

Rav Belsky Remembered As Truly Extraordinary Individual

By Jennifer Jaffe

In Pirkei Avos, it states that Hillel would say: "Do not separate yourself from the community. Do not believe in yourself until the day you die. Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place. Do not make a statement that is not readily understood in the belief that it will only later be understood. And do not say, 'When I have free time I will learn,' lest you not have free time." This is an example of how HaGaon HaRav Chaim Yisroel Belsky zt"l lived his life.

Despite the frigid weather on Friday, January 29, thousands of people showed up at Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn to pay their final respects to their father, grandfather, brother, family member, rebbe, and friend, HaRav Belsky, who passed away the day before at the age of 77. Rav Belsky was a teacher, a poseik, a parent, and a leader in Torah, and his words and actions portrayed the unconditional love he had for all of klal Yisrael.

There is probably not a home you could walk into where observant Yidden reside that does not have at least one book or photo of a great Torah luminary. Rabbi Belsky, in every aspect of his life, lived up to that very title. Though his knowledge of most subjects was unbound, it was his gentle, caring nature that drew people to him. Terri Kalker of Kew Gardens Hills spent time with the Rav shortly before his death. "He was a real mentch," Terri noted. "I had the z'chusto host Rav Belsky zt"l and his wife just two months ago for his youngest child's Shabbos Sheva Brachos. He sat in my living room and we discussed Torah and played Jewish geography. He was so easygoing and made me feel comfortable. The loss of the Rav is a great loss to the entire Jewish world."

There was a deep understanding that Rav Belsky possessed. He believed that only Hashem is flawless, and in order to live a true Torah life and serve Hashem, you must continue learning, growing in Yiddishkeit, and doing chesed. His son, Rabbi Aryeh Belsky, noted his selfless nature. "He gave so much and never turned anyone away."

To be a role model, you must teach by actions, not words. During his son Tzvi's hesped, he reiterated that while growing up, they learned by example. "To tell your son to learn is less than doing it yourself. My father would teach us by learning himself, not by telling us to learn." Family members, friends, and Rav Belsky's talmidimgathered at his second home, Yeshiva and Mesivta Torah Vodaath, founded by his grandfather, where the crowd of thousands filled in every open area to hear the hespeidim by his sons, his brother, and several rabbanim with whom he had worked alongside for many years. Rabbi Aryeh Belsky said that he lived for the Yeshiva and giving shiurim. He never missed a shiur if he could help it. "One time he was being honored by the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation. Right in the middle he got up and left. He had to get to his Monday night shiur. Even in the hospital, he told the doctors he can't be there, he must do his lectures."

Natural intellect was a gift from Hashem, and the Rav's brilliance in all aspects of knowledge was unmatched. Though the Rav was offered a full scholarship to college, he deferred once to continue learning and then chose to relinquish his scholarship, making a commitment to a life of learning and

teaching Torah. He led the way for colleges and universities to allow those wishing to study for a year after high school prior to beginning college the choice to defer their acceptance for a year. Now generations of children are allotted the opportunity to continue learning Torah.

At a mere 25 years of age, the Rav began his long teaching career that would span decades. In addition to learning and teaching, the Rav played a huge role as Senior Halachic Consultant in the Orthodox Union (OU) and in the certification of thousands of products that we use in our everyday lives. In 1962, Rabbi Belsky received s'michah from Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, and in 1965 from Hagaon HaRav Moshe Feinstein zt"l. He also spent time learning in Beth Medrash Elyon. Another passion and large part of the Rav's life was his role in Camp Agudah.

Rav Belsky was a true tzadik: humble, honest, and unafraid to defend Torah values

Just as thousands poured into the Yeshiva, stood on the street, and listened in on live-stream and teleconferences last Friday morning, thousands more made their way to Kennedy airport on Motza'ei Shabbos to show their kavod to Rabbi Belsky before his body was flown to Israel, accompanied by his family for burial.

He was a true tzadik: humble, honest, and unafraid to defend Torah values. He was the epitome of emes, always striving for the truth in all situations. Rabbi Menachem Genack of the OU pointed out this extraordinary quality. "Rav Belsky was in constant pursuit of justice. Like Moshe Rabbeinu, who, too, stood up for justice." He looked at those who came across his path as children of Hashem and treated them with respect and care. Just over two months ago, he was mesader kiddushin at the wedding of his youngest son – his last child to get married. If you took a look at him during the chasunah, all you would see is the smile that never left his face.

What was most remarkable about Rabbi Belsky was his devotion and love for his family, as well as for each of his talmidim. He was sensitive to the needs of others and never spoke negatively about another. He played a significant role in the lives of so many. He was a true tzadik.

His l'vayah continued on Sunday in Eretz Yisrael, where HaGaon HaRav Chaim Yisroel Belsky zt"l was escorted on the final leg of his magnanimous life's journey for k'vurah at Chelkas HaRabbanim on Har HaMenuchos.