושל ביראת אלקים  
אשר הפליא בהרבצת תורה והארת ד' אמות של הלכה  
ברזב גאון ובעמידתו על משמר קדשי בית ישראל  
ה"ה

מרן הגאון הצדיק מוהר"ר

## חיים ישראל בעלסקי זצ"ל

ראש ישיבת תורה ודעת

הננו בברכת תנחומין לבניו וביתו אחריו  
וכל מרבית מקהלות רבבות תלמידיו ומושפעי  
זבתוכם ייזכרו לטוב  
חתנו הרגול מרבבה, שר הצדקה והחסד  
איש החזון והמעש, הוא שח ויהי  
מוה"ר שלמה יהודה רעבניץ שליט"א  
ורעייתו הכבודה אשת חיל, יראת ה' היא תתהלל  
המשקיעה אונה והונה ודם לבבה למען משפחות "בוני עולם"  
מרת תמרה שתחי' לאוי"ט:

תגן נא זכותו של הנפטר הגדול  
על כל בית ישראל הנתונים בכל מיני צרה וצוקה  
ומורשתו הנפלאה בתורה והעמדת הדת על תילה  
תוסיף להתברך בכרם בית ישראל  
ובזכותה ידובבו שפתיו במרום  
ללמד זכות של פדות וישע על עם עני ואביון  
להיוושע במהרה בתשועת עולמים  
אכי"ר!



בוני עולם  
BONEI OLAM



rebbe, through his *shiurim*, his *p'sakim*, and his *talmidim* who I am close to who constantly share his wisdom with me. In so many ways, I felt like a *talmid*.

As did much of *Klal Yisroel*.

He was a *yochid bedoro*, a legend in his own time, a humble leader who guided and advised *Klal Yisroel* with clarity and wholesomeness.

*Klal Yisroel's* problem was his problem.

*Klal Yisroel's* adherence to *halachah* was his worry.

*Klal Yisroel's nitzrachim* were his concern.

He was a father to one and all.

The stories related by his children are enlightening. They demonstrate that he taught by example, constantly learning even though he had already mastered *kol haTorah kulah* at a young age.

He practiced what he preached publicly, yet to his children, he didn't preach what he practiced. They saw it on their own. It was the most powerful form of *chinuch*, as he was a living embodiment of everything he espoused and believed.

Rav Belsky maintained a level of *gevurah* at all times, notwithstanding various challenges and opposition, because he was singularly focused on fulfilling Hashem's will. There was never any other motive or agenda. His every act and every decision was carried out with such purity.

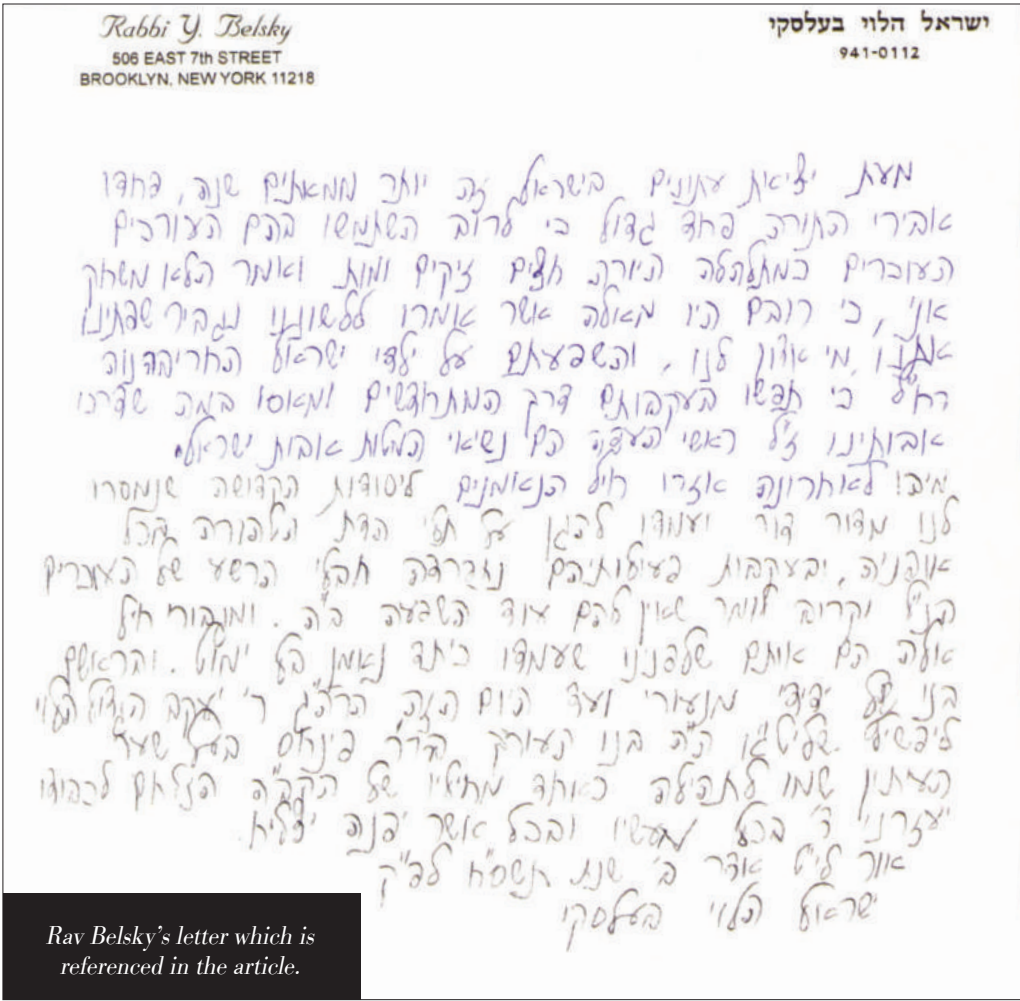
He was a *gadol* who was cloaked in the garb of one of us. He was a regular, approachable person, who spoke our language and understood how to relate to the *hamon am*. But he was so far removed from us. He was in a different stratosphere of greatness. This dichotomy was always astounding.

Many people know the story of Rav Belsky spotting a formation of stars in the sky that appeared out of place, an observation confirmed by NASA, whose experts said that it was the rarest of phenomena. Fewer people know stories like the one his son related at the *levayah* about a *talmid* of Rav Belsky who felt compelled to let go of one of his employees, who continually spoke disparagingly of Rav Belsky despite being asked not to. It was none other than Rav Belsky to whom the employee turned to help get him reinstated. Rav Belsky begged his *talmid* to rehire the fellow and not to worry about the fact that the man had spoken derogatorily about him.

Many people are aware of the fact that Rav Belsky dispensed a tremendous amount of *tzedakah* over the years, often making \$20 his minimum donation to any person in need. Those less informed assumed that Rav Belsky had a fund of some kind and received money from others to give out as *tzedakah*. The fact of the matter was that Rav Belsky, for whom *parnassah* was so often a struggle, gave the *tzedakah* from his very own pocket. This was the case for decades.

His two most precious roles, among the many that he filled, were father and *rebbe*. He was a devoted father to his own *mishpachah* and a loving *rebbe* to his *talmidim*, constantly worrying about their welfare.

Those who went to meet with him at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas did so in his "office" - except that he had no office. His "office" was his *shiur* room. This, in many ways, was so apropos. It reflected how available he made himself to people and, also, the fact that he felt that



Rav Belsky's letter which is referenced in the article.

his place was in his *shiur* room, where he taught and guided *talmidim* of all ages. That was his place of comfort, his place of fulfillment. For many, there was nothing more exhilarating or comforting than spending time in that classroom, as Rav Belsky, sitting behind his desk, perhaps stirring a coffee as he spoke, dispensed wisdom, *halachic* expertise and warmth in his calm, soft-spoken manner.

I recall meeting Rav Belsky over fifteen years ago, when I was a *bochur* learning at Yeshiva Torah Temimah. A friend and I made the short walk to Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, where we met Rav Belsky in his *shiur* room. He gave of his precious time to review a *halachah* article I had written. My legs were quivering as Rav Belsky sat in front of me, graciously reading my writings. And then he came upon something I wrote that he gently pointed out was incorrect. Woe-fully incorrect.

With immense patience, he proceeded to go through the *sugya* from the beginning, clarifying and edifying. Like he did throughout his life, this *gadol baTorah* sat and explained to a simple *yeshiva bochur* principles and basics of *halachah* that were so clear and obvious to him, with tolerance and serenity. He was calm and collected.

It was only afterward, when I sat down to relearn the *sugya*, that I realized how much I had missed the boat. The mistake I had made was so elementary, and yet the great *rosh yeshiva*, in his humility and with his love for *bnei Torah*, didn't indicate how ignorant I had been. Instead, like a caring *rebbe*, he gave of time he didn't have, to a *ben Torah* he didn't know, to break down the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *nosei keilim*, point by point, by heart, ensuring that I understood everything correctly.

I fast forward about a decade. I had undertaken a project for the *Yated* and contacted Rav Belsky to ask that he write a letter. The ease with which I was able to contact the *rosh yeshiva* via telephone was always mind-boggling to me. Rav Belsky was as gracious as could be, while I again felt guilty taking up his time for what was a relatively trivial matter compared to the weighty issues with which most of his time was occupied. I visited his home several times until I was able to gain an audience with him, mainly because, in each instance, a matter of urgency that was *klal*-related kept him unavailable.

On one morning visit, I was told to return at night and the *rosh yeshiva* would make time for me. I arrived at his home at approximately 11 p.m. It was clear from the continuous discourse emerging from the Belsky dining room that the *rosh yeshiva* was presiding over a pressing matter, a *din Torah* of sorts, and so, recognizing my place, I waited outside. It was well past midnight when the *rosh yeshiva* warmly welcomed me into his home. Despite the tense and stressing nature of the meeting Rav Belsky had just participated in, he was as calm as a human being could be, making small talk and ensuring that I was comfortable. He then asked me about the nature of the letter that needed to be written and proceeded to write it, patiently and with concentration. I looked at my watch. It was 1 a.m. He wasn't rushed and never gave me the feeling that I was wasting his time. He reminisced about his younger years at Torah Vodaas as he wrote. When his pen ran out, he made a lighthearted quip and asked if it was okay that the second portion of the let-





שר וגדול נפל בישראל

# THE ORTHODOX UNION

**MOURNS THE ENORMOUS LOSS OF OUR  
SENIOR POSEK**

הגאון הגדול

מורנו הרב חיים ישראל בעלסקי זצ"ל

**RAV BELSKY'S MONUMENTAL CONTRIBUTIONS  
TO THE WORLD OF KASHRUS LEAVE  
AN EVERLASTING LEGACY**

**KLAL YISRAEL HAS LOST THE  
TRUEST PERSONIFICATION OF ITS  
THREE FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS**  
תורה עבודה וגמילות חסדים

RABBI MENACHEM GENACK

Chief Executive Officer

RABBI MOSHE ELEFANT

Chief Operating Officer

HARVEY BLITZ

Chairman OU Kashrus

MARTIN NACHIMSON

President

ALLAN FAGIN

Executive Vice President





ter would be in a different colored ink. He then completed the letter and warmly wished me *hatzlachah*.  
 What is extraordinary is not this solitary exchange, but the fact that this type of thing happened every day, day after day, for years and years, with all types of people, from all types of backgrounds, for all types of causes, and the *rosh yeshiva* never got flustered or overwhelmed. He was a picture of the peace and tranquility of one who lives for others and gives of his time, despite, or because of, the fact that he is a *gadol baTorah*.  
 Rav Belsky was one of the greatest Torah minds of his generation, a preeminent *posek* and *rosh yeshiva* whose guid-

ance was sought by tens of thousands of Jews across the globe. His genius was unparalleled and his breadth of knowledge unsurpassed in his time.  
 At the same time, in addition to his *gadlus* in Torah, Rav Belsky possessed a heart that was open to all Jews, and he gave of his time, wisdom and abilities to help people from across the spectrum of *Yiddishkeit*. Despite the great burdens he carried on his shoulders, guiding so many Jews in so many different facets of life, Rav Belsky continued to extend himself on behalf of others, opening his home to people who came to him for help. His home was a veritable *reshus harabim*.  
 While all he wished to do was sit and

learn the Torah that was so beloved to him, he sacrificed his time to *pasken shailos* and answer *halachah* queries on a continuous basis. From early morning until well past midnight, Rav Belsky was working on behalf of *Klal Yisroel*, serving as a *shliach Hashem* and imparting advice and guidance from his wellspring of Torah knowledge.  
 Whether it was the writers of the ArtScroll Schottenstein *Gemara* or other *talmidei chachomim* seeking clarity in some of the most esoteric *sugyos* in *Shas*, Rav Belsky was *the* address. Those who spoke to him came away stunned by his brilliance and aptitude, and touched by the manner in which he articulated himself.

A friend of mind, Rav Menachem Savitz, was a member of a group of *bochurim* who participated in the Masmidim program at Camp Agudah in Ferndale, NY, during its first years. He recalled one particular incident from 30 years ago that reflects the manner in which Rav Belsky displayed his deep humility while demonstrating his love and sensitivity for every *Yid*.  
 The *bochurim* in the Masmidim program asked Rav Belsky if they could go on a trip. Rav Belsky suggested that they visit Niagara Falls. Before they departed on the lengthy drive, Rav Belsky indicated that they should take along a handicapped camper who was wheelchair-bound. Despite the great challenges involved, Rav



# כי גדול כוס שברנו



הנהלת בית מדרש גבוה, ועד הנאמנים  
רבנן ותלמידיהון,  
יחד עם כל עולם התורה די בכל אתר ואתר  
משתתפים בצער העמוק בהלקח מאתנו ספר תורה חי,

## הגאון הגדול הר"ר חיים ישראל הלוי בעלסקי זצוקל"ה

### ראש ישיבת תורה ודעת

מי יתן לנו תמורתו, הן בהישג ידו בכל מכמני התורה  
והעמדת תלמידים הרבה,  
הן בהדרכתו לכלל ולפרט, הן בתחומי הכשרות  
ועמידה על משמר חומת הדת.

נשגר בזה כסא דנחמתא למשפחתו הדגולה, ויהי נא למליץ עבור  
אשתו שתחי' ובניו ובנותיו וחתניו  
שינחמם בעל הנחמות ויאזרו חיל להיאחז בדרכו ולהמשיך באורחותיו.  
המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים  
ולא תוסיפו לדאבה עוד,

אסיף נא יאלף קול  
במחנה ה' עמך  
ארי' מלביא' קוטלר  
בלאאמו"ר הגרי"ח ש' זצוק"ל

ירוחם אולשין | דוד עבי שוסטאל | ישראל עבי ניומאן | מתתיהו חיים סלומון



Belsky gave his assurance that he would take care of this camper's needs. The members of the group were perhaps less than excited to be encumbered by the presence of this camper, but they saw the love and care that the *rosh yeshiva* expressed and they understood that it was the right thing to do.

Upon arriving in Niagara, one of the outings the boys went on was the Cave of the Winds, a thrilling experience that begins with an elevator ride 175 feet down into the Niagara Gorge, where, in ponchos and specially-designed sandals, guests stand a few breathtaking feet from the torrents of Niagara Falls.

Seeing the young camper in his wheelchair, one of the Cave of the Winds staff members regretfully informed Rav Belsky that the boy wouldn't be able to participate and someone would have to remain behind with him. Rav Belsky immediately encouraged the rest of the group to go ahead and said that he would remain with the camper. At that moment, however, Rav Belsky noticed a father lifting his young son on to his shoulders and head to the attraction. Turning to the guide, Rav Belsky asked if it would be okay for him to carry his disabled camper on his shoulders.

Looking at the bearded rabbi with surprise, the staff member asked, "But he's dead weight. How in the world can you carry him?"

Rav Belsky told him not to worry. Once permission had been granted, Rav Bel-

sky proceeded to lift his beloved camper on his shoulders and walk ahead, as he did his best to catch up to the Masmidim group. The giant of Torah made the beleaguered camper on his shoulders feel like a giant as well, enabling him to take part in the Cave of the Winds experience.

For Rav Belsky, nothing was unbecoming for his stature or beyond his reach if it could make a positive difference for a *yochid* or the *rabim*. That was precisely one aspect of his greatness. He allowed his various positions and roles, and his ability to bring himself down to the level of one and all, to sometimes divert our attention from the fact that he was one of the *gedolei hador*, a living *Sefer Torah*, who had every word of Hashem embedded in his mind and heart, the very heart that was open to *Klal Yisroel*.

And to a disabled camper.

A camper who sat on the shoulders that carried the burdens of *Klal Yisroel*.

Shoulders that were at times frail and weighed down by tremendous *yissurim*, but almost miraculously never ceased carrying the concerns, worries and responsibilities of a nation.

Who can replace him?

TRANSCRIBED BY RABBI MOSHE SHOCHET

# “Believe in Every *Talmid*”

*The following is a portion of a message delivered by Rav Yisroel Belsky zt”l at a Yeshiva Torah Vodaas “Shabbos of Chinuch and Chizuk”*

A *rebbe* has to not only love every *talmid*, even the difficult ones, but also believe in every *talmid*. Even if the *talmid* does not believe in himself, when he sees you believing in him, that will give him a healthy self-esteem to begin believing in himself.

A *rebbe* has to see potential *kochos* and *kishronos* in a child. Even if the student resists your efforts, don't give up on anyone. A *rebbe* who is cynical and comes down on a *talmid* does not belong teaching. *Talmidim* who are not *matzliach* may be [suffering] because in the past a parent, *rebbe* or friend was too cynical toward him and told him that he wouldn't amount to anything.

A *talmid* might not realize that he has inner abilities. As a *rebbe*, you can bring that out of him, and your efforts never go to waste. Years later, you may be surprised to see him grow into a *talmid chochom*. If you believe in your *talmidim*, they'll see themselves in a different light.

A *rebbe* must never be angry at a student. Outwardly he can show that he's upset with him, but never in his inner heart. You must not be jealous of a *talmid*; in fact, a *talmid* is supposed to *shteig* more than the *rebbe*.





BAIS MEDROSH ELYON



בית מדרש עליון

אנו משגרים כוס תנחומין  
למשפחת ראש ישיבת תורה ודעת,

הגאון הגדול

מגדולי פוסקי דורנו

**ר' ישראל בעלסקי זצ"ל**

שבבחרותו למד בישיבתנו הקדושה

וזכה לשמש רבותיו מרגן הגאונים הגדולים

ר' ראובן גראזאווסקי זצ"ל

ור' ישראל חיים קפלן זצ"ל

והיה משומעי שעוריו של

מרגן הראש הישיבה הגאון ר' דן זצ"ל

וסייע רבות אף בענייני החזקת ישיבתנו הקדושה

ושוב עלה ונתעלה עד שנעשה ביתו לתל תלפיות

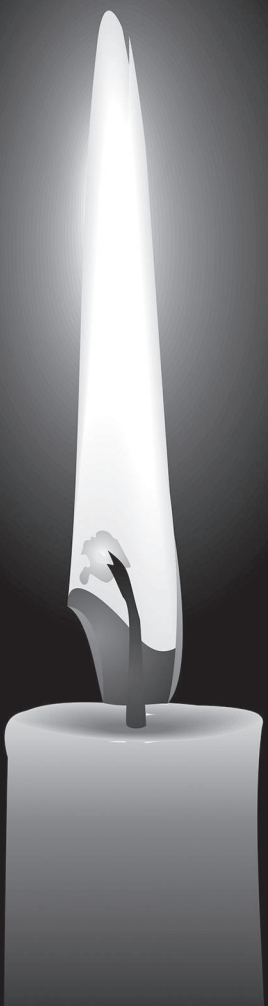
לכל מבקש דבר ד' זו הלכה,

וזכה להעמיד דור של בנין וחתנין

גדולי תורה ויראה ומחזיקי תורה,

ונזכה להבטחת הנביא ובלע המות לנצח וגו', אכי"ר.

הנהלת בית מדרש עליון





# A Unique and Remarkable Combination of *Moach V'Lev*, Intellect and Heart

*Klal Yisroel* sustained a crushing loss this past Thursday with the passing of Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky *zt"l*, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas. Rav Belsky was a *gadol* who can truly be described as an *ish ha'eshkolos*, a person whose multifaceted personality contained myriad remarkable qualities and talents rarely found in one person. He was a *gaon* in all areas of Torah, even obscure subjects that few sought to learn and understand. He was a great *rosh yeshiva* in the conventional sense of the term, delivering *shiurim* to generations of *talmidim* and playing a vital role in the success and viability of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas. He was a devoted *rebbe* who loved every *talmid*. He was a *posek* with broad shoulders who undertook the *achrayus* of ruling on the most difficult *halachic* matters with great courage and leadership.

He was also a *baal chessed* on a level that is simply difficult to describe. His heart pulsed with *rachmonus* and love for his fellow Jew, embracing all *Yidden*, especially broken-hearted souls who no one else would look at. He was *ah gutte mentch* who couldn't bear to see *Yidden* in pain,

make one a *gadol*. A *gadol* needs to be an innovator who possesses courage and leadership. These were the traits that characterized Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky."

Indeed, with his passing while still in the prime of his *hashpa'ah*, *Klal Yisroel* has lost a unique combination of *lev* and *moach*, heart and intellect, that is rarely found in one person. When the great *rosh yeshiva* was buried on Sunday evening on Har Hamenuchos, the holy earth of Eretz Yisroel accepted a *guf* that had been born and raised in America, a *guf* that managed to reach the levels of Torah, *avodah* and *gemillus chassodim* of generations past.

## Scion of Pioneering American Torah Families

Rav Belsky was born on August 22, 1938. His parents were Rav Berel and Mrs. Chana Tzirel Belsky. Both his father's family, the Belskys, and his mother's family, the Wilhelms, were among the pioneering Torah families in America in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. His maternal grandfather, Rav Binyomin Wilhelm, was the founder of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas. His mother's older

to him by his ancestors.

His father, Rav Berel, after learning in Torah Vodaas, journeyed to far-off Europe to learn in the famed Radin Yeshiva during the lifetime of the *Chofetz Chaim*. He never tired of relating his experiences in Radin and the unique perspective of an American going to learn in the very different atmosphere of the pre-war European *yeshivos*. This, too, became part of Rav Yisroel Belsky's *mesorah*.

## His Early Years: Growth and Sacrifice

Rav Belsky grew up in Williamsburg and spent his formative years at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas. He did not merit learning under Rav Reuven Grozovsky, *rosh yeshiva* of Torah Vodaas, but as a young *bochur* served Rav Reuven during the latter's illness after a stroke. Rav Belsky would often relate how once, when he was washing Rav Reuven's hands after Rav Reuven had already put on his *tefillin*, he inadvertently spilled water on the *rosh yeshiva*. He was terribly embarrassed, but Rav Reuven proceeded to ask him how he was doing and

Medrash Elyon and son-in-law of the Mirrer *mashgiach*, Rav Yeruchem Levovitz.

Rav Belsky had a tremendous *bittul* to his *rabbeim*, and later in life, he wouldn't budge when it came to issues or *kabbalos* that he had learned and received from them. He would often quote his *rabbeim*, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, Rav Yisroel Chaim Kaplan and Rav Moshe Feinstein. It was clear that they served as lifelong guides and sources of inspiration to him.

Upon graduating from Torah Vodaas high school, he earned such a high mark on his SAT exam that the Board of Education thought it impossible and concluded that he must have been cheating. They made him retake the test under supervision. When he received a perfect score, he was given a full university scholarship.

In the 1950s, it was basically a given in the *yeshivos* that even good *bochurim* from the best of families attended college. The *nisayon* was one that we, in our times, simply cannot fully understand. Nevertheless, young Yisroel wanted to learn, and he made what was at the time an unprecedented request to have his scholarship deferred for a



who couldn't tolerate injustice and cruelty, and who would literally become sick trying to ease the pain of the downtrodden and rectify the wrongs done to them.

In the late 1960s, after the passing of Rav Yaakov Teitelbaum *zt"l*, Rav Belsky became *rov* of Camp Agudah. During almost 50 years as the camp's spiritual leader, he changed the face of sleep-away camps for boys in our times by combining new ideals of *limud haTorah* with kosher recreation in a way that had not previously existed.

He was a great *posek* and *mechaber seforim*, as well as an innovator in the field of *kashrus*, serving as a senior *posek* for the Kashrus Division of the Orthodox Union.

His longtime friend, Rav Meir Weinberg, *R"m* at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, said at the *levayah*, "Being great in Torah, *chedes* and *avodah* like Rav Belsky still doesn't

brother was the first *talmid* in the *yeshiva*, and his father, Rav Berel Belsky, was the second. Thus, Rav Yisroel was born into a family that literally blazed the trail for *chinuch al taharas hakodesh* in the spiritually hostile climate of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century America.

His parents and grandparents bucked the prevailing trend and tenaciously held on to their values. It would be these very character traits that would stand out in their son, Rav Yisroel, who had a unique sense of right and wrong, and it was those values that compelled him to stand his ground when necessary in defense of what was right. He also continued the legacy of the family in preserving and cultivating Yeshiva Torah Vodaas as one of America's most distinguished *mekomos haTorah*. He invested his heart and soul into perpetuating the legacy of Torah Vodaas as bequeathed

what he was learning, making small talk with him. Later, he found out that Rav Reuven never talked while wearing *tefillin*, but in order to put the young *bochur* at ease, he forewent this *chumrah*.

His primary *rosh yeshiva*, *rebbe* and guide at Torah Vodaas was Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky. At the *levayah* on Friday at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky, son of Rav Belsky's primary *rebbe*, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, said that despite his genius and greatness in Torah, it was clear that Rav Belsky always had a *rebbe*, lived with the lessons of his *rabbeim*, and distilled the Torah he learned through the prism of the lessons and *hashkafah* that he received from them.

As an older *bochur*, he went to learn at Bais Medrash Elyon in Monsey, where he became a close *talmid* of Rav Yisroel Chaim Kaplan, famed *mashgiach* of Bais

year so that he could continue his studies in *yeshiva*. Although, at that time, deferring a scholarship meant losing it, the university so wanted to have such a prodigy that they acquiesced.

A year later, Rav Belsky requested another deferment, which was declined. He made the decision that he would not take the scholarship, but would instead devote his life to learning and, eventually, to *harbotzas haTorah*. A family member related how for several years thereafter, Rav Belsky would walk around with the scholarship letter in his pocket, and when fellow *bochurim* faced *nisyonos* of whether to go to college or to continue learning, he would remove the letter from his pocket and show them, "Look what I gave up in order to remain in learning! You can do it, too!"

An insight into his own *avodah* as a young man can be gleaned from a story he



The Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation extend their sincerest condolences to the entire Belsky family, on the passing of their esteemed father, the world-renowned *posek* and Rosh HaYeshiva

# HaRav HaGaon R' Yisroel Belsky זצוק"ל

He was distinguished for his incredible intellect and knowledge of Torah and related subjects, and renowned for his incredible courage to stand up what he knew to be true. HaRav HaGaon R' Yisroel זצוק"ל headed a household that was simply overflowing with *tzedakah* and *chessed*, and was personally involved with numerous mosdos and individuals. He leaves behind thousands of talmidim both in Yeshiva Torah V'daas and Camp Agudah, and Klal Yisrael as a whole will feel the impact of the loss of one of our leading Poskim.

בצער רב ובקול אנחה משתתפין  
אנו בצערותן של ישראל בכלל  
ובהמשפחה המתאבלת בפרט  
על האי שופרא דבלי בעפרא  
ועל סילוקן של האי גברא רבא  
מוריננו הראש הישיבה

# הרב הגאון ר' חיים ישראל בעלסקי זצוק"ל

ראש ישיבה תורה ודעת  
ומעמודי הוראה בדורנו  
מי יורה לנו דרך  
מי יעמוד בפרץ!  
מאחלים לנו לכל בני  
המשפחה הדגולה  
שיתנחם בנחמת ציון  
ולא ישמע עוד שבר  
בגבולכם.

May the entire Belsky and Rechnitz *mishpachos* experience a true new *nechamah*  
המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

HaRav HaGaon Shmuel Kamenetsky, shlita  
CHAIRMAN, RABBINICAL BOARD

Michael Rothschild  
DIRECTOR

CHOFETZ CHAIM HERITAGE FOUNDATION



once told his *talmidim* at Camp Agudah. He was on a trip to Niagara Falls with the Masmidim of the camp, and as they approached the falls after a long, multi-hour drive from the Catskills, Rav Belsky insisted on pulling over before the falls came into view and learning with the group. “Learning must come first,” he explained. He then related a story that had transpired with him when he merited visiting Eretz Yisroel in 1972. He had mapped out a whole list of people and *mekomos hakedoshim* to visit. On his way to Yerushalayim, as he was contemplating his packed schedule, the thought suddenly hit him: “What am I doing? I have come to Eretz Yisroel and I will first do other things?! I must set down the roots of spiritual growth first.” When he arrived in Yerushalayim, he put down his suitcases, found a *bais medrash*, and learned for eight hours straight. That was his *shalom aleichem* to Eretz Yisroel, and that is indicative of how he planted roots of Torah and *ruchniyus* in everything he did.

Already as a *bochur*, he earned a name as a tremendous *illui* and *masmid* who literally spent his days and nights in the *bais medrash*. This continued and increased after Rav Belsky’s marriage. In 1962, Rav Belsky received *semichah* from Yeshiva Torah Vodaas and, later, in 1965, he received *semichah* from Rav Moshe Feinstein. His relationship with Rav Moshe continued and blossomed. For years, Rav Belsky would travel to the Lower East Side to ask Rav Moshe *shailos*, to receive *shimush* from him, and to clarify many difficult *halachic* questions. It was not uncommon to hear Rav Belsky say in his later years, “I heard it *mipi kadsho* from Rav Moshe.”

### The Building of a Bayis Ne’eman of Chessed

Rav Belsky’s *shadchan* was his beloved *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky. His parents-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Ben and Rochel Leah Berkowitz, were pillars of the Cincinnati Jewish community. In fact, his father-in-law, together with another Jew, teamed up with Rav Eliezer Silver to establish the Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, which Rebbetzin Miriam Belsky attended as a child. When she finished elementary school, because of the dearth of *chinuch* opportunities in Cincinnati, her parents sent her to Bais Yaakov of Baltimore. The principal of Bais Yaakov at that time was Rav Hirsch Diskin, a son-in-law of Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky. Rav Diskin mentioned the unique qualities of Miriam Berkowitz to Rav Yaakov, and Rav Yaakov *redd* the *shidduch* to the Belskys. The couple’s first meeting took place in Rav Yaakov’s home in Williamsburg.

It is important to note here the instrumental role that Rebbetzin Miriam Belsky *shetichyeh* played in her husband’s myriad undertakings in *harbotzas haTorah* and *cheded*. Firstly, until she took ill a number of years ago, she completely absolved him of all domestic duties. Whether it was shopping, bill-paying or the numerous other tasks pivotal to running a house, she assumed responsibility for all of them, as her husband’s learning was paramount in her eyes. She was, and is, the quintessential *ishah kesheirah*.

In addition, Rav Belsky’s *tzidkus* in bringing home all kinds of broken souls, many of whom ended up even living there for periods of time, was only possible because of Rebbetzin Belsky. She bore the brunt of the difficulties and spent hours listening to the *tzaros* of these broken hearts and souls. She tolerated the difficulty and abuse associated with hosting people who

had been rejected by the rest of society. Their union was truly one that exemplified an authentic Torah partnership in which the *Shechinah* resided. Together, they raised an exemplary Torah family of thirteen children, *bnei* and *bnos Torah*, *talmidei chachomim* and *ehrlische Yidden*.

### The Youngest Rebbe at Mesivta Torah Vodaas

Rav Belsky’s extraordinary career in *harbotzas haTorah* began 52 years ago, when he was called back to Brooklyn from Bais Medrash Elyon after *Pesach bein hazemanim* to take over Rav Zelik Epstein’s *bais medrash shiur*. Rav Zelik was not well that *zeman* and was unable to deliver his daily *shiur*. Rav Belsky was asked to step in. At the time, he was a newly-mar-

At Torah Vodaas, he delivered *shiurim* on literally all areas of Torah. Of course, he gave comprehensive and brilliant *shiurim* on the *yeshivishe masechtos* but he went far beyond that. He also delivered *shiurim* on *Chulin*, *Choshen Mishpat*, *Yoreh Deah*, practical aspects of the laws of *shechitah* and *treifos*, *Chumash*, *Nach*, *dikduk*, astronomy and chemistry as they relate to Torah and *halachah*, and the list goes on.

His son, Rav Aryeh Belsky, said at the *levayah*, “My father lived Torah Vodaas. It was his *makom*. He started his day there every morning, learning at 5 a.m., and it was the center of his *hashpa’ah*.” Indeed, at the *levayah*, his fellow *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Yosef Savitsky, noted that it was Rav Belsky who was instrumental in saving the *yeshiva* during one of its difficult periods and

exclaimed, “He is a *talmid chochom* whom you can question on any area of Torah.”

It is said that every night of his own *sheva brachos*, he delivered a 45-minute in-depth *shiur*, with each night’s *shiur* serving as a continuation of the *shiur* he had said the previous night.

His sheer knowledge was mind-boggling. *Talmidim* from Yeshiva Torah Vodaas and Camp Agudah talk about his riveting *shailos uteshuvos* sessions. Every week, *talmidim* would ask him questions on all four *chalakim* of *Shulchan Aruch*, and he would answer them like a computer, without flinching. One *talmid* said, “We knew that he was a great *anav*, and if he did not know, he would say so, but we could never catch him. He just knew everything.”

A *talmid* from the early years in camp,



ried *yungerman*, barely 25 years old.

At the *levayah*, Rav Belsky’s *talmid* from that period, Rav Elya Brudny, *R”M* at the Mirrer Yeshiva of Brooklyn, related that the *bochurim* enjoyed a remarkable *zeman*. In those days, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas was the *eim hayeshivos*, and this 25-year-old *yungerman*, Rav Belsky, was saying *shiur* to *bochurim* just a few years his junior, and he had a colossal *hashpa’ah* on them. Thus began his many years of *harbotzas haTorah*. Ultimately, he would go on to teach at all levels of Torah Vodaas - *mesivta*, *bais medrash*, and *halachah* - until, with the passing of Rav Avrohom Pam about 15 years ago, he was appointed *rosh yeshiva*.

in ensuring that it remained one of the great *yeshivos* of America.

### Gaon in All Areas of Torah

“The *Rambam* writes about his *rebbe*, the *Ri Migash*, that his intellect was frightening,” said Rav Menachem Genack, CEO of the Orthodox Union’s Kashrus Division, at the *levayah*. “Rav Belsky’s intellect, his extraordinary brilliance and his knowledge of *kol haTorah kulah* and all *chochmos* even remotely associated with Torah, was mindboggling.”

When the *rosh yeshiva* of Torah Vodaas, Rav Reuven Fein, was in the *yeshiva* and one of his sons came from Eretz Yisroel to visit him, he pointed to Rav Belsky and

Rav Menachem Savitz, recalls going on a trip to Niagara Falls with the Masmidim led by Rav Belsky over 30 years ago. “We returned very late to the place where we were sleeping. It was after 2 a.m., and due to the lack of beds, I slept on the floor. It was not so comfortable on the floor and, at about 5 a.m., I woke up tossing and turning. I could not believe my ears or eyes. Rav Belsky was already awake, fully dressed, sitting on his bed immersed in learning. The next morning, I went over and asked him, ‘*Rebbi*, was I dreaming or was *rebbe* learning at 5:00 in the morning?’ He matter-of-factly replied that the early morning is the only time in the day when he can learn uninterrupted. The rest of the day he is disturbed





## אבל גדול ליהודים

שבורים ורצוצים אנו יחד עם אחינו  
כל בית ישראל עטופי יגון קודר

על השבר הנורא אשר  
הושברנו בהסתלקותו לשמי מרום  
של הגאון האדיר, האי גברא רבא,  
מרא דשמעתתא, איש האשכולות

## מרן הרב חיים ישראל הלוי בעלסקי זצ"ל

שנתבקש לישיבה של מעלה  
הרבה לפעול בעד אגודת ישראל  
ובעד כלל ישראל

גדולה האבידה ואין לה תמורה

וכל בית ישראל יבכו את  
השריפה אשר שרף ה'

המקום ינחם את משפחתו הכבודה  
בתוך שאר אבילי ציון וירושלים

אגודת ישראל באמריקה



Camp Agudah  
Machane Ephraim  
Camp Bnos  
Camp Bnoseinu  
Camp Chayl Miriam

OUR HEARTS ARE BROKEN OVER  
THE TRAGIC PASSING OF

## Moreinu Hagaon Harav Chaim Yisroel Belsky זצ"ל

As our beloved Mara D'Asra for 47 years, he  
inspired the campers and staff of Camp  
Agudah with his gadlus baTorah, his  
exceptional midos, warmth and humility.

How we yearn once again to hear his perfect  
leining, his heartfelt tefillos, his sweet  
zemiros. How we will miss seeing him being  
escorted by his beloved masmidim to his  
bungalow after an uplifting seudas Shabbos.  
How we would love to once again hear his  
powerful voice at our end-of-summer  
banquet, imploring his "dear campers" to  
take the lessons of bein adam lachaveiro  
home with them.

Harav Belsky taught through his brilliant  
shiurim and through the essence of his  
beautiful personality.

We will never forget him.

May he be a meilitz yosher for his chashuva  
rebbeztin, who stood by his side with great  
devotion; for his children and grandchildren,  
for his beloved yeshivah, for our camp — for  
which he had such love and served with such  
dedication — and for all of Klal Yisrael.

*Signed with great sorrow,*

**THE CAMP AGUDAH FAMILY**



by the phone and his myriad responsibilities. Thus, it was a *seder* that he would never forego, commenting, ‘Even if I went to sleep at 4:30 a.m., I would still wake up at 5:30 to learn.’”

His close *talmid* and *chavrusah*, Rav Heshy Wolf, related that Rav Belsky’s knowledge of Torah and the way he constantly learned despite his many responsibilities was deeply inspiring and showed how attached he was to Torah. “Every *Yom Tov*, he learned the *masechta* for that *Yom Tov*,” said Rav Wolf. “Every *Shabbos*, he learned parts of *Maseches Shabbos* and *Eruvin*. Thus, every year he completed the entire *Seder Mo’ed*.”

“I remember, on another occasion, we had to go to Monsey for a *nichum aveilim* visit. He gave me the keys to the car and asked me if I could drive. ‘I have to learn some *Mishnayos*,’ he said. During that trip, which took just over an hour, he completed the entire *Maseches Kodshim*.”

On another occasion, Rav Aryeh Malkiel Kotler, *rosh yeshiva* of Bais Medrash Govoah in Lakewood, visited Camp Agudah for *Shabbos*. While there, he gave an in-depth *shiur* to the Masmidim. After the *shiur*, Rav Belsky approached Rav Kotler and proposed that perhaps there was a simpler answer to resolve the difficulties in the *sugya* that Rav Kotler had raised. Later, Rav Kotler remarked said that he had delivered that particular *shiur* seven or eight times previously, and it was a *shiur* into which he had invested tremendous effort. Nevertheless, in a matter of minutes, Rav Belsky proposed a solution that resolved

## Easy Pass

A young man named Eliyahu who attended Sinai Academy received *semichah* from Rabbi Belsky only two years ago. Sinai Academy saw so much promise in Eliyahu that they sent him to Eretz Yisroel to learn. He attended Yeshivat Mikdash Melech in Yerushalayim and after arriving back in New York he became a *talmid* of Rabbi Belsky’s at Torah Vodaath.

Eliyahu had become a *chosson* and wanted to maintain his strong ties to Rabbi Belsky. He asked Rabbi Belsky, “Now that I am getting married, will I still have access to you for my *shailos*?” Rabbi Belsky assured Eliyahu that his door would always be open to him. He said, “You know where I live and you are always welcome. You have an instant easy pass.”

Eliyahu’s wedding was scheduled in the summer. As a general rule, Rabbi Belsky did not travel while he was in camp with his *talmidim*. When Eliyahu approached him to be the *mesader kiddushin*, Rabbi Belsky jumped at the opportunity to be part of Eliyahu’s *simcha*. His very special bond with the boys at Sinai Academy was something he cherished dearly.

Last *Purim*, Eliyahu brought his children to Rabbi Belsky’s home to bring *mishloach manos*. When Rabbi Belsky saw the lovely children he wanted to make them feel special so he took out his harmonica and started playing it for them. The ebullient looks on their faces brought a palpable joy to Rabbi Belsky. He was thrilled that he could bring them and everyone he knew such happiness.



the issues in a much more basic way.

His knowledge of *Tanach* was astounding. He knew *Tanach* almost completely by heart, and the *pesukim* of *Neviim* and *Kesuvim* were constantly on his lips.

On one occasion at Camp Agudah, he went out with the *bochurim* and studied the sky. Rav Belsky began explaining what each star was, when, suddenly, one *bochur* pointed out a certain star, asking what it was. Rav Belsky looked and was stumped. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “That star is not supposed to be there.” The next day, they called NASA and, indeed, they were told that this star was a rare anomaly.

Rav Heshy Wolf related, “I once went collecting *tzedakah* on *Purim*, and the person I approached for money stipulated his giving of a handsome donation on us going through *Shas* and listing every *halachah* *l’Moshe miSinai*. What did I do? I put in a call to Rav Belsky and asked him, ‘*Rebbi*, please tell me every *halachah* *l’Moshe miSinai* beginning with *Maseches Brachos*.’ Rav Belsky started rattling off the *halachos* *l’Moshe miSinai* in *Brachos*, *Shabbos*, and *Eruvin*, one after the other, in rapid fire. We were holding at about thirty, when the *baal habayis* was satisfied and ready to give his donation. The only thing was that Rav Belsky was not satisfied! ‘We are not finished! Let’s go further,’ he said, and he continued to go through *Shas*. Once he started, he wanted to finish the whole thing.”

Rav Moshe Elefant, COO of the OU, related, “Rav Belsky didn’t just know everything. He actually did it. He didn’t just know *hilchos shechitah*; he was a *shochet*.





"כל בית ישראל יבכו את השרפה אשר שרף ה"  
וועד ראשי הישיבות, חברי הוועד וההנהלה של "תורה ומסורה" משתתפים באבל הכבד של כלל ישראל ומבכים  
מרה את האבידה הגדולה בהילקה מקרבינו האי גברא רבה ויקרא, הגאון  
האדיר ורב הפעלים, ממאורי ומנהיגי דורנו ...

## הגאון הרב חיים ישראל הלוי בעלסקי זצלה"ה

רשכבנה"ג, ראש ישיבת "תורה ודעת", מגדולי הפוסקים של יהדות אמריקה, מורה דרך לאלפי תלמידים בכל רחבי  
תבל, עמוד התווך ובריה התיכון בעניני כשרות באמריקה ובייחוד בארגון ה-OU המפורסם, בקי נפלא בכל חדרי  
תורה, איש ישר ואמת למופת...

אוי לספינה שאבד קברניטה.  
לאלמנתו שתה' ושתזכה לרפו"ש, ולכל בני המשפחה הרוממה ...  
המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים ולא תוסיפו לדאבה עוד .

הרב אברהם חיים לוין  
יו"ר וועד ראשי הישיבות

דוד נייאוויטץ  
מנהל



**תורה ומסורה**

Los Angeles Teacher Center, its Staff and Committee

extends deep and heartfelt expressions of  
nechamah to our dear friend and supporter

**TAMAR RECHNITZ**

and the entire Belsky Family

on the loss of their beloved and esteemed father

**HARAV CHAIM YISROEL HALEVI BELSKY** ז"ל

The Los Angeles Teacher Center of Torah Umesorah and all of  
Klal Yisrael mourn the loss of this great Gadol B'Yisroel.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

*Mrs. Libby Engel*

Director, Torah Umesorah Los Angeles Teacher Center



He didn't just know *hilchos milah*; he was a *mohel*. His knowledge of Torah was *limud al menas laasos*."

He once gave a young *talmid chochom* a piece of advice, saying, "The only way that you will truly be able to learn, know and *pasken* is if you take off your *kapote* and get your hands dirty!"

All of Rav Belsky's genius and remarkable knowledge would have come to nothing if not for his tremendous *hasmadah*. His longtime friend, Rav Meir Weinberg, said at the *levayah*, "He was an American *bochur* who grew up with all the luxuries

even when they engaged in conduct that was wrong and they deserved to be disciplined, he had a hard time doing it. He would often petition the *hanhalah* of the *yeshiva* to go easy on a *talmid* who had strayed, because he simply couldn't bear to see the *talmid* taken to task or sent away.

Rav Belsky, with all of his genius, always had infinite patience when it came to *talmidim*, even young *bochurim* who asked very basic questions. He consistently took the time not only to give them the answers, but also to explain the *Gemara* or *halachah* in an easy way so that they would under-

thing and shouldn't affect me. You try to do the same.' The next day, he insisted that I come to the *shiur*, but as soon as he started, I began to feel sick and ran away. He noticed that I was gone and asked, 'Where is Menachem?' On another occasion, he took us to a *shlachthoiz* to observe *shechitah*. I stayed in the van. In the middle, he noticed that I was not there and asked where I was. He came out to try cajoling me into coming. This was our *rebbe* - caring, kind, and with a burning desire to teach and treat his *talmidim* like a father does to his sons."

On another occasion, when he was

Another incident occurred when two elementary school boys approached Rav Belsky with a "*din Torah*" over a toy. Rav Belsky listened with seriousness to both sides of the story. After they finished, he took five dollars from his pocket and gave it to them, saying, "The *din* is that you are supposed to make a *pesharah*. I am going to pay for a new toy and you will both split it." He thus taught the *talmidim* right then and there that when two people argue, it is best to try to come to an agreement.

Often, there were competing loves for *talmidim* at work. For example, deliver-



and bounty of America, but he shunned them in favor of unrelenting *hasmadah*. It wasn't his genius that made him into what he was. It was his *hasmadah*. He had *sedorim* and gave *shiurim* in almost all areas of Torah. His *shiur klali*, *Choshen Mishpat shiur*, popular Friday *Chumash shiur*, *Nach shiurim*, daily *Daf Yomi shiur*, and *shalosh seudos shmuessen* all required preparation. It was only due to his unrelenting *hasmadah* and sheer hard work that he achieved all that he achieved."

## Love of Talmidim

Earlier this year, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas held a special *Shabbos* for its *rabbeim*. Rav Belsky, who attended the *Shabbos*, spoke to the *rabbeim* with deep love and openness. He said, "In my more than fifty years of teaching, I have never hated a *talmid*. Just the opposite. I loved every *talmid*!"

Indeed, Rav Belsky always saw himself first and foremost as a *rebbe* to *talmidim*. He loved his *talmidim* with a deep, unconditional love. At times, he would throw himself into helping *talmidim* who strayed and were perhaps even undeserving by other people's standards. His love was one that was *mekalkel hashurah* and simply overcame intellect.

Once, during camp, Rabbi Duvie Frischman, who helped run the Masmidim program under Rav Belsky's leadership at Camp Agudah, said, "I walked into Rav Belsky's office and found him crying. I was alarmed and asked, 'Rebbi, what happened?' He looked at me with his red eyes and replied, 'You know this and that *bochur*? So many of his *rabbeim* said that nothing will come of him and that he does not have the *kishronos* to learn. Do you know what kind of amazing *kasha* he asked me in *shiur* today?! He was telling us and showing us that he, too, can be *matzliach*. We can never give up on a *talmid*!' Rav Belsky had such pain when a *talmid* wasn't successful and such *simcha* when a *talmid* progressed."

His love for *talmidim* was such that

stand not only the *halachah*, but the reason for it.

Rav Belsky would go on trips with the *bochurim* in camp and eat together with them. He held that even recreational activities had to be *Torahdik* and that his presence on these trips gave them a unique Torah component. Rabbi Frischman related that during one of the camp trips, which began before *shkiah* on *Erev Rosh Chodesh* and ended after *shkiah* on *Rosh Chodesh*, a *bochur* asked during supper whether he should say *Yaaleh Veyavo* when *bentching*. Rav Belsky put down his own fork and knife and patiently explained the *halachah* and its reasoning for the *p'sak*. A minute later, another *bochur* came over with the same question. Once again, Rav Belsky stopped eating and patiently gave the same explanation. At least five times during the meal, *bochurim* came over with the same question, and each time, Rav Belsky interrupted his own meal and gave the same answer, slowly, deliberately, and with such love.

Rav Belsky taught *talmidim* with such excitement. Whether it was his regular *shiurim* or his extra-curricular ones, like teaching them how to bake *matzos*, how to perform *nikkur* on an animal's hindquarters, or *shechitah*, he taught with tremendous enthusiasm. It was clear that his *chiyus* came from teaching Torah to *talmidim* and that, simultaneously, he was deeply sensitive to his *talmidim*.

Rav Menachem Savitz recalls, "I was a *talmid* who cringed and became faint at the sight of blood. Once, in camp, Rav Belsky told the boys in the *shiur* that the following day he would be showing them the *halachos* of *treifos*. I made a mental note not to come, because I couldn't bear to see the bloody scenes. Rav Belsky found out and came over to me. 'I want you to know that when I was young, I, too, couldn't stand the sight of blood and I would faint when I saw blood,' he said. 'You know how I overcome this phobia? I told myself, 'Shechitah is a *mitzvah*. If it is a *mitzvah*, it is a good

learning with Rav Heshy Wolf, a seventh grader came over to ask what *brachah* one makes on a "bell," a pastry that contains a combination of cake, cream and chocolate icing. Rav Belsky did not know what a bell was and listened to this seventh grader, with full concentration and focus, as he tried to describe it. Rav Belsky told the child to go buy one at the bakery around the corner and bring it to him. The boy returned a few minutes later and presented the pastry to the *rosh yeshiva*. Rav Belsky pulled out a pocket knife from his pocket, cut it, looked inside, and then enthusiastically made a *borei minei mezonos* and ate a piece. The boy was flabbergasted! Rav Belsky had just ate his bell! With a big smile on his face, Rav Belsky reached into his pocket, gave the boy a dollar, and said, "Please go buy yourself another one and make a *borei minei mezonos*. And thanks so much for buying one for me!"

This was not a one-time occurrence.

ing his *shiurim* to *talmidim* was *kodesh kodoshim* to him. He would do anything to avoid skipping a regular *shiur*. He tried to structure *simchos* around his *shiurim* so that he would not have to miss delivering *shiurim* to his beloved *talmidim*. What would happen, however, when a *talmid* was making a *simcha* - a *bar mitzvah* or a *chasunah* - when he was supposed to say a *shiur*? One *talmid* recalled that he made a *bar mitzvah* on the night of one of Rav Belsky's *shiurim*. The *bar mitzvah seudah* was called for 7 p.m. The only people present at 7:00 were some family members and several of the *bochur*'s friends. In walked Rav Belsky. He had a *shiur* later that evening that he couldn't skip. The *talmid* related, "He asked me if I wanted him to speak, and I replied affirmatively, but said that I couldn't ask him to speak right then. 'It would be a *bizayon* for the *rosh yeshiva* to speak for a few *bochurim* and family members,' I said. He disagreed, got up, and de-

## A Special Bond

Shlomo Goldman is a boy from the former Soviet Union who had been living in Germany. Interested in pursuing studies in *Yiddishkeit*, he became an exchange student and spent six months in New York at Sinai Academy. This *yeshiva* was founded for immigrants from the former Soviet Union approximately 28 years ago. To Rabbi Belsky, the boys from Sinai Academy were the apple of his eye. He innately understood that they needed additional help in their studies and gave them constant words of encouragement. He'd look them in the eyes and tell them, "Don't worry. You had a late start but you are doing extremely well and are making tremendous strides."

Thriving in his newfound connection to Hashem, the *yeshiva* sent Shlomo to the Camp Agudah *masmidim* program. It was there that he met Rabbi Belsky *zt"l*, who took the young man under his wing and welcomed him with a palpable sense of warmth. When he had to go back to Germany after his student visa expired, Rabbi Belsky initiated a fundraising appeal to generate the funds to bring this boy back to New York from Germany. Eventually, Shlomo went to Eretz Yisroel to learn in *yeshiva* with the encouragement and support of Rabbi Belsky. Their special bond was never broken as Rabbi Belsky made it his business to ensure the boy's continuous growth in *Yiddishkeit*. He has since flourished in his learning and is now married with children. He is currently enrolled in *kollel* in Eretz Yisroel.



## נטפי תנחומין

יחד עם כל בית ישראל  
מבכים אנו מרה את השריפה אשר שרף ה'  
בעלותו לגנזי מרומים של האי גברא רבה,  
אוצר כל כלי חמדה, מקים עולה  
של תורה, מאיר העולם בתורתו ופסיקותיו,  
הביא דבר ה' ברמה ולא חת מפני איש,

## הרב הגאון הגדול רבי ישראל הלוי בעלסקי זצוקללה

הוא הלך למנוחות ועלה בסערה השמימה, ואותנו הותיר לאנחות  
ובזה נביע תנחומינו הכנים לכבוד משפחתו הגדולה והחשובה שיחיו  
והנחמה אחת היא לבתו החשובה והדגולה  
אשת חיל רבת הפעלים לתורה ולחסד

## מרת תמר תחי

אשת חבר ידידנו עוז, מגדולי מחזיקי התורה בדורנו,  
הפועל ללא לאות להרים קרן התורה והיראה  
בכל קצוות תבל ותומך נאמן ליחידים ולמוסדות תורה וחסד

## מוהר"ר הרב שלמה יהודה רכניץ שליט"א

בעל הנחמות ינחם אותם ובהמשך  
מעשיהם הברוכים והכבירים ימצאו ניחומים.

המשתתפים בצערכם,  
ת"ת תשב"ר ד'ליקווד  
מאיר נפתלי הלוי הרץ



בס"ד

מרכז רפואי הכוללני לאישה בשבילך ע"ש אוולין ברנט  
מבכה יחד עם כל בית ישראל על סילוקו

## של הגאון הגדול שר התורה עמוד ההוראה הרב חיים ישראל בלסקי זצ"ל

ראש ישיבת תורה ודעת ומגדולי הפוסקים בדורינו  
ומשתתפת באבלם של המשפחה הכבודה  
ושל בתו הגב' רכניץ שתח"י

שעומדת לימין מפעלינו לסייע לנשי ישראל

ושולחים תנחומינו בזה שהמקום ינחם אתכם  
בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים ויתן הקב"ה שלא ישמע עוד שוד  
ושבר בגבולכם ואך טוב וחסד ירדפוכם לנצח כל הימים

שרה סעמיאטיצקי  
מייסדת ומנהלת "בשבילך"



בעה"ת

יחד עם כל בית ישראל מתאבלים אנו מרה על עלייתו לשמי הום  
של גאון וצדיק ממקימי עולה של תורה בארה"ב

## הגאון הגדול רבי חיים ישראל בעלסקי זצוק"ל ראש ישיבת "תורה ודעת"

מגדולי התורה ופוסקי ההלכה יראתו קודמת לחכמתו  
ראש וראשון לכל דבר שבקדושה  
העמיד תלמידים לאלפים והעמיד הדת על תילה

אנו שולחים את תנחומינו לכל בני המשפחה הנכבדה שיחיו  
לבניו ולחתניו החשובים שליט"א  
צורבא דרבנן ותמכין דאורייתא  
בהמשך דרכו בקודש ימצאו נוחם.

ארגון "פעילים לב לאחים"  
האברכים, הפעילים, חברי ההנהלה בארה"ק ובארה"ב

THE MOVEMENT OF THE  
P'EYLIM LEV'ACHIM  
גב לאחים



livered a *drashah* as if he was talking to a full house. Then, apologizing profusely, he left to say the *shiur*. That wasn't enough. He returned to the *bar mitzvah* after the *shiur* to join in the dancing. That was our *rebbe*."

The following is one of many fascinating stories that illustrate both his caring for *talmidim* and his profound wisdom. Once, a *talmid* from an out-of-town family with a very poor Torah background came to him, saying, "I have to go home to my brother's wedding. The *Gemara* dictates that a *talmid chochom* needs to know the *halachos* of *Birchas Chassanim*. Since I am a *yeshiva bochur* and my family members might assume that if I learn in *yeshiva*, I must know these *halachos*, perhaps the *rosh yeshiva* can quickly teach them to me." Rav Belsky replied, "Your parents have a *rov*. I am sure that he will take care of those details. However, what you should perhaps be prepared for is the fact that they might give you a *brachah* under the *chupah*. As a *yeshiva bochur*, they may feel that you deserve to get a *brachah*. Do you know how to say the *brachos* with the right *niggun*?" Rav Belsky went on to teach the boy each *brachah* with the proper *nusach*, and didn't let him go until he repeated the *brachos* perfectly, with the right *niggun* and intonation. Indeed, the *bochur* was honored with a *bra-*

Rav Boruch Ber told the person accompanying him, "Pay him and let's leave. A *goy* who does not observe his religion could be a *rotzei'ach*."

"From here we see," said Rav Belsky, "that a person without religion is a murderer!"

They gave him a standing ovation.

They then asked him, "How do you attract your youth? After all, you spend most of your time learning ancient tomes."

With great feeling, Rav Belsky responded, "To us, these are not ancient. They are as relevant to our lives today as they were when they were written. We live this every day!"

"Rabbi," they exclaimed, "teach us how to make ancient tomes relevant to today's youth!"

"That is not for me to do," said Rav Belsky.

To Rav Belsky, the main lesson was that teaching *talmidim* was what he lived. It was alive, it was vibrant, and they were swept up in his enthusiasm and love for them.

### Paragon of Tzedakah and Chessed

Recently, Rav Belsky was in Los Angeles for a *Shabbos* to attend a family *sim-*

I thanked him profusely and wished him well. I did not even entertain the thought of travelling to Queens to participate in the *siyum*. A little while later, I met the barber, and he excitedly showed me a picture on his phone of Rav Belsky speaking at his *siyum*. It turned out that he had also invited Rav Belsky without expecting him to come. Imagine his ecstasy when he looked up and noticed Rav Belsky and his driver sitting at one of the tables at the edge of the room. He could not believe his eyes! He immediately brought Rav Belsky to the front, introduced him to the crowd, and asked him to address the assemblage. That was Rav Belsky! Whereas no one expected him to come, he couldn't say no. He wanted to honor a Bucharian Jew who was learning Torah. The great *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas thought nothing of *shlepping* out to Queens on a *Motzoei Shabbos* to honor his barber, who was taking his first steps in Torah learning."

No one would have ever known about this barber story had the barber himself not told it to *rabbonim* who work at the OU. In truth, that is how most of the *chessed* performed by Rav Belsky was done - quietly, discreetly, and without fanfare. Tens of thousands of acts of kindness performed by Rav Belsky will never be known, because that was just the way he did things.

He would borrow from his *chavrusah* or borrow from a *gemach* in the *yeshiva* in order to give the poor person, and he would repay the loan when he was able.

At the *levayah*, Rav Elya Katz related that a simple *meshulach* who most people would give a quarter or a dollar approached Rav Belsky. Rav Belsky gave him twenty dollars, explaining, "To give someone less than twenty dollars is a *bizayon*."

Reb Moshe Abba, a *talmid chochom* who learned in the pre-war European *yeshivos*, became a broken man due to the travail and suffering that he experienced during the Holocaust. He was basically homeless and would travel from *yeshiva* to *yeshiva*, spending time in each place and collecting money to sustain himself. At the end of his life, he lived in the dormitory of Bais Medrash Govoah. Rav Moshe Weinberg related, "We all saw Reb Moshe Abba's plight. We felt bad and would perhaps give him a dollar. Rav Belsky was the only one who thought beyond that. In trying to help him, he came up with an idea. If we could get him an apartment with an address, he could be eligible for government relief. That way, he would be able to sustain himself. Rav Belsky invested great effort into finding him an apartment and a landlord who would accept him as a tenant. He also borrowed my car in order to trans-



*chah* and reported back to Rav Belsky that, as he was returning from the *chupah* after reciting his *brachah*, he heard one of his uncles comment, "It is good he was sent to *yeshiva*. At least now he knows how to make a *brachah* under the *chupah*." It was this wisdom and caring that made Rav Belsky so special.

Rav Belsky's son-in-law, Rav Yaacov Gross, related that a few years ago, thirteen Catholic cardinals and bishops were engaged in a world tour to try ascertaining how other faiths manage to inspire their youth. Due to attrition in their ranks, they were intent on determining how other faith communities succeeded in this aspect. Someone suggested that they meet with Rav Belsky. When the request came in, he agreed on two conditions. Firstly, he would not go to them; rather, they must come to him. Secondly, the visit must be completely confidential and secret. The group agreed.

Upon their arrival and after exchanging pleasantries, they asked him why Jews hate Catholics. Rav Belsky explained that this was not true with a well-known story about Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz. Rav Boruch Ber was once being transported by a non-Jewish wagon driver. After they passed a church and the driver did not cross himself,

*cha*. When he returned home, he looked exhausted and a *talmid* asked him how he was feeling. He said, "I spoke thirteen times during those few days." When asked how he could have done that much, he said, "I don't know how to say no."

That statement offers a window into the inner workings of Rav Belsky and the phenomenal scope of *chessed* that he performed throughout his life. He couldn't say no to people. He was such a *gutten mentch* that his natural instinct was to try to help people and cater to their needs and wants. He did *chessed* with others with his entire being - his *guf*, his money, and his refined sense of *hergesh* for the feelings of another.

Rav Moshe Elefant related a remarkable story that recently transpired.

"In the lobby of the building that houses the OU in Manhattan, there is a barber shop. One of the barbers there is a *frum* Bucharian Jew from Queens. Rav Belsky would periodically take his haircuts in that barber shop after one of his weekly meetings at the OU. The man was always so proud that he merited being Rav Belsky's barber. A few months ago, this barber made his first *siyum* on a *masechta* and he was very proud. He actually invited me to the *Motzoei Shabbos siyum* in Queens.

Rav Belsky's home was a place where the brokenhearted and broken souls found a home, a listening ear and acceptance. His *Shabbos* meals were often graced by guests who were insulting and often mentally imbalanced. Many of these people would stay in the home for long periods of time. When they insulted him and behaved uncouthly, Rav Belsky's own children would want to protest in his honor and remove them. Rav Belsky never allowed that. He would remind them of the story about the *Baal Shem Tov*'s father, who had an extremely uncouth guest, and in the end, that guest was Eliyohu Hanovi, who was testing him to see how he would treat such a person.

Rav Belsky was the address for all kinds of brokenhearted people. Even though for most of his life he himself was in financially precarious straits, he always gave *tzedakah* above and beyond what was expected. *Talmidim* recall how when people would come to ask him for donations, he would invariably and indiscriminately give. In their state of need, they would frequently ask him for more money. He never said, "I already gave you," or, "That is all that I can give." On the contrary, he would always add more money. Often, however, he would not have any more money to give.

port all of Reb Moshe Abba's possessions to the apartment. When Reb Moshe Abba was settled, Rav Belsky applied for relief. Ultimately, Reb Moshe Abba couldn't stay in one place and ended up on the street once again, but not for lack of trying on Rav Belsky's part. He saw Reb Moshe Abba for the *neshamah* he had been before the trauma set in."

In general, people were amazed by how Rav Belsky honored Reb Moshe Abba and took such pains to show him deference. He would say that Reb Moshe Abba is akin to a *Sefer Torah* that was burned, which we must honor profoundly.

Indeed, after Reb Moshe Abba's passing, Rav Belsky delivered a masterful *hesped*. It was a *hesped* that could only have been given on such a person by an *illui* with an expansive, compassionate heart, a heart such as the one that beat inside Rav Belsky.

Another fascinating story that illustrates the lengths to which he went to help a fellow Jew took place a number of years ago when a Yemenite Jew came to America in great need. His greatest problem was that he could not communicate. He only spoke a Yemini dialect of *Lashon Hakodesh* that no one could understand. The poor Jew



# ישיבה ומתיבתא ד'ברוקלין

Yeshiva and Mesivta of Brooklyn

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הנהלת ותלמידי הישיבה



was extremely frustrated, because he was unable to properly raise money, as he couldn't make himself understood. Rav Belsky spent hours talking with the person until he learned his language and was able to communicate with him, thereby easing his plight.

### Feeling the Pain of His Brother

At the *levayah*, Rav Yosef Savitsky said, "His heart was as big as his brain." One of the characteristics of that great heart was his inability to tolerate the *tzaar* of a fellow Jew. When he saw another Jew in pain, when he saw cruelty or injustice, he became physically sick. His son-in-law, Rav Yaacov Gross, related at the *levayah* that after engaging in *dinei Torah*, when Rav Belsky saw corruption among *to'anim* or other parties involved in the dispute, he

His longtime *chavrusah*, Rabbi Yaakov Feinzeig, similarly related, "Just a few weeks ago, during the period right before he was diagnosed with cancer, a woman who was an *agunah* asked him for help. Her husband agreed to meet with Rav Belsky and he came one morning. Rav Belsky was already very unwell. He could not walk properly. The cancer was active, although he did not know it at the time, and he had multiple other health issues. He desperately needed to go home to lie down, but he saw an opportunity to procure a *get* for the woman. He quickly assembled a *bais din* and spent the entire day, from 8:30 in the morning until 5:30 in the evening, negotiating with the husband and trying, with his brilliance and insight into human nature, to convince the husband to give a *get*. He knew that if he would leave to go home and rest, the woman would probably miss



would become ill. He detested injustice.

Rav Heshy Wolf recalled, "I remember a woman, an *agunah* whose husband refused to give her a *get*, coming to him, seeking his involvement. I knew that this case would result in him getting his 'hands dirty.' I knew there would be difficulties and *bizyonos*, so I had the temerity to say, 'Why does *rebbe* have to get his hands dirty with this kind of thing?' Rav Belsky retorted, 'A lady comes to me crying. How can I turn her away? Who is going to help her?' When I replied, 'Others,' he countered, 'No, they won't!'"

her opportunity, so he pushed himself with superhuman endurance to persevere. About a minute before *shkiah*, he completed the *get*. The woman was free. When he finished, he nearly collapsed from sheer exhaustion and asked me to take him home. These stories happened for forty years. They didn't stop."

There was a girl who suffered from a terrible case of anorexia to the extent that her doctors said her body had sustained such abuse and trauma that she would be unable to have children. The girl was in life-threatening danger. All interventions had thus

## Sightseer

A young man named Aviel arrived in New York from the former Soviet Union with his mother and brother, eager to learn more about his Jewish heritage. His mother allowed Aviel to pursue his Torah studies but warned him that when his father would arrive in the next few months he would be adamantly opposed to it. She advised him to tread carefully when his father was around. The months sped by and Aviel was *shteiging* in Sinai Academy. It was then that his father arrived. His father planned a two-day trip to Virginia over *Shabbos* and the second day of *Shavuot*. He didn't give Aviel a choice and compelled him to join him.

Aviel immediately went to his *rebbe*, Rabbi Silber, to seek counsel. Rabbi Silber contacted Rabbi Belsky to ask him what this young man should do. Rabbi Belsky empathized with Aviel's arduous plight and provided personal step-by-step instructions on what he could do to avoid being *mechalel Shabbos* and *yom tov*. He told him not to carry anything, not to open the car door and other practical insights. Rabbi Belsky offered him a most beautiful *brochah* that the trip should go easily and smoothly.

It was then that Aviel witnessed genuine *hashgochah protis*. On *Shabbos* morning, the car service that Aviel's father called upon to pick them up at 8:30 a.m. in order to arrive at their bus at 9:00 a.m. was late. When it finally arrived, the car hit the curb and sustained a flat tire. The next car service they called also was delayed. The bus driver waited for the family but soon after their departure the transmission on the bus blew out on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. At this juncture, Aviel's father became quite agitated and looked at his son with harsh eyes. He blamed these mishaps on the fact that Aviel observed *Shabbos*. The bus driver announced that it was an exceptionally rare occurrence for a transmission to burn out and offered his apologies to the passengers.

By the time the bus arrived at their hotel in Virginia, it was nearing the end of *Shabbos* and Aviel was able to get by without being *mechalel Shabbos*. But the *nissim* that Aviel experienced had not yet reached their conclusion. The *treif* food for the tour participants had not arrived at the hotel and the only food available to them were vegetables. That is exactly what Rabbi Belsky advised Aviel to eat if at all possible.

The next day was Sunday and the second day of *Shavuot*. To his father's dismay, it rained heavily the entire day. Unable to go sightseeing, they stayed in the hotel room for the day, thus preventing Aviel from being *mechalel yom tov*.

In the weeks to follow, Aviel's father became ever more curious about his son's devotion to a Torah life and made the decision to walk two miles on *Shabbos* from his home in Park Slope to Borough Park to see where his son *davens* and to see what *Shabbos* was all about. Rabbi Silber saw the sacrifice that Aviel's father was making and gave him a *Chumash* in Russian to keep him occupied during *davening*. Suddenly, Aviel's father's face turned white. He happened to open to a page stating the death penalty for those who violate *Shabbos*. After ruminating on this and experiencing an inspiring *Shabbos* at Rabbi Silber's home, he had a new sense of appreciation for what his son was doing. He committed himself to walking those two miles every *Shabbos* morning.

Both father and son knew that there was a divine message in the fact that things went completely wrong throughout the course of their trip. Aviel remembered Rabbi Belsky's heartfelt *brochah* that he should not transgress *Shabbos* and dedicated himself even more to growing as a Torah Jew.

Aviel is still *shteiging* in his learning and is the unofficial *poseik* at Rabbi Tzvi Kaplan's *yeshiva* in Yerushalayim. Aviel's father, along with his *mechutonim*, help support him in *kollel*.

Aviel's brother Dovid is also a Sinai Academy graduate. Although he gained a tremendous appreciation of *Yiddishkeit* from Aviel, Dovid felt that the two mile walk to *shul* on *Shabbos* morning from Park Slope to Borough Park was just too difficult for him. He felt that the best mode of transportation for him would be rollerblading. When asked if this was permissible, Rabbi Belsky said it was okay for Dovid, knowing his background. Dovid wore a baseball cap on his head so that his *yarmulke* would not fall off. Although people looked at him askance with his *tzitsis* hanging out, Dovid was truly *moser nefesh* in his own way for *Shabbos*.



# כוס תנחומים

נשגר בזה כוס תנחומים לכל משפחתו הכבודה

של האי שופרא דבלי בארעא קדישא המאור הגדול גאון ישראל

ה"ה הרב חיים ישראל הלוי בעלסקי זכרונו לברכה

שעמד בראש מערכת כשרות המזון © בפסקיו המיושרים ומוצדקים



המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

**Sinai Academy Yeshiva High School** mourns the Petirah of **Hagaon Harav Chaim Yisroel Belsky, zt"l**. Among his many endeavors, the **Rosh Hayeshiva** had a special place in his Lev Tov for Russian Jewry. He formed a deep personal relationship with Sinai Talmidim who learned for many summers, in his **Masmidim Program** in Camp Agudah.

Rav Belsky, zt"l spoke at the Sinai Dinner this past June in honor of the recipient of the **Sinai Alumnus Award**, who was part of the **Masmidim Program**. Rav Belsky, zt"l related to every Yid on his own personal level and told how that talmid and his parents were active participants at his Pesach Seder. The devotion, personal attention and warmth he provided to our talmidim serves as an inspiration for all of us.

*He is sorely missed.*

**תנצב"ה**

Rabbi Aryeh Katzin  
Menahel

Nochum Dick  
Chairman

Rabbi Mordechai Blaustein  
Executive Director

Rabbi Mendel Silberberg  
Rebbe







far been unsuccessful. Rav Belsky heard about the situation and asked that the girl come to see him. She came and, with great care, empathy and psychological insight, Rav Belsky spent an hour speaking to her. When she left, it was clear that his words had made an impact. He commented, “I think that after another session, she will be fine.” Indeed, after spending more time speaking to him, she eventually pulled out of the crisis. Ultimately, she married and established a beautiful family. After the girl had left, a *talmid* found Rav Belsky crying. “*Rebbi*,” he wondered, “why are you crying?!” Rav Belsky replied, “No one came to ask me how I did it. How I spoke to her. There are so many people suffering out there and we can help,” he said with tears in his eyes.

### On Behalf of Russian Jewry

Rav Belsky felt a special sense of responsibility for Russian Jewry. When the Jews from Russia began immigrating to America after decades of Communist indoctrination, Rav Belsky felt that American Jewry, as a community, had a special responsibility to help them and teach them. He didn’t look at them as “Russians,” but as fellow *Yidden* who we were obligated to help. His own parents were role models in this regard. Both his father and mother were deeply involved in bringing *Yidden* from the former Soviet Union closer to *Yiddishkeit*.

Rav Belsky was unique in his approach.

He realized that in order to properly reach these Jews, he had to speak their language. He understood that the language barrier would make things so much harder. He thus invested much time into learning and mastering the Russian language. He and his parents also gave English classes to Russian Jews, and while teaching them English, they weaved in many lessons about Torah and *Yiddishkeit*.

In 1979, Rav Belsky played an instrumental role in the founding of the Be’er Hagolah school for children from the Soviet Union. He remained closely connected to the school for the next 35 years. Rav Belsky was the spiritual guide to the Russian Jewish expatriate community under the leadership of Rav Avrohom Binsky, and he would often grace their *melava malkas* and other events, where he would speak in Russian.

In Camp Agudah, as well, he had a soft spot for boys from the former Soviet Union who would come for the summer. Rav Mendel Silberberg, a *maggid shiur* in Sinai Academy, would frequently send his *talmidim* to Camp Agudah to benefit from the special camp experience and Rav Belsky always reached out to them.

One remarkable story involved a boy from Sinai who had a deep desire to learn, but was very behind and needed much catching up in order to catch up to the level of his peers. Because he was not advanced enough to have a regular *chavrusah*, the *rabbeim* would ask each boy to learn with him for a half hour during *seider*. This boy

so badly wanted to learn that when he was passing a gazebo and heard a fourth grade *rebbe* teaching basics in reading to his *talmidim*, he begged to join that class, even though he was five years older. The camp asked the fourth grade *rebbe* to learn with him privately. Slowly, he progressed.

During that summer, this boy formed a close relationship with Rav Belsky, who would also spend time learning with him. This *gaon* and genius patiently sat with a wonderful Russian boy and learned basic translation with him, never becoming impatient, but rather reveling in his success. The following summer, the boy returned to camp and had sufficiently progressed that by the end of the summer, he was ready to make his first *siyum*, a *siyum on Maseches Megillah*. The camp made a gala *siyum* in his honor and invited his parents, who were fine, respectful Jews, but unfortunately were far from understanding their child or identifying with his religious feelings.

At that *siyum*, Rav Belsky was so *b’simcha* that when he began to speak, he burst into tears. After Rav Belsky’s speech and the spirited, *simcha*-filled dancing, the father of the boy asked to address the crowd. Clearly very moved, he said that although he does not understand the entire religion issue and what they were doing there, he could see that his son is so happy, and he therefore agreed to allow his son to continue on the path of learning Torah and Jewish observance.

Throughout the following school year, the boy kept up with Rav Belsky and

would periodically go to learn with him. When *Pesach* arrived, Rav Belsky invited the boy and his parents for the *Seder*. During the *Seder*, Rav Belsky, who certainly had much Torah that he wanted to say and many *Pesach* songs that he wanted to sing, instead began to sing old Russian songs, beautiful ballads of longing that he somehow knew. The boy’s parents became deeply moved and started singing along. Before they knew it, they were crying as they sang. That was the turning point. From that *Seder* on, the boy’s parents began taking their first steps toward observance. Tragically, the boy’s father died of cancer not long thereafter, but it was Rav Belsky’s caring heart, pulsating with love for his fellow Jews and especially fellow Russian Jews, that compelled him to sacrifice his own *Seder* and spend time singing Russian songs. Why? For the singular purpose of reaching the *pintele Yid* buried in a fellow Jew.

On another occasion, there was a boy from Sinai Academy who went to Camp Agudah but was determined to leave in the middle of the summer in order to participate in a table tennis tournament. Rabbi Duvie Frischman tried to convince the boy to stay, but his efforts were futile. Rabbi Frischman went to consult with Rav Belsky. Rav Belsky thought and thought and then, with his eyes lighting up, offered, “Perhaps, if I challenge him to a game of ping pong and I win, he will take the challenge and agree to stay.”

“*Rebbi*,” Rabbi Frischman asked, “you





ISRAEL CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR  
TAHARAS HAMISHPACHA

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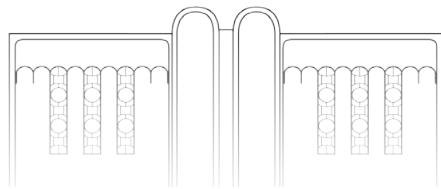
פאר נדיבי עם קודש

בהמשך מורשתו לריבוי והנחלת תורה בישראל תנוחמו

בנחמת ציון וירושלים ולא תוסיפו לדאבה עוד

רבנו ותלמידהונו

הנהלת הישיבה



הישיבה הגדולה והקדושה דטעלז

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הגאון הגדול הרב חיים ישראל הלוי בעלסקי זצוק"ל

ראש ישיבת ישיבה תורה ודעת

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אשר ברחב דעתו נדבה רוחו לישא בעול הציבור ולהטיב עמהם

בפסקיו בכל מקצועות התורה

מי יתן לנו תמורתו

נשגר בזה כסא דנחמתא להמשפחות המתאבלות

ובפרט לבנו הרב ר' צבי הלוי שליט"א

סגן נשיא הישיבה

ולמשפחת ידידינו הנגיד

ר' שלמה יהודה רכניץ ורעייתו שליט"א

ברכתנו מקרב לב שהמקום ינחם אתכם ולא תוסיפו לדאווה עוד

אהרן דוד הלוי גולדברג

ראש ישיבת טלז







are good at ping pong?”

Rav Belsky replied, “I was once very good. I would have to practice, but if it would mean keeping him in camp, I would do it.”

### “To the Humble He Will Find Favor”

Despite his exalted stature, Rav Belsky had no airs about him. He was both so humble and so “normal.” His humility was often mind-boggling and could bring tears to one’s eyes. Rabbi Yaakov Feinzeig related, “Recently, I was learning with Rav Belsky in his office. When we finished and it was time to go to the *bais medrash*, Rav Belsky, who during his last years was weak and had difficulty walking, would generally take the elevator. As we exited the room, he saw a bunch of little children playing on the floor in front of the elevator. He looked at them with satisfaction and said, ‘The children are

playing so nicely. I can’t push them away. Let’s take the stairs...”

Rabbi Feinzeig remarked, “Not long ago, I found Rav Belsky crying while we learned. He never cried when we learned *Gemara* and I became alarmed. What happened? We were learning the *Yerushalmi* in *Maseches Sheviis* that says, ‘If a person visits an *ir miklat*, the person who killed inadvertently (*bashogeig*) must publicize the fact that he killed *bashogeig*. From here, the *Gemara* derives that if people think a person learned two *masechtos* and he really learned only one, he must tell them that he only learned one. Rav Belsky tearfully said, ‘Why do people say that I know so much? People make up stories about my knowledge that are just not true.’”

At the *levayah*, one of his children mentioned that they once had a guest for *Pesach* who Rav Belsky knew enjoyed mayonnaise. In order to make mayonnaise from scratch,

## Micro-Masmid

A young man named Yaakov attended the *masmidim* program at Camp Agudah in the summer. A highly inquisitive sort, Yaakov had a list of questions about Hashem and *Yiddishkeit* that went on ad infinitum. He was constantly engaged in conversation with Rabbi Belsky, who eagerly answered his inquiries. Yaakov’s *rebbe*, Rabbi Silberberg, was concerned about the future trajectory of his young charge and sought advice from Rabbi Belsky. Rabbi Belsky told Rabbi Silberberg not to worry since Yaakov would grow exponentially in his studies and commitment. As it happened, Yaakov indeed flourished in his learning and became an exemplary *talmid* at Yeshivas Ner Israel in Baltimore. A bright young man, Yaakov was offered a lucrative position at Microsoft but turned down the job to continue his learning.

as many do for *Pesach*, one must engage in the time-consuming job of dripping oil into a blender or beater. Rav Belsky, the great *gaon*, whose every second was precious, sat there himself, slowly and painstakingly making that mayonnaise so that his guest would enjoy his food.

One summer, some *bochurim* from a different camp visited Camp Agudah to participate in a *melava malka*. When the *melava malka* ended at 2 a.m., they had no way to return to their own camp. Who offered to drive them back? None other than the camp *rov* and *rosh yeshiva* of Torah Vodaas, Rav Yisroel Belsky. He did not give them any lectures about lack of responsibility. He just took them back, as if that was his job.

Rav Belsky never made an issue about where he should sit. He would arrive at a *simcha* and sit at the end of a table. He would *shmooze* with everyone about everything and, in general, had a tremendous hu-

man touch.

Once, on a trip with his *Masmidim* to Niagara Falls some thirty years ago, he accompanied his campers to the local *shul* in Buffalo to *daven*. The *rov* of the *shul* at that time came over and gave the group *shalom aleichem*. When the *rov* asked his name, he replied simply, “Yisroel Belsky.” Hearing this, the *rov* questioned, “Are you by any chance related to the Rav Belsky from Torah Vodaas? I call him all the time with my *shailos* and he always answers right away. Lately, however, he seems busier and busier and I am having a hard time getting through to him.” Rav Belsky answered, “I happen to know him. I will try to get a better ‘in’ for you so that you get through more easily in the future.” It was only then that it dawned on the *rov* that he was actually talking to *that* Rav Belsky. He was thrilled to have the opportunity, and for the next hour or so, he utilized the opportunity to ask all of his *shailos*.

In camp, especially, his humility and total lack of airs were clear. Rabbi Duvie Frischman recalled a trip in rural Pennsylvania. They were driving on small country roads en route to their destination, when Rav Belsky asked for the bus microphone. He began describing the scenery on both sides of the road. “On the right side,” he explained, “the corn being grown is for animal consumption. On the left side, the corn being grown is for human consumption.” He began to give detailed explanations of each of these unique types of corn. He then stopped and, with a bit of emotion in his voice, told the *bochurim*, “I don’t think you understand what you just saw! Look at the *brachah*! Look at the bounty we have here in America! There are others who would do anything to be able to acquire the bounty that we have throughout the United States. Why has Hashem chosen to give this country such munificence? Perhaps,” he explained, “the reason is that America has always opened its doors to people from all over the world who want to come. When you are good and benevolent to others, Hashem sends His *brachah*!”

On that same trip, the camp wished to visit a state park for a barbeque supper, but they encountered an anti-Semitic ranger who not only did not let them make the barbeque in the park, but also called the police





# תורה תורה חגרי שק

משתתפים אנו באבלה של תורה ועוסקיה בטהרה  
כאשר נצחו אראלים את המצוקים ונשבה ארון הקודש  
עמוד התורה ונזר ההוראה בקי בכל חדרי תורה  
אשר עשרות בשנים הדריך ולימד את העם דבר ה' זו הלכה

מרן הגאון **רבי חיים ישראל הלוי בעלסקי** זצוקל"ה

ראש ישיבת תורה ודעת

ומצורף בזה ברכת אבלים מול בני המשפחה המופלגים שליט"א  
המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי צון וירושלם  
ולא תוסיפו לדאבה עוד  
אוי מי יתן לנו תמורתו

שלמה חיים קנריק

אבי פערשלייסער



בלב כואב ודואב

משתתפים אנו באבל הגדול בפטירתו של האי גברא רבה

**הרה"ג ר' חיים ישראל הלוי בלסקי זצ"ל**

אשר הרביץ תורה לעדרים בישיבה הקדושה תורה ודעת והיה אחד מפוסקי הדור  
כסא דנחמתא שלוחה בזה לנוות ביתו האלמנה החשובה הרבנית מרים תחיל'  
אחותו מרת לאה אשתו של מגיד שיעור, הרב יעקב בירון שליט"א  
בנו ר' יעקב בנימין תלמיד לשעבר  
בתו מרת תמר אשת ר' שלמה יהודה רכניץ מתומכי ישיבתנו

מתיבתא דלאס אנדזשעלעס  
(קלאבאסאס)

שלמה זלמן גוטסמן ר"מ





on them when they attempted to make the barbeque just outside of the park. Rav Belsky was very upset about the overt anti-Semitism that he had witnessed both on the part of the ranger and the similarly unsympathetic policeman. During the bus ride from that park, as the boys had to make do with left-over tuna sandwiches, Rav Belsky channeled his emotion into a *niggun*. On the spot, he composed a song to the words, “*Vayomer Edom lo saavor bi.*” He began to drum his fingers and then taught the *niggun* to the boys. This became one of his favorite *niggunim*. During subsequent years, he would relate the above story before teaching new campers the song.

Yashrus and Emes

Rav Belsky had an incorrupt-

The Russian Map

Because Rabbi Belsky always had a special affinity towards the *talmidim* from the former Soviet Union, he would often throw in a Russian word in the middle of his *shiur* so that they should know that he had a personal connection to them. He would ask each *talmid* what community in Russia they came from as he was quite familiar with the geography of the country. Rabbi Belsky traveled there on numerous occasions to ensure the highest standards of *kashrus* and would tell the *talmidim* of his sojourns there.

ible sense of *yashrus* and *emes* that enabled him, with great alacrity, to confront what he deemed to be *sheker* or corruption in the *halachic* process, even when it came at great personal sacrifice.

His decision to lead a *bais din* to adjudicate *dinei Torah* was

made because he felt at the time that there was a dearth of opportunities for fellow Jews seeking affordable *dinei Torah* with a reputable, knowledgeable *bais din*. The *dinei Torah* literally cost him his health. He would get sick upon hearing about malice and

cruelty between feuding parties.

One *talmid* remembers seeing Rav Belsky’s face become ashen while he was on the phone. When he hung up the phone, he began shaking his head in disbelief. “I just had a *shailah* regarding a father who needed to put his house in his son’s name for a certain reason. Now the son refuses to return the house to his father. How could anyone do that?!” Rav Belsky exclaimed incredulously, “Forget even about the terrible *aveirah* and *geneivah*. He is your father and you are his son!”

The cruelty that was sometimes prevalent in the divorce process tore at his heart. The cunning and deception that people used in order to cheat each other gave him no *menuchah*. His sense of *yashrus* and *emes* could never make peace with it, no matter how many stories he heard.

Once, a person who was a *moser* visited Yeshiva Torah Vodaas. When Rav Belsky saw him, he began screaming, “*Arois!* Get out of the *bais medrash!*” The person did not budge and refused to leave. Rav Belsky, then a physically strong man, went over to the *moser*, picked up him up, carried him out of the *bais medrash*, and unceremoniously placed him outside.

When Rav Belsky felt that the underlying concept of a *halachah* was either under attack or was being treated lightly or frivolously, he stood like an unbending rock to protect the *halachah*. This was evident in the laws of *Shabbos* and a number of other areas as well.

A *talmid chochom* who resided in a certain neighborhood in Manhattan asked Rav Belsky about a new *eruv* that had been erected in his neighborhood. This *talmid chochom* explained that he knew that Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik and his brother, Rav Aharon Soloveitchik, his own *rabbeim*, as well as many local *rabbonim*, would have opposed, or did oppose, the *eruv*. He had read Rav Belsky’s *teshuvah* on the Brooklyn *eruv* and asked if it pertained to the new *eruv* in his neighborhood as well. Rav Belsky closed the door, stood up, and his jovial manner transformed into one of utter solemnity and intensity. He proceeded to explain why the *eruv* was invalid, stating the reasons in detail and explaining that his *p’sak* on the new Brooklyn *eruv* applied to this neighborhood as well. Rav Belsky permitted the *talmid chochom* to copy his written *teshuvah* from his *sefer* on the issue and disseminate it. He also explained with tremendous emotion how wrong it was for an outside *rov* to have come in and set up an *eruv*. “He was so forceful, like I had never seen,” said the *talmid chochom*. “Such is a person who loves Torah and cares about Hashem’s honor with every fiber of his being.”

Rav Yaacov Gross, Rav Belsky’s son-in-law, related that his wife, Rav Belsky’s oldest child, told him that in the 1970s, when there were those who attempted to make an *eruv* in Boro Park, which Rav Moshe Feinstein strongly opposed, Rav Belsky himself had signs printed up in large purple letters proclaiming, “Do no desecrate the *Shabbos!*” He and his children went around the neighborhood hanging up the signs in order to prevent *Yidden* from transgressing.

In the world of *kashrus*, as well, *emes* and *yashrus* served as his guiding light, sometimes even at great personal a sacrifice.

Posek and Revolutionary in Kashrus

A number of years ago, at Camp Agudah, Rav Belsky was learning with a *chavrusah* when there was a knock on his door. The petitioner informed Rav Bel-

Mifal Torah Vodaath D'Yerushalayim

נפלה עטרת ראשנו  
אוי נא לנו כי חטאנו

בצער רב ויגון קודר מבכים אנו פטירתו של האי אדם גדול בענקים שהיה מפורסם בכל קצוי תבל בגודל כח תורתו עד להפליא, המאור הגדול לממשלת התורה ולומדיה, גאון עצום בכל מכמני התורה, כל רז לא אניס ליה, מגדולי פוסקי דורינו, איש נבון וחכם מלא מדע וחכמתא, מקרבניטי היהדות ומנהיגיה, רבים השיב מעון והחזיר אחינו בני ישראל לאבינו שבשמים, גדול כים שברינו על שבר בת עמינו, מי יורה דעה ומי יבין שמועה, הוי מי יתן לנו תמורתו ה"ה הגאון הגדול המפורסם מפוסקי הדור והדרו

מרן רבי חיים ישראל בעלסקי זצלה"ה  
ראש ישיבת תורת ודעת

אשר עמד בראש מפעלנו "מפעל תורה ודעת - תפארת בנימין" מיום הווסדה עד הנה והוא אשר עידד ופקד וצוה כבוד העסקנים הדגולים בקיום והרחבת גבולי מפעלנו וכן זכינו שבמשך כל השנים היה לנו למורה דרך ונהג בנו טובת עין באופן פרטי והעניק אותנו מאוצרו הטוב בעצה ותושיה על כל צעד ושעל

ועתה אהה עלינו עד מאוד בהלקח מאתנו רוח אפינו אשר אמרנו בצלו נחיה אוי לה לספינה שאבדה קרבניטה!

המנחם ציון וירושלים הוא ינחם אותנו ואת כל משפחתו הרוממה על האבידה הגדולה שאבדנו, ויה"ר שלא ישמע עוד שוד ושבר וצער בגבולינו, ויושר יליץ ממרומים על עדת צאן מרעיתו ועל כל הנלווים אליו, ונזכה בקרוב בימינו לביאת משיח צדקינו ויקיצו וירננו שוכני עפר בב"א

החותמים מתוך צער רב  
הנהלת מפעל תורה ודעת - תפארת בנימין



sky that he had just heard that someone had rendered milk impermissible for consumption because of a medical procedure done on milk cows that, in that person's opinion, rendered the cows *treifos*. Rav Belsky listened, closed his *Gemara*, and told his *chavrusah*, "I need some time now to write a *teshuvah*. I don't know who the person who rendered this *p'sak* is, but I assume he is over 55 years old and his primary purpose for milk is to put in his coffee. There are, however, women and children who absolutely must have milk and cannot do without it." He then locked his door and spent hours writing a *teshuvah*. The next morning, Rav Belsky entered the large dining room in Camp Agudah, poured himself a glass of milk, and, in a booming voice, made the *brachah* of *shehakol*, after which he drank the cup of milk in front of everyone.

This story illustrates both Rav Belsky's sense of *achrayus* to *halachah* and *Klal Yisroel* and his power of *p'sak*, which was built on solid foundations and thus so widely accepted. He had the specially endowed *siyata diShmaya* to be able to render *piskei halachah* in the most complex areas *aliba dehilchesa*. He also had the special *shikul hadaas*, the ability to know when to use the power of *heter* and when to be *machmir*, which Hashem grants to unique *poskim* in every generation.

Rav Moshe Elefant, COO of the OU and a great *talmid chochom* and expert in all areas of *kashrus*, related a question that once arose. The question was whether video cameras should be installed in dairy farms all over the United States, thereby ensuring that the milk in these farms would be considered *cholov*



*Yisroel*. Rav Belsky was adamantly opposed to this leniency. "That is not what *Chazal* meant when they said that milk must be supervised."

Rav Elefant, who worked with Rav Belsky at the OU for nearly thirty years, explained that as one of the OU's senior *poskim* for the past three decades, Rav Belsky had an incalculable impact on *kashrus* in our time. Until he assumed the position of *rosh yeshiva* at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas upon the passing of Rav Avrohom Pam, Rav Belsky would go to the OU offices in Manhattan twice a week to *pasken shailos* that constantly cropped up. In more recent years, he visited the OU once a week.

"The impact he had on *shechitah* in the United States is one that most will never realize," said Rav Elefant. "Rav Belsky was not only a *posek* and *rov*, but was himself a *shochet* who was familiar with every organ and sinew in an animal. In addition to the *halachah*, he knew the process and the mechanics and was thus able to render *piskei halachah* in a most comprehensive way, from all angles. Just last year, an issue regarding the process and the *halachos* and *minhagim* of *nikkur* came up. When I went to discuss it with him, he started to give me a *shiur* on these complex *halachos* and *minhagim* extending back to the 1800s. Unfortunately, we never had the chance to finish that conversation..."

"Rav Belsky reveled in being able to rule on *kashrus* matters by getting to the bottom of the issues, by understanding the *metzius*. He would often relate a Torah thought," says Rav Elefant, "that encapsulated his outlook on these matters. The *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* says, 'One must hate the *rabbonus*.' The ob-

## הלא תדעו כי שר וגדול נפל היום בישראל

יחד עם עם ה' ובית ישראל  
הדואבים על הסרת הנזר והרמת העטרה  
בסילוקו של גאון וצדיק רם ונישא  
אשר האיר שמי יהדות התורה בארה"ב ומחוצה לה  
בהרצת תורה, במשמר הכשרות, ובהמון פעלים לה' ולתורתו

ה"ה

הגאון הגדול, מעוז ומגדול, רב רבנן  
הג"ר ישראל בעלסקי זצ"ל  
ראש ישיבת תורה ודעת

הננו בברכת תנחומים למשפחתו הגדולה  
בנים וחתנים ובני בנים, גדולי תורה ועתירי מעש:  
המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים  
ובהגברת חיילים בעבודת חיו בתורה ובחסד תנוחמו

זכותו הגדולה תעמוד לכל בית ישראל בשעה קשה זו  
להגן עליהם ממרומים מכל צרות הזמן ברוח וגשם  
ומהרה ינחם כולנו כאחד בנחמת עולמים  
בישועת ה' על עמו ונחלתו בב"א

פינחס הלוי ליפשיץ  
יתד נאמן דארה"ב

YatedNe'eman





vious question is: ‘Hate the *rabbonus*?’! *Rabbonus* is one of the most vital needs of *Klal Yisroel*! On the contrary, we should all love, honor and hail all the *rabbonim* in the *rabbonus* who are engaged in ruling on matters of *halachah*. Rav Belsky would explain that there are two components to the *rabbonus*. There is the actual rabbinic work, learning, rendering *piskei halachah*, trying to understand the *metzius* and ruling

accordingly. There are also the trappings of the *rabbonus*, the honor and the political roles that often come into play. One should hate the *trappings* of the *rabbonus*, but love the actual *work* of the *rabbonus*, Rav Belsky would conclude.”

That was Rav Belsky. He loved engaging in the *rabbonus* aspect of *rabbonus*, not the trappings of the *rabbonus*. As Rav Menachem Genack so eloquently conveyed at

In the early years at the Kof-K *kashrus* organization, where Rav Belsky first started his work in *kashrus* after being encouraged to do so by his *rebbe*, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, and later, as a *posek* at the OU, he would receive a constant flow of *shailos* that streamed in from *mashgichim* all over the world. It was often imperative that he be reached. In those pre-cell phone days, at times his wife would be called, and she would run to the *yeshiva* to give him a message to call the OU. During the ensuing years, when a large cadre of *talmidei chachomim* joined the OU, his expertise was used in setting policy, setting up how the *hashgachah* would be conducted, and answering really serious questions.

“I was frequently *zocheh* to discuss very serious and difficult *shailos* with Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv,” related Rav Elefant. “On many of those occasions, Rav Elyashiv would ask, ‘What is Rav Belsky’s opinion on this matter?’ It was clear that Rav Elyashiv had great respect for the *piskei halachah* of Rav Belsky.”

Rav Avrohom Gordimer, a rabbinic coordinator at the OU, related, “Rav Belsky always replied to *shailos* with tremendous depth, piercing to the heart of the issue with great *sevaros* and *lomdus*, as a senior *rosh yeshiva*. He never presented a superficial or a ‘*cheshbon*’ approach to *p’sak*. His total

## Pripitchik

Another Sinai Academy *talmid* who attended the Camp Agudah *masmidim* program was Kalman.

Kalman was so incredibly moved by Rabbi Belsky because of his genuine concern about each and every boy in the FSU program. He had the fortunate opportunity to learn one-on-one with Rabbi Belsky every *Shabbos*. Rabbi Belsky was so impressed by Kalman’s dedication to learning and his stellar *middos* that he continued the relationship after the summer’s conclusion. The family attempted to have Kalman’s sister enrolled at the Shulamith school for girls in Brooklyn but were unsuccessful. At that point, Rabbi Belsky offered his assistance and made sure she had a quality Torah education.

One year on *Pesach*, Rabbi Belsky invited Kalman and his entire family to his home for the *seodorim*. When he saw that Kalman’s father appeared distinctly disinterested in the recitation of the *Haggadah*, he stopped the *seder* and began singing a very old Yiddish song called, “*Pripitchik*.” Kalman’s father immediately recognized the song and did not stop singing it. This creative approach allowed Rabbi Belsky to craft a strong connection with Kalman’s father. Kalman’s father began to show more interest in the *seder* and became involved for the remainder of the evening.

On another occasion, Rabbi Belsky made a *siyum* for Kalman as he had finished the *mesechta* he was learning. While Kalman’s father did not recognize the high level of *simcha* that this meant to his son, Rabbi Belsky made it his business to personally invite his father to take part in the *siyum*. It was a very emotional experience for Kalman and his father witnessed the *kovod* extended to his son by those gathered. He soon realized the importance of Torah learning and encouraged his son at every turn.

the *levayah*, “Rav Belsky tenaciously pursued the *emes* when it came to *halachah*.”

He would learn everything that there was to know about the process of food manufacturing. His mind never sufficed with “this is the way it has always been.” Rav Genack recalled that there was a question regarding the *kashrus* of oil contained in massive, seven-story tall oil tankers. Rav Belsky himself climbed up a seven-story ladder and climbed into the tankers to ascertain the actual facts in order to render a *p’sak*.

Rav Elefant related, “Rav Belsky taught us never to accept anything at face value. One must constantly review *halachic* procedures, and just because things were done in a particular way in the past does not mean matters should continue in that way. The *metzius* frequently changes and, in general, one must try to constantly upgrade if possible.”

mastery of the entire corpus of *halachah*, both in breadth and depth, as well as his stunning mastery of the technical *metzius*, both in terms of its intricacies and its inner workings, were mind-boggling.

“Every time we asked a *shailah*,” continued Rav Gordimer, “we received a mini-*shiur* on the topic, a detailed explanation of the mechanics of the *metzius*, with an answer that was so compelling that we knew it was pure *emes*, not something based on an ‘*ukimta*’ or an approach that we felt was subject to question. Rav Belsky would read aloud from the relevant *seforim* when replying to *shailos* in order to show us the sources and wording, and he would make us feel part of the *masa umatan*. After rendering a decision, he would show us inside how the *p’sak* was truly what the *Gemara*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Rama*, *nosei keilim* and relevant *teshuvah seforim* meant. It always came forth so decisively clear that the *p’sak*

**The Hanhala, Board of Directors, Staff & Students of  
Valley Torah High School  
(Los Angeles, California)**

**express deepest condolences to the family of**

**HaRav Chaim Yisroel Belsky זצוק"ל**

**He was a true leader of our generation,  
and left a legacy of many esteemed descendants.**

**May הקב"ה comfort the  
Belsky, Gross, Cohen, Rechnitz,  
Berl, Lehrfield, Presby and Goldstein families.**

**המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים**





Photo: Rabbi Eliyahu Ferrell

was *emes*. Rav Belsky always presented totally compelling *teshuvos* of dizzying depth with a *pashtus* that fit the words of the *mekoros* and clearly reflected their true intent.

“Rabbi Genack, head of OU Kashrus, told me on several occasions that food company executives would state that after visiting their factories for *kashrus* purposes, Rav Belsky understood the equipment and processing mechanisms better than they themselves did, and he taught them things about their own operations of which they were unaware.”

The OU’s most senior overseas field representative, Dr. Avraham Meyer, who is both *Chasidish* and has a PhD from MIT, is one of the greatest *kashrus* experts in the world today due to his mastery of food science, production technology, machinery, and much more. He commented after Rav Belsky was *niftar* that Rav Belsky was “the most amazing man I have ever met, and I have been around for a quite a while.”

Dr. Meyer explained: “One of the most remarkable memories of my life was having lunch at an OU conference with Rav Belsky, discussing *kashrus* and microbiology. Everything was at his fingertips: the intellectual speed (truly a supersonic thinker); the interest in and understanding of complex science and technology; the innovative thinking; the whole range of conceivable *halachic* approaches... Plus, he was such a lovely, caring person.”

Rav Gordimer continues: “Once, I had an urgent *shailah* and the answer really needed to be in writing. It was during the summer, when Rav Belsky was away at Camp Agudah and officially on vacation from the OU (even though he always made himself available to the OU staff

as much as possible). Despite his unbelievably busy schedule, Rav Belsky faxed me a comprehensive *teshuvah* immediately, and left me a kind, detailed voice message, resolving the situation on the spot.

“Rav Belsky was intense about Torah, yet he sat at his office in the OU explaining and answering all *shailos* with a smile and usually a story about the issue at hand. He was never tense and always appeared relaxed. He certainly made everyone who posed *shailos* feel relaxed, as he dealt with them with friendliness and a very warm *shalom aleichem*, and laid out the *halachah* with clarity, background and *seder*.”

Rav Yosef Savitsky said at the *levayah*, “A *posek* must be a *lamdan* as well. Rav Belsky had the unique stature as a *posek* who was a great *lamdan*, with an unusual range of knowledge in all *seforim* and in all practical aspects relevant to *halachah*. Thus, his *p’sak* was accepted by such large portions of *Klal Yisroel*. In addition, his good cheer and humble nature made him extremely approachable. Any person who asked him a question understood that he wouldn’t just get a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ answer, but rather a clearly explained reason for the *p’sak* as well.”

It is this colossal loss that *Klal Yisroel* is mourning and will continue to mourn for years to come. We are now left with the task of internalizing Rav Belsky’s legacy of Torah, *avodah* and *gemillus chassodim*, and trying to emulate and continue in the ways of this giant of Torah and *chessed*, whose genius and loving, expansive heart inspired and guided generations.

*Yehi zichro boruch.*

*Special thanks to the numerous family members, talmidim, colleagues and friends who*

*were interviewed in the preparation of this article. They include Rav Yaacov Gross, Rav Meir*

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*Rav Menachem Savitz, Rav Avrohom Gordimer and Rav Yitzchok Gottdiener.*

## בנות אסתר

בית ספר גבוה חרדי לחינוך הבנות  
ע"ש האשה החשובה מרת אסתר רויזא דויטש ע"ה

### שר וגדול נפל בישראל

TOGETHER WITH ALL KLAL YISROEL BNOS ESTHER HIGH SCHOOL

MOURNS THE PASSING OF THE GREAT GAON AND TZADDIK

פוסק חדור ומרביץ תורה לאלפים שר התורה אשר כל רז לא אניס לי

ראש ישיבת תורה דעת

### מון רבי ישראל בעלסקי זצ"ל

WE EXTEND OUR CONDOLENCES TO HIS CHOSHUEH DAUGHTER

MRS TAMAR RECHNITZ תח"י

MAY THE WONDERFUL AND INCREDIBLE מסירות TO THE כלל AND THE פרט

בכל קצוי תבל OF YOU AND YOUR ILLUSTRIOUS HUSBAND

בגנזי מרומים AND A נחת רוח FOR HIS NESHAMA זכות

LIKEWISE WE EXTEND OUR CONDOLENCES TO HIS CHOSHUEH SISTER

OUR REVERED MECHANECHES AND MORAH

MRS LAYA BIRON תח"י

WHOSE PRESENCE CREATES SUCH AN IMPACT ON OUR SCHOOL

AND WHO SERVES AS AN INSPIRATION TO ALL

MAY YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES KNOW ONLY SIMCHOS

AND CONTINUE TO ADD NEW CHAPTERS

TO THE ANNALS OF YOUR FAMILY’S SHINING LEGACY

בהוקרה

BNOS ESTHER HIGH SCHOOL

HANHALA

TALMIDOS

PARENTS



# “Were You Close?”

That question keeps being asked to the many nephews and nieces of Rav Yisroel Belsky *zt”l*, as we are still trying to absorb the fact that he is no longer with us, no longer the *rosh hamishpachah*.

I’m just picturing the complete bewilderment on his face were someone to ask him that question. With all the many thousands of people he dealt with, with the *ohl* of all of *Klal Yisroel* on his shoulders, family, to “Uncle Sruly,” was still family. He was always there for us. If we had *shailos* or needs, he carved out time for us, because we were *mishpachah*.

During a time when he was incredibly busy (when was he not?), a family member had a complex *din Torah*. Uncle Sruly sat with him and worked out all the details, advising him which *bais din* to use and who to speak to, until he was fully prepared and confident.

When my oldest son was born, after a few years’ wait, it was a time when Rav Belsky wasn’t doing so well physically. He needed a knee replacement and it was hard for him to get around. We debated if it was fair to be *matriach* him to come and perform the *bris milah*. After all, we had one of the *gedolei poskei hador* as our uncle and everyone else seemed to use him. We finally made the call. My aunt told us that she wasn’t sure if he could make it because of his health situation, a seemingly fair response. She called back an hour later. “Your uncle said that he won’t turn a niece down!” she said. “We just need a driver for him!”

I didn’t dream that, six years later, we wouldn’t even have that option anymore. I’m so happy that we took the opportunity when we did.

Over the last few days, I asked some of my cousins what their most significant memories of Uncle Sruly are. The Friday night singing at “Bobby and Zaidy Belsky” was the first response of most people. Uncle Sruly used to go every single week to visit his parents. Zaidy Belsky put out nuts and candies and they would sit and sing. When Uncle Sruly learned a new *niggun*, he taught it to the family and it would become a family tune. He taught us the power of the *niggun* and used it for his *avodas Hashem*.

Another common response from cousins was his *simchas chachaim*. Not just his love of learning, but the genuine joy he found in every pleasure the *Borei Olam* gives us. He would notice the beauty of the *bria*, and he derived much pleasure from the beauty of nature and the beauty of people. He genuinely appreciated the daily *brachos* we have.

He gave each of the little children his time and attention, letting them “choose their *brachos*,” making them feel special.

Every single cousin has a story (or two, or ten) about when Uncle Sruly was there for them, answering their *shailos*, coming to their *brisos*, showing us he cared. I was always amazed by how he knew us all - including our spouses and even our children - by name. But then again, of course.

When my sisters called to ask him about a *kashrus* question overseas, he didn’t just respond. He researched, called them back, and guided them to the right place.

The family loyalty was reciprocated

during Uncle Sruly’s final illness, as the extended Belsky and Wilhelm family rallied to try and be *mezakeh a refuah* with family *Tehillim* calls, learning sessions, *Tehillim* of *tinokos shel bais rabbon*, and the establishment of a family *hachnosas kallah* fund. The *achdus* alone was a tremendous *chizuk* to all and surely a *zechus* for our uncle as

well.

Uncle Sruly taught us to be proud of our *yichus* and to carry it on. He was the strongest proponent of writing a book about our great-grandfather, Rav Binyomin Wilhelm *zt”l*. He exhorted the family to support Mifal Torah Vodaas, Zaidy Binyomin’s project. He taught the family *niggunim* and

could sit for hours and regale us with stories about our ancestors – stories to learn from. He encouraged us to be there for each other, no matter how busy we are and how big the family got.

So to answer the question, “Were you close?”

“Of course! We’re *mishpachah*!”





# Carrying the Legacy of His Zaide

*The apple does not fall far from the tree, and Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky zt"l was the select fruit that grew on a tree that was firmly rooted in American soil, planted from seeds brought over from early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. As his cousin from the Wilhelm side of the family, I am privileged to share some stories about Rav Belsky's close relationship with our mutual ancestor, his grandfather and my great-grandfather, Rav Binyomin Wilhelm zt"l.*

In 1918, Rav Binyomin Wilhelm moved to Williamsburg from the Lower East Side of Manhattan. A short time later, his son, Shia, was ready to start *yeshiva*, but there was none there for him to attend. Drawing on the initiative and drive he displayed throughout his life, Rav Binyomin decided to establish one. He went from *shul* to *shul* and from house to house for help in accomplishing this goal.

One of the homes he visited was named Reb Yisroel Belsky zt"l. When Rav Binyomin told him of his plans to start a *yeshiva*, Reb Yisroel, a man of means, reached for his checkbook. Rav Binyomin stopped him, saying, "I'm not here for money. That will be for a different time. Now I am here to ask you to send your son to the new *yeshiva*."

That son, Berel zt"l, later became Rav Binyomin's son-in-law and the father of Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky.

As the oldest grandson of Rav Binyomin, Rav Belsky was the apple of his grandfather's eye. Rav Binyomin once said that it was worth creating Yeshiva Torah Vodaath just for his grandson, Rav Yisroel.

Their special relationship revolved around Torah. A story told by the *rosh yeshiva* illustrates this point: Rav Binyomin was spending a few days at a hotel in Spring Valley, and Rav Belsky was learning nearby at Bais Medrash Elyon. One day, he received a phone call from his grandfather, asking him to come over immediately. Wondering what could be important enough for his grandfather to summon him, Rav Belsky dropped what he was doing and rushed to the hotel. As soon as he saw his grandson, Rav Binyomin cried, "I'm so glad you came! I have a *shverekeit* (difficulty) with a *Tosafos* in *Yevomos*. Maybe you can help me figure out *pshat*."

Of course! What else but a Torah problem would have warranted such urgency?

Even when separated by distance, Rav Belsky kept in close touch with his *zaide*. In one particular letter to Rav Binyomin, who was traveling in Eretz Yisroel, Rav Belsky described the high level of learning at Camp Torah Vodaas, where he was spending the summer as a young married man. He praised the camp's atmosphere and the positive influence the older *talmidim* had on the younger boys. However, he wrote, one thing was lacking. "If only there were a special camp for the *bais medrash talmidim*... But maybe we will be able to correct that in the future." He envisioned a camp where older *bochurim* would devote themselves to learning full-time — and he knew that his *zaide* would share his dream. He continued the letter with inquiries about Rav Binyomin and went on to share some *divrei Torah* with his *zaide*. Torah. Al-

ways Torah.

Rav Belsky's tremendous *ahavah* for *yedios haTorah*, coupled with exceptional *kishronos*, allowed him to absorb and retain every detail of the Torah that he pursued. His grandfather recognized and valued his tremendous *kochos*. He understood that Rav Yisroel could become a *gadol* in Torah and encouraged him to devote himself entirely to his learning.

Once, Rav Binyomin was involved in a complicated *din Torah* and many individuals — including family members, friends,



Rav Belsky zt"l with his grandfather, Rav Binyomin Wilhelm zt"l, at the wedding of his brother, Rav Mendel Belsky.  
AT RIGHT: Rav Belsky zt"l as a child.



and *talmidei hayeshiva* — were encouraging Rav Belsky to get involved in the *halachic* aspects. When Rav Binyomin heard about this, he told Rav Belsky to remain uninvolved and focus on his learning.

Rav Belsky evinced deep interest in — and knowledge of — the history of his forebears: the Belskys, the Bruders, the Wilhelms and the Webermans. Over the last few years, the *rosh yeshiva* spent many hours relating to me the history of his *zaiden* coming to America. He felt that it was a *cheilek* in the *mesoras haTorah* and stressed how important it is to transmit these stories to future generations.

When the Rav Belsky was sitting *shi'vah* for his sister, a prominent *rosh yeshiva* came to be *menachem avel*. Rav Belsky told this *rosh yeshiva*, "If not for my *zaide*, there would be no *Yiddishkeit* in America."

Not just Torah, but *Yiddishkeit*.

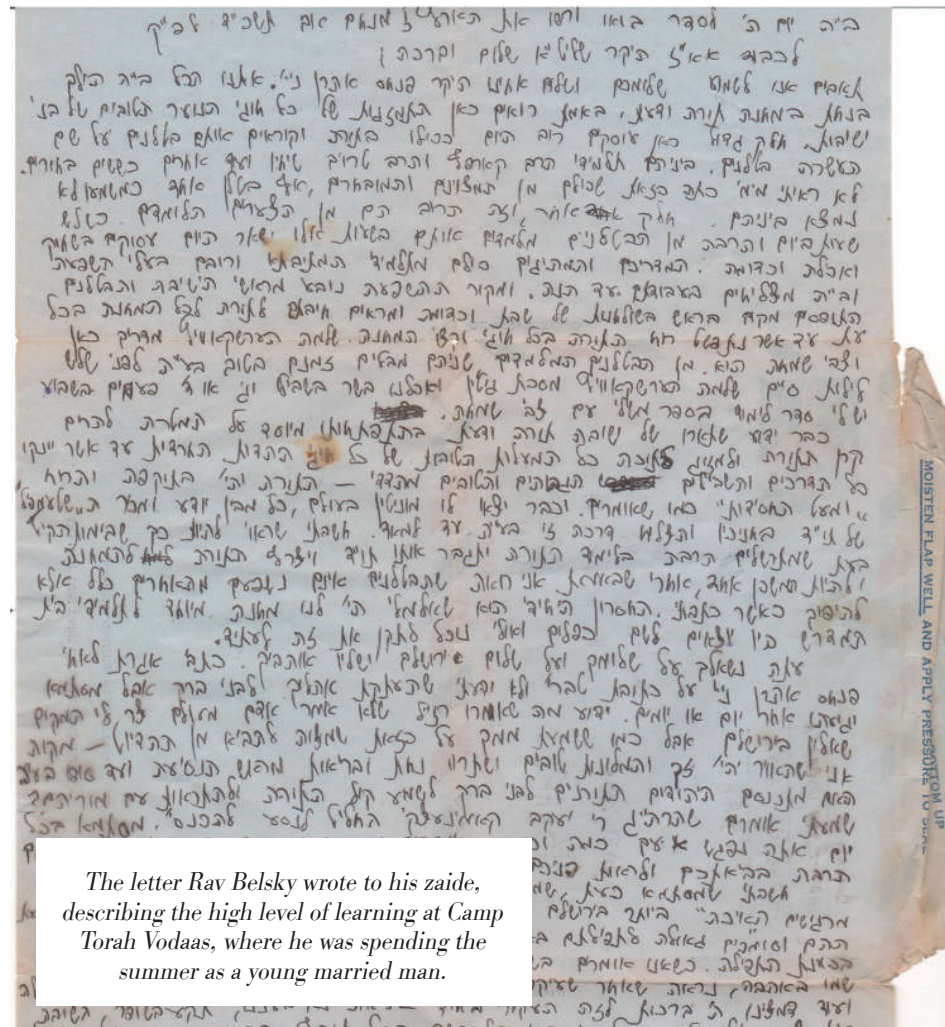


Rav Belsky zt"l with the author, reviewing a brochure about the forthcoming biography about his grandfather, Rav Binyomin Wilhelm zt"l.

Rav Belsky felt that it was very important for *Klal Yisroel* to understand what the battle for Torah Vodaas meant to the future of *Yiddishkeit*. He capitalized on every opportunity to talk about his *zaide*, Rav Binyomin, publicly, whether at various Torah Vodaas functions or when addressing sixth graders beginning

from his *rabbeim* and his *zaide*. This, the *rosh yeshiva* felt, was also a vital *cheilek* of his *harbotzas haTorah*.

His strong sense of *niggun* was obvious to anyone who observed his *avodas Hashem*. He would constantly sing songs he had learned from his *zaide* and taught them to his *talmi-*



The letter Rav Belsky wrote to his *zaide*, describing the high level of learning at Camp Torah Vodaas, where he was spending the summer as a young married man.

to learn *Gemara*. His face lit up as he spoke about his grandfather with great reverence and glowing admiration.

Not only was Rav Belsky a master *rebbe*, he was a master *talmid* who absorbed both Torah and aspects of *avodas Hashem* from his *rabbeim* and incorporated them until they became part of his very essence. Aside from the myriad *shiurim* he gave and his other means of *harbotzas haTorah*, he would constantly transmit stories and *limudei mussar* he heard

*dim* and to the *bochurim* who merited spending their summers with him at Camp Agudah.

It was only in Rav Binyomin's later years that he felt it was time for Rav Belsky to devote himself to the *tzibbur*. Towards the end of his life, Rav Binyomin summarized his worldview to his grandson. As they were about to drink tea together, Rav Binyomin commented, "In America, it's called tea. In Yiddish, 'tee' means 'to do.' Always remember to do — for Hashem, for others, for Torah."

Like the exceptional product of an exceptional family, like the apple that does not fall far from the tree, Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky grew and flourished and established new shoots — both descendants and *talmidim* — committed to continuing the holy Torah legacy of his forebears.

*Yehi zichro boruch.*

.....

The writer is currently compiling a book about Rav Binyomin Wilhelm zt"l and would like to include a chapter about Rav Belsky, his beloved grandson. If anyone has stories, memories or *divrei Torah* that they heard from the *rosh yeshiva*, please email Rabbi Binyomin Gewirtz at [torahvodaathlegacy@gmail.com](mailto:torahvodaathlegacy@gmail.com) or call him at 848.525.1145.



# The Musician

One morning while reading a newspaper, Jarbas Agnelli, an artist and composer from São Paulo, Brazil, saw a photograph of birds perched on an electric wire, a short respite for the birds on a much longer journey. They seemed to have found their places randomly. But the photo caught his eye and he cut it out. In a burst of inspiration, he noted the exact location of the birds on the wire, and used those locations as musical notes to compose a song. He was curious to hear what melody the birds created.

It was breathtaking.

He sent the music to a photographer, who told his editor, who told a reporter, until the story ended up in the newspaper. Before long, the photo, the story, and the composition had become known throughout the world. The composition is titled “Birds on a Wire,” and has become a classical musical masterpiece.

One photo. One scene. One masterful composition.

When Yisroel Belsky graduated eighth grade, he listed his plans for his future in his yearbook. He intended to attend Yeshiva Torah Vodaath for high school, and then

to continue his studies in Beth Medrash Elyon in Monsey. Then he planned on becoming a musician.

He attended both of those yeshivos, but then his life deviated from his scripted plan. Or so it seemed.

Yisroel’s brilliant and insatiable mind devoured all the Torah he learned: *Tanach. Mishnayos. Bavli. Yerushalmi. Shulchan Aruch. Tur. Rishonim. Acharonim. Midrash. Sisrei Torah.* And more.

But along the way, he also picked up many other pieces of wisdom: Physics. Chemistry. History. Astronomy. Astrology.

Botany. Calculus. Sociology. Poetry. And more.

All this, without the assistance of secular academia. He was never seen learning anything other than Torah.

Rav Belsky utilized his encyclopedic knowledge to enable him to become the primary *posek* for the world’s largest kashrus organization. His mastery of physics, comprehension of chemistry, and command of mathematics helped him bring kosher food to the world over.

So upon further reflection, Rav Yisroel Belsky actually did become a master musician. The *niflaos haBorei* were his instruments, and the Torah his *shirah*, his song. The *Bais Yosef* was his piano, the *Magen Avrohom* his flute, and the *Pischei Teshuvah* his guitar. Rav Belsky’s *shiros* were unique compositions.

When most people gaze at masterful landscapes and breathtaking sunsets, they see the elegance of nature. Rav Belsky saw the *Borei Olam*. He saw this beauty through the lens of Torah, and used it to decipher complex and difficult *halachic* queries. But he also saw the *Ribbono Shel Olam*’s beauty in less striking images. He saw the magnificence and splendor, wisdom and brilliance, in the minutiae of Creation.

A lifetime of photos. Millions upon millions of images. And an infinite amount of musical masterpieces.

Rav Yisroel was a paradigm of “*Avdi atah Yisroel asher becha espa’ar*” (*Yeshayah* 49:3). Perhaps what made him even more special was that he saw the same in others. Where others may have seen something unremarkable or even something displeasing in other human beings, he saw the *tzelem Elokim*— beautiful in its makeup, a perfect complement to Hashem’s stunning brushstrokes.

It is difficult to fathom Rav Belsky’s *gadlus beTorah*. Suffice it to say that he knew *kol haTorah kulah* some 30 to 40 years ago. It is unfair to demand from common folk greatness in Torah when the leader we are speaking about is eons beyond our mental capacity. But there is no excuse not to learn from his gentle and tender sensitivity toward others.

He became the champion for the underdogs, for the downtrodden and the oppressed. He fought on their behalf and never gave up. It mattered not that he could also get dragged in the mud, sullied from the dirt of cynics. While others were afraid to stand up for what was right, Rav Belsky feared no one. There were times when Rav Belsky had to sing solo; those solos pierced the silence, and became sweet music to those who finally had a friend to whom they could turn.

“*Ki sarisa im Elokim ve’im anashim va’tuchal*” (*Bereishis* 32:29). He struggled for others. Fought their fight. Defended their honor. Persevered and overcame.

Age, prestige, and wealth were non-factors in determining to whom Rav Belsky gave his time. Heeding the calls of those in need, he was everyone’s friend. The youth of Camp Agudah and *talmidim* of Torah Vodaath will attest to the approachability of this humble, gentle giant and father figure.

One summer, I came to Rav Belsky







with a long list of *shailos*. Though I caught him on his way out, he took me back into his office and listened to my questions, answering each one with patience. He took a genuine interest in what I was doing and who I was. And I was one of thousands.

He played the song of the *beriah*, and only cared about the music he composed for *kvod Shamayim*, as well as *kvod haTorah* and *kvod habriyos*.

To show the importance of *kvod haTorah*, Rav Belsky would share a powerful story: Rav Aharon Kotler and Rav Yoel, the Satmar Rav, were in strong disagreement regarding the Chinuch Atzmai schools. Rav Aharon was the champion of Chinuch Atzmai, while the Satmar Rav was strongly opposed to the whole concept of setting up these schools in Israel.

On occasion, Rav Aharon would speak to *yeshivahleit* and encourage them to collect for Chinuch Atzmai during *bein hazmanim*. During one *bein hazmanim*, two boys naïvely went to the Satmar Rav for a donation. In no uncertain terms, he explained to them that this was not an organization he supported. However, before he sent them away, he asked them what made them decide to collect. They told him that they were disciples of Rav Aharon, and he had asked them to collect for Chinuch Atzmai. The Satmar Rav immediately changed his tune. “Oh, you’re collecting because your *rebbe* told you to?” he echoed, and then gave the two young men a very large

donation—for an organization he did not support.

Rav Belsky loved to tell this story, to show the importance of finding and following a *rebbe*.

But it was not only *kvod haTorah*, and not only *kvod habriyos* he sought to uphold; his concern extended to all *baalei chaim*. One time, a cat began hanging around the Belsky home. When it bore kittens, they, too, became the Belsky family’s guests. And when the cat disappeared, Rav Belsky took the well-being of the kittens very much to heart and made sure they were cared for until a home was found for them.

Alas, Rav Belsky is no longer. There were few *geonim* like him. Now, there is one less.

His courage and candor, a thing of the past. His orchestra has grown silent.

The Torah world—in fact, the whole world—is utterly bereft. I imagine that the sun and the stars, the flowers and trees, the nuances of nature he so appreciated and spoke about to the young and curious, will all lament his passing. Who will speak of the importance of nature? Who will teach a superficial and high-tech world that the *niflaos haBorei* are most wondrous of all?

One final story. One very hot and humid day, Rav Belsky went on a hike with the campers from Machane Ephraim of Camp Agudah. Aware of the possibility of dehydration, he instructed the boys to

bring along bottles and canteens of water so that they would be well-hydrated. Unfortunately, one boy, the largest and huskiest boy of the group, brought along two

***The niflaos  
haBorei were his  
instruments, the  
Torah his shirah,  
the Bais Yosef  
his piano, the  
Magen Avrohom  
his flute, and the  
Pischei Teshuvah  
his guitar.***

caffeinated bottles of soda instead. The caffeine he drank acted as a diuretic and instead of hydrating him, it caused him further dehydration. The boys were well into their hike when they noticed that this non-athletic young man was dehydrated and in need of medical attention. Rav Belsky took one look at him and told the boys that

they would have to go back to make sure that the boy got the medical attention he needed.

The boys looked at each other. They did not know what they were going to do. It was obvious that the boy was in no condition to walk back to camp. But who would carry him? Even if four of them tried, they would never be able to lift him, let alone carry him all the way back. Rav Belsky didn’t hesitate. With enormous effort and great strength, he lifted the young man and began carrying him back. It was a difficult challenge, and there were times that he had to stop and rest. But even then, he would not place the boy back on the ground. He didn’t want to shame him or cause him discomfort. When they finally returned to camp, the boy received the attention he needed.

And Rav Belsky told no one of his heroic act.

*Mi yitein lanu temuraso?*

Who will lift us on his back and carry us when we are weak and cannot navigate our own way home? Who will defend our honor?

The musician has stopped playing.

The silence is deafening.

*Yehei zichro boruch.*

*The author wishes to thank Rav Zvi Belsky for the inspiration for this essay. Additional thanks go to Rav Doniel Metzger, Rav Beirush Kipper and Rav Elchonon Ciment.*



# Ki Sarisa

## A Sar V'gadol B'Yisroel

Through the Lens of a Talmid

As the skies begin to dim and *Shabbos* approaches, I finally have a few minutes to reflect on what has transpired. In my mind, I begin counting some of the topics of the *shiurim* that I heard from my *rebbe*, Rav Chaim Yisroel Halevi Belsky *zt"l*: *Maseches Gittin*, *Shev Shmaatsa*, *Hakdomas HaRambam* *L'Sefer Ha'itzvos*, *Sefer Yehoshua*, *Yoreh Deah*, *Daf Yomi*, and much more. I recall the *shmuessen*, surrounded with the panorama of *Tanach*, filled with the magnitude of his *yiras Shomayim*, and filled with *ahavas Hashem* and *ahavas haTorah*. The unforgettable *nusach hatefillah*, with each intonation reflecting the underlying sentiment of the words. The memories of the deluge of people converging on him to ask advice for their personal lives, their health, business and families. Perhaps the memories of the millions of *shailos* posed in all areas, and by people from all walks of life. As the

al difficulties we had just discussed. At times, the answer was just a simple *dikduk* rule, and other times it was an involved *lomdus*. Next, we delved into *Tosafos*. After learning the *p'shat* of *Tosafos*, we returned to the *Gemara*, rereading the text according to the *p'shat* of *Rashi*, and then reading the entire *sugya* according to the *p'shat* of *Tosafos*. We were held responsible to pinpoint which words *Rashi* and *Tosafos* agreed on and where they diverged. This system repeated itself with the *Maharsha*, the *Pnei Yehoshua*, and all of the *Acharonim* that we learned. We learned the *p'shat*, read it into the *Gemara*, and then examined where the *p'shatim* agreed and where they diverged.

The *rosh yeshiva* always encouraged us to expand our knowledge of the entire gamut of the Torah. While teaching the *sugya* of *kibush yochid*, which involves the borders of

cents for? Then, I went to visit my *rebbe* in the hospital and had to feed the dime into the meter. Hashem took care of everything to the last cent!"

Events like that, with the comments that followed, helped mold *talmidim* to differentiate between things that were important and those that were not. At times, *rebbe* would share with us many of the latest innovative *shailos* that arose and explained the basis of the *p'sak halachah*. I recall the time he explained a new process with which food manufacturers extracted flavor from flowers using alcohol, and then removed the alcohol. He explained the scientific process and how a *posek* approaches such a process to determine the *kashrus* ramifications. With this, the importance of *kashrus* certification was ingrained in us, while we gained a new appreciation for the *halachic* approach to the *shailah*.

leave. He was told to stay, and as a result witnessed something unbelievable.

The fellow began: "I work for a person who is a *talmid* of the *rosh yeshiva*. At times, I made some disparaging comments about Rav Belsky and my boss warned me that if this continued, he would fire me. I continued with these jokes, and sure enough, I got fired. What should I do now?"

Our *rebbe* immediately called his *talmid* and asked what happened. "My employee mocked *rebbe*, so I had to let him go."

To this, Rav Belsky characteristically replied, "You want to be *mechabed* me? Then give him back his job!"

These interactions showed the *talmidim* firsthand how a *Yid* is supposed to function. He was able to show clearly what was important to Hashem and what was not, and to act accordingly. We were also able to see his



gloomy sky begins to darken, I cannot help but feel the emptiness engulfing our world.

*Talmidim* of Rav Belsky will find it difficult to pinpoint which aspect of his multifaceted personality they were drawn to. Some may express feeling connected to his *gaonus* in Torah; some to his broad knowledge of the world. Others related most to his unassuming nature. But all will agree that he was approachable to answer whatever they wished to ask, and they felt certain that he would do whatever was within his power to assist them. His affection for his *talmidim* was palpable, and his *talmidim* reciprocated with devotion and dedication.

Our *rebbe* designed his *shiur* with one thing in mind: to fit the needs of the *talmidim*. When teaching *Gemara*, he would begin by pointing out the beauty of the language of *Chazal* and then pinpointing the difficulties in the text. This segued into *Rashi*, which he pored over, searching for clues, often showing that *Rashi* was bothered by some of the textu-

Eretz Yisroel, he expounded on a *chiddush*. Later, he had us open a *Sefer Yehoshua* and led us through the *pesukim*, revealing a totally new understanding of the text utilizing his *chiddush*. Thus, by showing the unity of Torah, we were encouraged to expand our own knowledge. Indeed, a *talmid* recently told me that he decided to learn the *halachos* of *bris milah* and *shechitah* based on this type of association.

Many years ago, while we were in his *blatt shiur*, *rebbe* celebrated the birth of a child. An acquaintance wished to be *mehaneh* him by giving him \$100, but the person knew that it would not be accepted. We were asked to present the money as a *matanah* from the *shiur*, which was commonly given, and we complied. Sunday morning, *rebbe* came in and announced to us, "Hashem provides for each person's needs. When the *shiur* gave me \$100, I wondered what it would be used for. I went shopping for the *simcha*, and sure enough, the bill came to \$99.90. So what was the extra 10

Another time, he described the improvements he arranged in the certification of a certain baby food manufacturer. This plant had been under certification beforehand, but it was not up to the standards Rav Belsky demanded. On a walk through the plant, he suggested changing the process that would not only improve the *kashrus*, but actually save the owners money.

The *rosh yeshiva* had many *sedorim* for learning privately with individual *talmidim*. With one he would learn *Kodshim*, with another *Choshen Mishpat*, and with yet another *Zeraim*. One *talmid*, who had learned by him several years earlier, left Torah Vodaas and went to learn at Yeshiva M'kor Chaim. Each night after *Maariv*, Rav Belsky would arrive to learn with him *Mishnayos Ohalos*.

One such "*chavrusah*" tells of a time when he was learning *Yerushalmi* with Rav Belsky and a stranger entered, looking very worried. He announced that he had an important matter to discuss, and the *talmid* asked if he should

*achrayus* to *Klal Yisroel*, as he would go the extra mile to find a way to make life more comfortable for others.

A *talmid* was once walking in Camp Agudah with Rav Belsky, who excused himself, saying that he had to write an urgent *teshuvah*. "Recently, a tumult rose concerning the *kashrus* of milk. I'm sure that the one who raised this problem only considered the drop of milk he puts into his morning coffee. But I have to worry about the mothers and children who need milk for their health and growth."

*Rebbe* made a hasty exit, and then wrote a convincing *teshuvah* explaining why there was no problem with the milk. Later, he entered the dining room, poured a cup of milk, made a loud *shehakol*, and drank it.

This feeling of *achrayus* extended for the *yochid* as it did for the *rabim*. Rav Belsky would often borrow large sums of money from a *gemach* run by a close *talmid*. These funds were distributed to the many *nitzrachim* who approached him constantly for dona-



tions. With money being tight, how did Rav Belsky repay these loans? At times, people would give him some money for performing a *bris*. Although he never charged a fee, if someone offered him payment, he would use this money to pay off his *tzedakah gemach* loan. In addition, the minimal fees he was paid as a *dayan* in *dinei Torah* were used for this purpose.

A *talmid* once asked him, “Why do you use this ‘extra’ money for this? Most people would give it to their children.” In his own inimitable way, *rebbe* answered, “So I give it to other people’s children.”

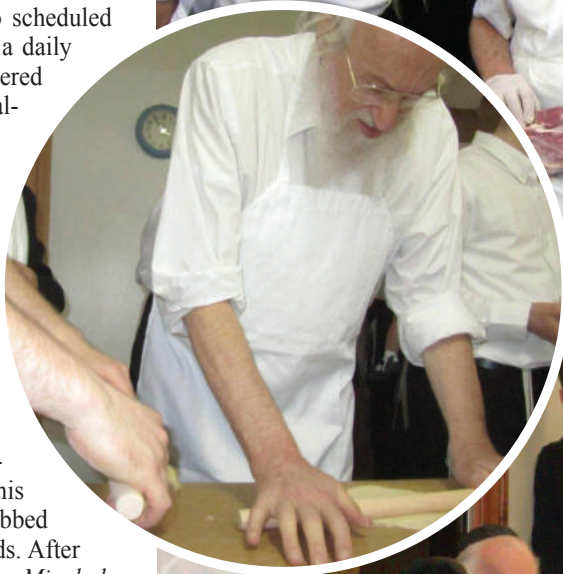
Many of his close *talmidim* were aware of the fact that he reviewed *Seder Mo’ed* each year. Over the *Yomim Noraim* and *Sukkos*, he reviewed *Masechtos Rosh Hashanah*, *Yoma* and *Sukkah*. (I once observed him learning from a *Gemara* between *aliyos* on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*. He was already on *Daf Yud Bais*.) On *Pesach*, he finished *Masechet Pesachim*. *Shavuot* was reserved for *Beitza* and other small *masechtos*. Each *Shabbos*, he learned several *blatt* in *Shabbos* and *Eiruvin*. Thus, through the course of every year, he reviewed the entire *Seder Mo’ed*. Yet, this was all done quietly, without any fanfare.

Once, while traveling with a *talmid* to a wedding in Monsey, he took along a *Mishnayos Kodshim*. On the way to the wedding, he reviewed the entire first part, and on the way home, he finished the second part. Again, this was done *behatznei’a leches*, without calling attention to himself.

The dedication he showed to scheduled *shiurim* was legendary. He gave a daily *Daf Yomi shiur*, which was delivered during the lunch break. The time allotted for it was a mere thirty minutes, and this was often shortened due to time constraints. Yet *rebbe* was devoted to reviewing the *blatt* each day. One time, he arrived quite late with blackened hands, and immediately launched into the *shiur*. Time was short, and less than fifteen minutes remained until *Minchah*. As he raced through the *daf*, he discreetly poured some water from his coffee urn onto the desk and rubbed off some of the dirt from his hands. After the *shiur* ended and he headed to *Minchah*, he remarked, “I just came from the hospital, where my wife had a baby. On the way back, my car had a flat tire and I had to change it. I didn’t have time to wash up before beginning the *shiur*.”

In the realm of *avodah*, Rav Belsky was unique. Each word and nuance was filled with emotion, and the meaning of the text came to life as he raised his delicate voice to beseech the Almighty. The Torah Vodaas *nusach*, which was developed decades ago, was precious to him. Each *niggun* was chosen for its mood or history. Certain parts of the *tefillah* were to be said slowly, and certain parts were said quickly, as per the direction of Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz *zi”l*. And the keeper of this *mesorah* was Rav Belsky. Although the crowded *bais medrash* knew what to expect as Rav Belsky began the *davening*, the heart and soul of this special *davening* was the *rosh yeshiva* at the *amud*.

Rav Belsky spent his summers in Camp Agudah, where he developed a very popular Masmidim program for young teenage *bachurim*. During this “vacation,” he was a living example of how a *ben Torah* must live his life, from the *tefillos*, to the learning, and even to the nature hikes. He would often take his *talmidim* into the woods and share with them his extensive scientific knowledge, thereby revealing to them the *niflaos haBorei*. At night, he would show them the constellations of the heavens, peppering his talks with



*ma’amarei Chazal*. In addition, he cared for them in very personal way, seeing that they developed their own *kishronos* in a positive manner.

I recall one summer when someone brought him three hind quarters of fallow deer and asked him to develop a way to *traber* them from the *gid hanasheh*. [The hind quarters of an animal have two issues: They contain the *cheilev*, the fats that were brought on the *mizbei’ach* from *korbanos*, which are prohibited, and the *gid hanasheh*, which is also prohibited. In an animal such as a cow, sheep or goat, the fats are *assur*. In a *chayah*, a wild animal such as a deer, which is not brought on the *mizbei’ach*, only the *gid hanasheh* is a problem.] Rav Belsky proceeded to carefully carve up one leg, noting where the *gid hanasheh* was attached. He then took the second leg and made several slices with a knife, which detached the *gid hanasheh* in a manner in which it could be removed easily, without disintegrating. The third leg was *trabered* the

same way. Then, as only Rav Belsky could, he marinated the deer meat and served it to his *talmidim* at a barbeque after *Maariv*. During the meal, Rav Belsky explained the entire process and all the *halachos* involved.

My dear friend, Tsemach Glenn, related a story that he witnessed that truly encapsulates the *gadlus* of our *rebbe*. One summer day, he received a call from Rebbetzin Sara Hindy Gross, Rav Belsky’s daughter. She related that a certain *yasom* was scheduled to put on *tefillin* for the first time on Sunday morning in Camp Agudah. Since this would be such an auspicious occasion, she asked Tsemach for a favor. Would he attend the *hanochas tefillin* and take some pictures?

“The last thing I wanted was to wake up at 7 a.m. Sunday morning during the summer,” Tsemach told me, “but I could not disappoint a *yasom*. So I woke up early and took my young son along for the trip.”

Rav Belsky patiently showed the youngster the proper way to don his *tefillin*, explain-

ing each step of the process in his inimitable way. The *varmkeit* he displayed towards the *bochur* was indescribable, and the boy was shining in his moment of glory.

After *davening*, Tsemach approached Rav Belsky with his young son in tow, and they greeted each other warmly. “Rav Belsky asked me why I came to this affair, since I did not know the boy. I explained that I could not turn down the request of a *yasom*.”

“This boy is a *yasom*?” exclaimed Rav Belsky. “I was unaware. Why wasn’t I told that he is a *yasom*? Had I known this, I would have done things differently.”

“I don’t understand what *rebbe* is saying,” said Tsemach. “*Rebbi* spent an inordinate amount of time, patiently explaining each step of *hanochas tefillin*. It was a masterpiece. How would things have been different if *rebbe* would have known the boy is a *yasom*?”

“The way I acted is the way you must interact with any *Yid*,” said Rav Belsky. “However, a *yasom* is different. A *yasom* can be fragile, and there are sensibilities that we must be aware of when dealing with one.

Had I known it at the time, I would have acted with even more sensitivity.”

This sensitivity was apparent in the way he cared for each and every *talmid* and extended himself to his utmost to assist them.

A *talmid* tells of the time he was offered a job to teach a group of *talmidim* in Los Angeles. Since the offer had many details that could affect his future, he went to discuss it with *rebbe*. After carefully examining the issue, it was decided that he should accept the job. “Now that you are a *rebbe*, let me give you advice as to how you must conduct yourself,” said Rav Belsky. “You must act, and not react. You must be a leader, and not a follower.”

The year passed successfully and the *talmid* returned to *yeshiva* in New York. Four years later, when he became a *chosson*, he approached *rebbe* and asked, “Can I have advice about marriage now, so I don’t have to return later?” With a sly smile, he answered, “Four years ago, I gave you advice to always be a leader and not a follower.”

*Rebbi* did not just answer *shailos*. He answered people. He understood the background of the questioner and how it affected him. A *talmid* who was married several years and was not yet blessed with children asked a *shailah* about the *kashrus* of a Corelle plate. When he *paskened* that it was no longer kosher and had to be disposed of, *rebbe* noticed that the *talmid* seemed quite frustrated. He understood that the issue was not the plate, but rather his situation. “Don’t fret,” said Rav Belsky. “Your children will eventually break the entire set!” Time went on, and after the birth of several rambunctious boys who played “Frisbee” with the plates, they were quickly disposed of.

The day is coming to a close and *Shabbos* is fast approaching. *Chazal* tell us, “*Ba Shabbos ba menuchah*.” How can we experience *menuchah* at this time? Yet, we can be consoled with what *Chazal* tell us (*Brachos* 64a): “*Talmidei chachomim ain lahem menuchah lo ba’olam hazeh velo la’Olam Haba*. Surely, our *rebbe* continues his *avodah* in *Gan Eden*, beseeching *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* to bring the *yeshuah* to our needy *dor*. Surely, he will not rest until he can help *Klal Yisroel* achieve their true *menuchah*. May our esteemed *rebbe* continue *meichayil el choyil*, until we see *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* in *Tzion berinah*, *bimeheirah beyomeinu*.

Rav Mordechai Bressler, Rav Heshy Wolf, Rav Meyer Tzvi Chesir and R’ Tsemach Glenn contributed to this article.



# Not Just a *Gadol Hador*, But a *Rebbi Hador*

*A Talmid's Perspective*

*Rabbi Bohm is a musmach of Rav Belsky zt"l and was a close talmid for about 20 years. He authored Halacha Berurah columns on over a hundred halachah topics that were meticulously reviewed by Rav Belsky for halachic and factual accuracy.*

I sit down tonight to pen this article about my beloved *rebbe*, *moreh derech*, and *posek*. I had the *zechus* to have spent thousands of hours listening to Rav Belsky's *shiurim* and discussing myriad Torah topics with him. I cherish the time he devoted to reviewing hundreds of *halachah* articles that I wrote over the years.

It's so hard to come to terms with the fact that I no longer have access to such a special *rebbe*, who influenced my life probably more than any other individual. Four years ago, upon seeing him when he returned from the hospital, I made a *Shehecheyanu* with *Sheim Umalchus* for the immense joy I felt at that moment. I was so hoping to do the same again now, but the *Ribono Shel Olam* had different plans.

An article can't do justice to describe the impact he had on my life and on the tens of thousands of *talmidim* in whose lives he played such a pivotal role.

What increases the challenge in writing such a tribute is the fact that when you are so close to someone, you don't have a list of inspirational stories that stand out as you would have if you just spent a single day visiting a *gadol*. With someone who you are so close with, you don't just take notice of extraordinary things. It is all part of one big memory.

My *shaychus* with Rav Belsky started when I was an eleventh grade *talmid* at Yeshiva Torah Temimah. I was learning *Mishnah Berurah Hilchos Pesach* and encountered an apparent *stirah* in the words of the *Mishnah Berurah*. I went around asking the question to many *rabbonim*, who acknowledged that it was a good *kashah*. I was not ready to give up. At the time, a number of the *talmidim* in my class went to Camp Agudah's Masmidim program run by Rav Belsky. They were forever describing his *gadlus*, telling me how he literally knows everything and that there is not a single question he cannot answer.

I called Rav Belsky one night to ask him the question. Within seconds, he directed me to look in a different *cheilek* of *Mishnah Berurah*, and based on what the *Chofetz Chaim* writes there, one can easily understand why it's not a *stirah* and why the *Chofetz Chaim* specifically chose to write what he wrote in each location. The *terutz* blew me away.

Rav Belsky went on to say that, often, people think that they found a *stirah* in the words of the *Chofetz Chaim*, but with a drop of additional *iyun*, one can clearly realize how every single word was so meticulously written. Rav Belsky related that Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l said that you can be *medayeik* in the words of the *Mishnah Berurah* as if you are learning a *Rishon*, and the *Chofetz Chaim* was *zocheh* to that because he

scrutinized every word that came out of his mouth with regard to *shemiras halashon*.

The following day, I made up my mind that I needed to develop a *shaychus* with this *adam gadol*. During lunchtime, I left Torah Temimah and walked the three blocks to Torah Vodaas. I met Rav Belsky as he was walking to *Minchah* and introduced myself as the caller from the night before. He smiled. I mentioned that I had a few more questions to ask him. He told me that after *Minchah*, he would be taking the train to Manhattan to go to the Orthodox Union's offices, where he supervises its *kashrus*, and that I can walk him to the train.

I readily accepted the opportunity, somewhat surprised that this *gadol* traveled to the OU by train, unaccompanied by anyone. I prepared my list of questions and the walk began. I soon realized that it was not Rav Belsky's style to answer questions quickly. Every answer included lengthy explanations along with lots of stories and abstract tidbits. I only got to ask two questions during the fifteen-minute walk. I built up the courage and asked him if I can accompany him on the train. He smiled again and made me feel very comfortable. He even helped me swipe my MetroCard, which had been giving me difficulty.

The *shaychus* then began.

## His *Tzidkus*

I quickly realized that Rav Belsky dedicated significant amounts of time to everyone. It did not make a difference if the person was an eleventh grade *bochur*, a *yungerman*, a *meshulach* from Eretz Yisroel, an *almanah*, a prestigious *askan*, or a *rosh yeshiva*.

People were always impressed by his *ga'onus*. Those who knew him were even more impressed by his *tzidkus*. He was not able to say no to anyone.

Someone once asked me if I don't feel awkward calling Rav Belsky so often. Why, the person asked, don't I let him rest and relax a bit? I responded that apparently this person does not know Rav Belsky. There was no such thing as relaxation time for him. If it would not be me calling or visiting him, I said, it would be someone else. There seemed to always be people waiting by his house. He did not know the meaning of locking his door. Almost every second of his day, he was with someone. His entire life was dedicated to *Klal Yisroel*.

I was once sitting in his house reviewing a *Halacha Berurah* article I wrote, and the phone was ringing. I mentioned to him gently that if he takes every call, we will never get done with the article and the deadline was approaching. He looked at me in disbelief. "How can I not answer? There might be a *pi-kuah nefesh* issue on the line."

This was his very selfless essence. He was always there for everyone.

One time, we were really up against a deadline the next morning, yet his phone just kept ringing. He politely apologized and told me that he will call me when things quiet

down and promised to finish reviewing the article before the deadline. My phone rang at 2 a.m. That was when things quieted down in the Belsky household.

People would line up to ask him *shailos* and for *eitzos*, *haskamos* and *tzedakah*.

The *tzedakah* was something I would not have believed if I did not see it with my own eyes hundreds of times. *Meshulochim* heard that there is a big *baal tzedakah* in Torah Vodaas and his name is Rabbi Belsky. They would come to pour out their hearts to him, and the smallest check he wrote was \$20.

For many years, there were lines out his door for *tzedakah*. I once asked him if he had a fund. He responded that all the *meshulochim* definitely think that he has a fund, but it is all from his personal checking account. I asked him how he can afford it. He told me, "That's the *Ribono Shel Olam*'s job - to make sure there is money in the account. When people come pouring out their hearts to me, how can I not offer my personal financial assistance?"

He was so careful not to embarrass or hurt any person's feelings. There was once a *Yid* who kept on coming to him and cried out his heart. I once commented to Rav Belsky that this person comes so often. He told me, "I gave him advice and he doesn't listen to me, but he still comes back crying when things are not working out." I asked him, if the person is not taking his advice, why does he still spend so much time talking to the person when he is so busy? Rav Belsky said, "He is in such pain. How can I send him out and hurt his feelings? I must listen to him cry."

To further illustrate his sense of concern for each person's feelings, four years ago, when he was taken to Maimonides Hospital and was being treated by a doctor, some people advised him that he can probably get better treatment if he switched to a Manhattan hospital. Rav Belsky refused to be transferred, saying that his present doctor is confident he can help, and if he switches, it will hurt the doctor's feelings. He refused to let that happen.

When the immigration of Russian Jewry began with the fall of the Iron Curtain, the newly-arrived immigrants needed guidance and someone to turn to. Rav Belsky became *the* address. He didn't just help the Russian Jews. He actually taught himself Russian in a short period of time so that he would be able to communicate effectively with them.

Nothing he did was half-baked. Everything he touched was influenced by his expert approach.

## Standing Up For the Truth

Rav Belsky's selfless dedication to all people often ended up with him personally receiving a lot of flack, as he did not hesitate to go up against powerful and influential people if he felt that they were wronging someone. In most of these cases, no other person would touch the issue, as they knew good and well that going up against powerful individuals would ultimately come back and

hurt them. But Rav Belsky's door was always open. He was such a *mevakeish ha'emes* and possessed a *tzidkus* of wanting to help people. He couldn't stand by as someone was taking advantage of another person *shelo kadin*. He put his neck on the line to help others.

People knew that if they had a *din Torah* and wanted a fair shake, regardless of the stature of the other litigant, Rav Belsky's *bais din* was the place to go.

Rav Belsky once commented that he doesn't get discouraged by the negativity some people falsely spewed about him. He described it with a *moshol*. He said that when a person is climbing a high mountain, as long as he keeps on looking up, he will succeed. As soon as he looks down around him, he will slowly get frightened by his situation and that might cause him to fall. The same is true in life, said Rav Belsky. A person must focus only on the *Ribono Shel Olam* and on doing what is right, not taking a look at any of his surroundings.

He had such an enormous *bikkush* for *emes*. When he would come back from a *din Torah* where it was evident that one of the *baalei din* or *to'anim* were lying, it pained him physically. He had such *agmas nefesh* over it. It also hurt him to see people fighting about petty things and not be able to separate themselves and recognize the bigger picture. When he was able to persuade the parties to do what was *yashrusdik*, he experienced the greatest *simcha*.

## His *Ga'onus*

In two decades, there was not a single question that I asked him on any topic to which I did not receive a lengthy response, whether it was in *Tanach*, *Shas*, *Daled Chelkei Shulchan Aruch*, or, *lehavdil*, *chochmas chitzoniyus*. He had such a mastery of astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, and virtually every other subject.

There was not a *posuk* in *Chumash* or *Nach* that he could not recite *baal peh*. Every time I mentioned a *Gemara* to him, he was instantly able to show it to me.

He had the same *geshmak* in every area of Torah, whether it was *hilchos Shabbos* or a *sugya* in *Kodshim*. I was once discussing with him a *sugyah* in *Ohalos*. It was an abstract *sugyah*, not one he is asked about daily. It was as if he just learned it the day before.

I was once discussing with him the *Chazal* that one should learn *mah shelibo chofetz*, what his heart desires. He told me that he has a hard time relating to that, as all parts of the Torah give him equal enjoyment.

His son once mentioned to me that he observed Rav Belsky finish the entire *Maseches Kesubos* on a flight to Eretz Yisroel.

On *Shabbos*, he studied *Masechtos Shabbos* and *Eruvin*, finishing these *masechtos* hundreds, if not thousands, of times.

He possessed his remarkable knowledge already 40 years ago. His younger years were devoted to learning with such intense *hasmodah* and a thirst for knowledge. Once he



# An Appreciation

The *Rambam* writes about the *Ri Migash* that “his intellect in its knowledge of the entire Talmud was frightening.” Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky *zt”l*, too, had a frightening intellect, which included not only knowledge of *kol haTorah kulah*, but the scientific and mathematical background necessary to understand the Torah and to apply *halachah* to reality. (For a while, he even taught mathematics at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas.) Rav Belsky was the nexus between theoretical, abstract knowledge and practical, applied knowledge. Not only did he know *Shas*, he was actually a *mohel*. Not only was he a master of the *halachos* as written, he also knew how to *shecht* and do *nikkur* on an animal.

Rav Belsky had a scientific inclination and a curious mind that led him on a constant search for truth. If we were dealing with a *shailah* regarding *bittul b’shishim*, he would effortlessly calculate the volume of room-sized containers. When the question of the *shaitels* made from hair from India arose, Rav Belsky wrote several letters to Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv regarding the situation. Just reading these letters - the depth of his understanding, the elegance of his language - is a powerful lesson.

We once were dealing with a complicated *shailah* regarding tankers of oil imported from Asia. He bravely climbed a tall, narrow ladder to peer into a tanker of oil and calculate its properties.

He had a deep understanding of technology, and, for example, he could immediately *pasken* on the “*Shabbos* switch” (to which he was adamantly opposed). When an issue with the *kashrus* of fish was raised, Rav Belsky had the confidence, which came from his knowledge together with the *kabbolah* he received from his *rabbeim*, to allow the continued eating of fish. He sought out experts on the issue from the Museum of Natural History, and, as always, he stood for the truth as he saw it in the face of opposition. Absent his courage and knowledge, we wouldn’t be eating fish today.

But in addition to his knowledge, what was unique about Rav Belsky was his concern for the most forlorn elements of society. In his combination of towering intellect with a great and capacious heart, Rav Belsky followed the model of Rav Chaim Brisker. Rav Chaim was the greatest mind of his era and singlehandedly revolutionized Torah study with his analytical method. Yet, as my *rebbe*, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, described, Rav Chaim was the paramount *ish hachessed*: Rav Chaim’s home was open to those rejected by everyone else, the poor and the sick, those shunned by society.

A number of *rabbonim* were once asked to describe the essence of the job of a *rov*. The *Aruch Hashulchan* answered that the job of a *rov* is to *pasken shailos*. Rav Chaim responded that the job of a *rov* is to do *chesed*. When Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, Rav Chaim’s son, first entered the rabbinate, his father told him two things: one, to *pasken* that a *choleh* who must eat on *Yom Kippur* can eat a full *shiur*, and two, to remember that the job of a *rov* is to care for the widows and the orphans. On Rav Chaim’s epitaph, the words inscribed are “*rav hachessed*.”

This was Rav Belsky. He, too, fought heroically for the underdog, the lonely, the embattled, those for whom no one else would care. He put his reputation on the line, time and again, to stand up for what he felt was right. He was the advocate for Russian Jewry, for the homeless and impoverished, for those he felt were innocent. He always stood his ground in his pursuit of justice.

Once, standing in the OU office, whose windows overlook the Statue of Liberty, he wistfully remarked, “I can swim from here to the statue and back.” Rav Belsky was a powerful swimmer, who never hesitated to swim against the current. He was willing to take the unpopular position, to fight for what he felt was right, regardless of popular opinion.

Rav Belsky once related that when one of his younger children was born, the doctor asked, “Why do you have so many children?” To which Rav Belsky replied, on the spot, “We Jews are an endangered species!”

Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky was truly an endangered species. He was a *yochid* in his generation, *sui generis* in his brilliance, his wisdom and his concern for every individual. He is indeed irreplaceable. *Mi yiten lanu temuraso?*

Rav Menachem Genack is the CEO of the Orthodox Union Kosher Division, overseeing the kosher certification of 6,000 facilities in 83 countries. He is known as one of the foremost talmidim of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, under whom he studied for many years.

became a *rebbe*, almost all his time was consumed by *shiurim* and helping be *madrish* people. At that point, he spent very little time on his own personal learning; it was always dedicated to others.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky *zt”l* once commented that if Rav Belsky would have spent another ten years of his life focused on his personal learning, with the extraordinary *kishron* he had, he would have been the greatest Torah giant in the entire world. Rav Belsky understood his calling and he was there for the *klal*, and he still merited to be among the most prominent *gedolei Torah* of his generation.

## Tumults

Anyone who knew Rav Belsky saw how it pained him when people started a tumult based on false information or false *sevaros*.

He once related that years ago, there was a *shailah* about the *kashrus* of cast iron pots. He went to ask the *shailah* to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky *zt”l*. Rav Yaakov said that such a *shailah* should be brought to Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt”l*. Together, they traveled to the Lower East Side to ask Rav Moshe. Rav Moshe thought long and hard, and said that to *assur* it would cause a major *kashrus* issue in everyone’s kitchens and he needs to give it more thought. Rav Moshe stressed that they should not disclose this finding to anyone until he has a final answer in order to avoid causing an unnecessary tumult. Eventually, Rav Moshe was *matir* the pots and the issue was put to rest.

Rav Belsky commented that the *kohein gadol* is warned not to stay inside the *Kodesh Hakodoshim* on *Yom Kippur* for too long, despite it being the holiest day and the fact that he is representing *Klal Yisroel*. He is advised, nonetheless, to keep it short in other not to frighten the people that something bad had happened to him.

Such is the *achrayus* not to frighten people unnecessarily, said Rav Belsky.

Years ago, Rav Belsky related that there was a meeting with *rabbonim* to discuss a *shailah* regarding the *kashrus* of milk based on a new discovery. Even before the meeting was over, with a decision rendered, information leaked and *kol korehs* were posted. Rav Belsky was greatly bothered by this.

When the question about *shaitels* was raised, I worked very closely with Rav Belsky on researching the facts. Rav Belsky sent a letter to Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *zt”l* with a few questions on his *p’sak*. A few days later, I encountered a group of people looking at a letter written by Rav Elyashiv in response to Rav Belsky’s letter to him. I called Rav Belsky. He was shocked. He didn’t know that Rav Elyashiv had responded to him and that the letter had already been posted. It turned out that his fax machine was out of paper, so while it had been sent, he hadn’t seen it.

Rav Belsky told me that most tumults result from some people learning a *sugya* for the first time and thinking that they discovered something, not knowing that it was already addressed year ago by *gedolei Torah*. Generally, every 20 years, the same tumults resurface.

Nothing bothered him more than when people denigrated *gedolim* of previous generations. During a certain *eruv* tumult, I observed how he spoke so passionately about those who just dismiss the words of previous *gedolim*. He fought fervently for the sake of *emes*. It had detrimental effect on his health at the time.

He fought an issue to the very end, whether it was *lekulah* or *lechumrah*. The personal consequences didn’t matter to him. He wished to make sure that people were not *megaleh ponim shelo kehalachah*.

## Style of P’sak

Rav Belsky utilized his vast knowledge to see a complete picture in every *sugya* in *Shas*. He had an extraordinary power of reason and could quickly dismiss any *sevara* that lacked truth. His *bikkush ha’emes* was even more noticeable when talking to him in learning. He could not stomach when someone would say a *pilpul* or come to a conclusion that he felt was *halachically* incorrect.

He once showed me an algebra formula in which once you substitute ‘x’ and ‘y’ on both sides of the equation, you end up with a result of 1=0. Obviously,

that’s impossible. He used this to illustrate that, often, a *pilpul* might sound good, but if it produces a conclusion that is absurd, then it means that somewhere along the way, you made a mistake, despite how accurate it might seem. His *glatkeit* in *p’sak* did not allow him to accept anything that sounded remotely contrary to what clear logic dictated.

It troubled him when people established new *dinim* that are not mentioned in any of the *Rishonim* or *Acharonim*. He often said that unless we are dealing with a new *shailah*, the fact that certain obvious *dinim* did not appear in any of the earlier *poskim* is generally a good indication that it’s not accurate.

He strongly opposed the attitude of some people who distinguished contemporary scenarios from earlier times, thus calling for a change in *halachah*. He said that in order to make such a distinction, one must be very fluent in 1) the *metzius* in earlier times, 2) the current *metzius*, and 3) the related *sugyos*. Without proficiency in all three of these areas, it’s impossible to make any distinctions.

When people listened to a *shiur* from him, it often did not contain major *pilpulim*, yet when he was asked a question, he gave the most brilliant *pilpul* to explain what he had said. His extraordinary knowledge gave him a deep understanding of the underlying root, concepts and *sevaros* of each *sugya*. With this depth of understanding, the *pesokim* for each practical issue were simple extensions of the *sugya*.

Rav Belsky would roll up his sleeves and take apart machinery, also traveling to remote places if giving an accurate *p’sak* required that.

## Kashrus

It was because of his clarity and knowledge that he was able to revolutionize *kashrus* in America. He earned everyone’s admiration. People yearned to hear his expert opinion on all matters.

## A Rebbe

His *shiurim* and *pesokim* often included many stories. I once asked him why he spent so much time telling stories. He said that stories do a very good job in being *madrish* people and teaching them *hanhagos* for life. His role, he said, was not just to be a *posek*, but to be a *rebbe*.

*Talmidim* eagerly awaited his *shiurim*, because he taught them how to think logically and how to find the truth. He prepared them for life.

His question-and-answer *shiurim* on *halachah* were probably his most popular. The crowd dictated what he would speak about, and he made it fascinating. Thousands of people would flock to these *halachah shiurim*, and thousands listen to tapes of them. He was not just answering *shailos*. He was a *rebbe* teaching the background needed, and the correct logic and approach, for each *shailah*.

His office at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas was his classroom. People were often puzzled by the fact that he didn’t have an office. But he didn’t need one. He was a *rebbe*. That role never changed despite what stage of life he was at.

He would play paddleball in camp with *talmidim*, he went tubing down the Delaware with them, he went on hikes and star-gazing walks, and he traveled on coach buses on camp trips. Rav Belsky had no concern about his image. He was focused on how he could connect better with his *talmidim*. These trips and outings are among the fondest memories of his *talmidim*.

Rav Belsky would spend time teaching his *talmidim* how to knead dough for *matzos*. He had everything worked out to a perfect science, with an exact procedure. From baking *matzos* to deveining an animal, Rav Belsky’s lessons helped shaped his *talmidim*.

When he reviewed my *halachah* articles, he would comment on the grammar and sometimes rewrote paragraphs himself. Everything needed to be perfect.

I merited to spend time in the *daled amos* of a person whose every step was guided by *halachah*, with such sincere *hergesh* in *mitzvos*, such selfless dedication to everyone, such a *bikkush ha’emes*, and such care and concern for each member of *Klal Yisroel*.

Thousands have lost a *rebbe*, a *gadol*, a father...



# The Levayos

When the news that Rav Belsky had passed away on Thursday night at Maimonides Hospital became known, *talmidim* made their way to Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, where they awaited the *aron*. Eventually, the *aron* was brought to the *yeshiva*, where *talmidim* spent the night saying *Tehillim*.

On Friday, at 10 a.m., thousands packed the *bais medrash* of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, as well as the dining rooms and classrooms at the *yeshiva*, and the streets surrounding the *yeshiva*, where large speakers were erected so the crowds could hear the *hespeidim*.

For almost three hours, speakers described the profound loss sustained by Yeshiva Torah Vodaas and the entire Torah world.

*Hespeidim* were delivered by Rav Yosef Savitsky, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas; Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva of Philadelphia; Rav Meir Wein-

berg, *R"m* at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas; Rav Elya Katz, *menahel* of the *bais medrash* of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas; Rav Elya Brudny, *R"m* at the *Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn*; Rav Yeruchim Olshin, *rosh yeshiva* of Bais Medash Govoah in Lakewood; Rav Menachem Genack, CEO of the Orthodox Union's *Kashrus* Division; Rav Mendel Belsky, brother; Rav Aryeh Belsky, son; Rav Yaacov Gross, son-in-law; Rav Elimelech Belsky, son; Rabbi Avraham Belsky, son; Reb Shlomo Yehuda Rechnitz, son-in-law; and Rabbi Tzvi Belsky, son.

On *Motzoei Shabbos*, a large crowd accompanied the *aron* to JFK Airport, where *hespeidim* were delivered in the *El Al Cargo* section. About a thousand people heard *divrei zikaron* from Rav Belsky's sons, Rav Yaakov Binyomin and Rav Eliyahu; his son-in-law, Rav Rafael Presby; Rav Yitzchok Gottdiener, executive director

of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas; and Rabbi Duvie Frischman.

The *aron*, accompanied by Rav Belsky's sons and a few close *talmidim*, arrived on Sunday evening in Eretz Yisroel, where the *levayah* was held outside Yeshivas Mir-Yerushalayim. *Hespeidim* in Yiddish, Hebrew and English were delivered. Among the *maspidim* were Rav Eliezer Yehudah Finkel, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivas Mir-Yerushalayim; Rav Berel Povarsky, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivas Ponovezh; Rav Reuven Feinstein, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva of Staten Island; Rav Binyomin Carlebach, *R"m* at Yeshivas Mir-Yerushalayim; Rav Reuven Cohen, *rosh kollel* in Kiryat Sefer and son-in-law of Rav Belsky; and Rav Dovid Goldstein, *R"m* at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas and son-in-law of Rav Belsky.

The *levayah* then continued on to Ye-

shivas Kamenitz, where *maspidim* included the *rosh yeshiva* of Kamenitz, Rav Yitzchok Scheiner, who was an early *talmid* at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas; Rav Yisroel Reisman, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas; Rav Ben-zion Berl, Rav Belsky's son-in-law; and Reb Moshe Samsanowitz, a *talmid* of Rav Belsky who leads the Bais Hamussar in Yerushalayim.

*Kevurah* took place on *Har Hamenuchos*.

Rav Belsky leaves behind his wife, Reb-betzin Miriam Belsky, and their children, Rav Aryeh, Rav Elimelech, Rav Avrohom, Rav Eliyohu, Rav Tzvi, Rav Yaakov Binyomin, Mrs. Sarah Hindy Gross, Mrs. Bleemy Cohen, Mrs. Tamar Rechnitz, Mrs. Rivkah Berl, Mrs. Bracha Leherfeld, Mrs. Devorah Presby, and Mrs. Penina Goldstein.







In Yerushalayim



"וכל בית ישראל יבכו את שריפה..."

# הספד מר

לכלות השבעה של רבינו הראש הישיבה

מרן הגאון האדיר  
הרב חיים ישראל הלוי בעלסקי  
זצוקלה"ה

לתלמידיו לעולם הישיבות  
ולכל מי שנתקרב לרבינו לתורתו ולהוראותיו

ישמיעו דברי הספד והתעוררות מאת:

הרה"ג הרב ישראל רייזמאן שליט"א  
ראש ישיבתנו הק'

הרה"ג הרב דן סג"ל שליט"א  
המשגיח

הרה"ג הרב ארי' מלכיאל קוטלר שליט"א  
ראש ישיבה, בית מדרש גבוה ליקווד

הרה"ג הרב קלמן עפשטיין שליט"א  
ראש ישיבה, ישיבה שער התורה

הרב דוד גולדשטיין שליט"א  
ר"מ בישיבתנו הק', חתן של רבנו זצ"ל



יום א' פ' תרומה • כ"ח שבט תשע"ו  
THIS SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 7 • 10:30 AM  
בבית מדרש הגדול של ישיבה ומתיבתא תורה ודעת

עזרת נשים פתוחה



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