

I would like to share a few anecdotes from Rav Belsky zt"l which I personally witnessed.

I had the Zchus of learning in the Miami Beach Community Kollel, headed by Rav Belsky's son-in-law, Rav Yaakov Gross Shlit"a. As such, we had many opportunities to see and talk to Rav Belsky when he came to visit his children.

A few years ago, my guess is around 2010, Rav Belsky was suffering from back pain. To give you an idea of how much pain he was in, I watched one day as he was answering questions on the phone, and stopped the conversation because he was simply in too much pain. Around that time, one day I joined a friend who wanted to ask Rav Belsky a few questions in Halacha. In the middle of our conversation, Rav Belsky interrupted to start talking about how we take our backs for granted until something goes wrong. It was obvious that he interrupted the conversation because his back pain was not allowing him to carry on even a normal conversation. After a minute or two, my friend said, "back to the Shailos..." I was quite taken aback. Rav Belsky, 40 years older than us and one of the Gedolai Haposkim, was graciously answering our questions while on vacation in Miami, and was in such pain that it was hard for him to continue answering the questions, and yet my friend so casually dismissed his suffering and was pressuring Rav Belsky to continue answering his Shailia? Rav Belsky's reaction, however, was unbelievable. His face turned serious, and he responded immediately, "Yes, back to the Shaila." It was an incredible display of Anivus, total lack of self-importance, and ignorance of his own pain in order to talk Torah with other Yiddin.

I once watched as someone approached him to ask him if a certain lollipop is certified by the OU. He said that he didn't know, but would get back to him with the answer. In order to make sure he didn't forget, he used his phone to call his office, and left himself a voice-mail stating the question, to remind himself to look it up and get back to the questioner. Now, the questioner didn't seem to think there was anything unusual about asking Rav Belsky this question. After all, Rav Belsky works for the OU so isn't that part of his job? I, however, was very surprised. Rav Belsky was one of the two Rav Hamachshirim of the OU, whose job was to Pasken on difficult questions in Halacha and generally lead this large organization. Additionally, he was world renowned for being one of the Gedolai Haposkim. Questions like these should be addressed to the Rabbonim answering the phone at OU on a regular basis. It is most certainly not Rav Belsky's job to look up the status of individual lollipop brands. Rav Belsky's attitude was obviously different. If someone asked him a question, he wanted to give the correct answer. Not only that, but he was nervous he might forget about the question, so he immediately called his own voice-mail to make sure that the question would not go unanswered. This was another display of incredible self effacement and complete lack of self-importance, as well as dedication to helping any individual who asked him for advice.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable things I've ever heard about Rav Belsky was told to me by Harav Yaakov Gross Shlit"a. It happened from time to time that Rav Belsky Paskened a Shaila, and other contemporary Poskim disagreed with him. Unfortunately, there were many young men possessing a fraction of Rav Belsky's genius and knowledge of Torah, who would unilaterally declare that his Psak was erroneous and had no standing whatsoever, and many times would go on to attack him on a personal level. (May I add that Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt"l and many other Gedolim in history suffered

similar attacks from much lesser people who are long forgotten.) I once asked Harav Gross if all the personal attacks against Rav Belsky affected him. He told me not at all, these things don't bother him. What does bother him, is when he is a Dayan at a Din Torah, and he sees that one person is taking advantage of someone else. That he is not able to tolerate, and that makes him sick. (Rav Gross mentioned this in his Hespel at the Levaya as well.) If we stop and think, we will realize that this is absolutely incredible. When Rav Belsky knew that people are publicly besmirching his name, denigrating his phenomenal Torah knowledge and dismissing his Psakim, and personally degrading and insulting him to anyone who will listen, he was unfazed and ignored it. But when he saw a total stranger being abused and taken advantage of by a fellow Jew, that made him physically ill. He just couldn't tolerate it. Rav Belsky was miles above the vast majority of humanity, who are slightly bothered when they see an injustice being done to a stranger, but when they are personally attacked they become furious and harbor resentment for the rest of their lives.

The following story is an excellent example of how Rav Belsky Zt"l increased the Kovod of Torah in the eyes of so many of us. During night seder, I would learn with various Chavrusos, some of whom had little or no Yeshiva education in their youth. I was learning Masechet Megilla with one such Chavrusa, and we were up to the Gemara (15a) which says that if you are sent on a mission and you discover bad news you should not return to the sender with the bad news. My Chavrusa asked the obvious question, "Well, how else is he going to know the results of the mission? I would think you certainly have to go back and tell him!?" Now, I didn't know the answer, and even worse, I was afraid that my Chavrusa might lose respect for the Gemara, and think to himself that the Gemara makes no sense Chas V'Sholom. At that point I realized that Rav Belsky was in town, and was sitting a few tables in front of us. I told my Chavrusa, "I may not know Pshat but there is definitely a Pshat. Let's go ask Rav Belsky what the correct meaning of the Gemara is." Rav Belsky immediately replied "that indeed if the sender will have no way of knowing unless you go back to him, of course you should bring back the bad news. The Gemara is referring to case where it is self-understood that if the messenger doesn't come back the news is bad and nothing more needs to be said. This is similar to the Gemara in Pesachim (3b) which says that one should avoid relaying bad news when possible." Rav Belsky was famous for explaining many such Chazals which were hard to understand, as well as showing that many ideas in Torah don't contradict our current knowledge of science and nature. Many people who would have held fast to their understanding of science and nature and degraded the Torah due to their lack of understanding, were saved by Rav Belsky's explanations of what Chazal really meant.

I would share one more story emphasizing Rav Belsky's Dikduk in Mitzvos. He was world renowned for his encyclopedic knowledge, but not as many people had a chance to observe how far he would go to perform them as perfectly as possible. As I mentioned before, he was once in Miami while suffering from tremendous back pain. It was very painful for him just to walk. At one point he went to use one of the small restrooms in the back of the Kollel, and when he came out he asked where the nearest sink was. I was surprised at the question, because there was a sink inside the bathroom. There is a question in Halacha if our modern bathrooms have the status of a Halachic bathroom, and on a simple level based on the Gemara it would seem that they don't. The Chazon Ish discusses this question and rules that it's a matter of doubt, and many people are lenient and will wash inside the restroom and then dry their

hands outside the restroom. If you had asked me, I would have said that for a person in Rav Belsky's situation, where every step was painful, had every right to be lenient and wash inside the restroom. But Rav Belsky didn't look for the easy way out, and even when causing himself pain with every step he took, he demanded of himself that each Mitzva be performed as well as possible. (In the end someone offered to bring him water, which he accepted, but otherwise he would have walked to the sink and back, ignoring his own pain.)