

**R**abbi Shlomo Freifeld, zt"l, founder of Yeshiva Sh'or Yeshuv, was a spectacular orator and a master builder of people, whose eclectic vision and magnetic personality enabled him to attract thousands of people to *Yiddishkeit*.

Rav Shlomo was born in America in 1926. When he was thirteen he attended Yeshiva Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, where he met Haga'on Rav Yitzchak Hunter, who became his *rebbe muvhak*. The relationship he forged with Rav Hutner changed the course of his life.

After learning at Yeshiva Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, Rav Shlomo held a number of positions, such as principal of Bais Yaakov of Toronto and *menahel* at Yeshiva Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, and he helped found Kollel Gur Aryeh of Yeshiva Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin.

Rav Shlomo's lifework truly began in 1967, when he founded Yeshiva Sh'or Yeshuv in Far Rockaway. At that time the *teshuvah* movement was under way, and although Sh'or Yeshuv was initially composed of *yeshiva bachurim*, Rav Shlomo was a lightning rod for countless young men searching for spiritual direction. When Rav Shlomo's *talmidim* left the *yeshiva*, they yearned for continual interaction with their Rebbe, and many of them settled nearby, in Far Rockaway and the Five Towns. Sh'or Yeshuv gradually expanded into a large *yeshiva* with a

vital *kehillah*.

During the last eight years of his life Rav Shlomo suffered tremendous *yissurim*, but despite his physical pain and anguish, he continued to inspire others with his tremendous vitality, ebullient personality and indefatigable yearning for spiritual attainment.

On *chol hamo'ed Sukkos*, 1990, during *zeman simchaseinu*, a period that epitomized the trademark theme of his life, Rav Shlomo passed away. His legacy lives on, and today Sh'or Yeshuv, under the spiritual leadership of Rav Shlomo's sons-in-law, Rosh Yeshiva Harav Naftali Jaeger and *menahel* Rabbi Avrohom Halpern, boasts over 250 *talmidim*, 50 *kollel* members, a *kehillah* of over 500 families, and alumni spread throughout the world.

As I sat down to write these words in memory of a *tzaddik* as great and as beloved to all as Harav Shlomo Freifeld, zt"l, I realized immediately that I cannot possibly do justice to his memory. Anything I could say about him would be an understatement. Harav Freifeld was a truly unique Torah giant who had a massive impact on his generation.

By Rabbi Yehoshua Kurland

*An old Jew, well known in the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood of Yerushalayim as the "Rusisher maggid," could be seen walking with his lantern at 2 a.m. every morning on his way to the beis medrash, where he would learn for the remainder of the night. This saintly Yid continued his unusual practice even when he was well into his nineties.*

*When asked how he began such a custom, he responded that when he was a young boy his Rebbe had taught him: After the infamous sin of the meraglim, the spies in the wilderness, which occurred on the ninth of Av, every year for the next forty years, on the night of 9 Av, Jews would lie in a grave they dug for themselves. Some would rise the next morning while others would remain there to rest eternally. "Can you imagine the joy and exuberance that was felt the next morning by those who awoke? (Most assuredly, none turned over on the other side or pressed their snooze alarms!) One could readily imagine the alacrity and zeal they ex-*



# My Rebbe Harav Shlomo Freifeld, zt"l



hibited as they welcomed their new lease on life. "Ever since I learned this," he explained, "whenever I stir in the middle of my sleep, I get up, thrilled to be alive and savor every precious moment of life."

#### Savoring Every Moment of Life

Rabbi Freifeld, too, appreciated and took advantage of every moment he was alive. He used to say that when he couldn't sleep at night, he would play a game in his mind, imagining that someone had given him a million dollars. He would think of all the *chassadim* and projects he might institute to enhance the lives of Jews throughout the world.

The Rebbe loved life and the world around him. Everything that existed and that he experienced was for him an opportunity to sharpen his perceptions and insights into the symphonic symmetry of the *Ribono shel Olam's* beautiful world. When he saw good, he recognized it's full worth, and when he saw evil, he was keenly aware of its potential dangers. He knew; better than many, the meaning of the words of *Chazal*: *Olam hazeh domeh le'ailah*, "This world is compared to the night" — we live in a world of darkness; yet he was absolutely committed to the principle that a Jew who lives as a Jew should can diffuse that darkness and replace it with a bright and illuminating light.

Rav Freifeld was that light. Throughout his life he endeavored to be that true *talmid chacham*. He understood the balance of the entire universe and was attuned to its symmetry; he united himself and the world with its one Source — *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Rav Freifeld loved life, because it afforded him the opportunity to bring the world to its ideal state, in service of the Creator. He loved every Jew, because a Jew is Hashem's most precious commodity in His creation. He saw in his fellow man the pinnacle of creation, a true *chelek Eloka mimaal*. He saw the *izelem Elokim*, the image of G-d, in every man and related to everyone as such; for he lived by the conviction that, given the opportunity, man could transcend all limitations and soar to unfathomable heights. He loved to speak about the *midrash (Vayikra Rabba)* that relates how Hillel told his *talmidim* that he was going to do a mitzvah, and they asked him which mitzvah he was going to perform. When he told them, "I'm going to bathe," they expressed surprise over the fact that this was considered a mitzvah. "If you have a statue of the king," he explained, "you have to clean it regularly and make sure it always looks nice. I am like that statue — I am made in the image of Hashem, so it's a great mitzvah to keep myself clean." The human body is holy, it is an integral part of Hashem's universe; he was deeply committed to this conviction.

#### Reverence for Every Jew

In every Jewish *neshamah* he saw

"I get up, thrilled to be alive and savor every precious moment of life."  
— Rabbi Freifeld



the work of an Artist, filled with limitless potential. Like an instrument that can play the most heavenly music — at times it needs some fine tuning. Rav Freifeld served as a master conductor, leading the orchestra, ever seeking the proper balance to produce the most beautiful music; and the compositions he cultivated are priceless and eternally worthy. They — his *talmidim* and their children and grandchildren — grace *batei medrash* throughout the world, immersed in the beautiful, eternal music of Torah.

It disturbed him immensely that so many people were neglecting their potential, allowing their capabilities to slip away and go lost; but it was an even greater source of anguish to him that so many people — it seemed society at large — had relinquished all hope of ever reattaining the essential image and nature of a human being as Hashem originally meant it to be.

"*Ein davar ha'omeid bifnei haratzon*," Rav Freifeld would exclaim with absolute conviction — There is nothing that can stand before the will of a human being! The Rebbe liked to relate the *medrash* of how Rabbi Chaninah managed to transport a huge stone to Yerushalayim. What this *medrash* is telling us, he would explain, is that the human will is an irresistible force, and when it is focused and genuine, nothing can stand in its way. It is a power that is divinely engineered within every person, no matter what his IQ, no matter what label has been thrust upon him, no matter how far he may have strayed. With his steadfast belief in human po-

tential, he infused many hundreds of people with newfound confidence and dramatically altered the course of their lives.

He detested the idea that only geniuses and those with exceptional talents were destined for greatness in Torah. He would often quote the words of the Chazon Ish, which he himself had heard the Chazon-Ish say — that many renowned *Gedolim* were not geniuses. What they all shared in common was an absolute belief in the principle that nothing can stand before the will of a human being; with superhuman efforts they achieved what they did — and so can everyone!

#### Reaching Our Potential

Unlike anything else in the human experience, when it comes to Torah, the rule is, *Yagaata, umatzasa taamin* — one's toil is met with "matzasa" — a divinely influenced gift of *siyatta diShmaya*, which will supercede all obstacles. That *siyatta diShmaya* is there for anyone who wants it, anyone who is ready to reach for it. This is the essence of a human being at its best — stretching and extending and expanding oneself. The letters of the Hebrew word *adam*, man, can be switched around to spell *me'od*, connoting "very much so" or "extensively so," and Rav Freifeld would point out how apt is this word *adam*, to indicate that man's objective in life is to extend himself continuously to reach his potential. The Rebbe's unusual faith and belief in each individual and his potential was a natural outgrowth of his steadfast commitment to the principle of *Yisrael ve'Oraisa veKudsha Berich Hu chad hu* — there is a supernatural link that connects every Jew to his Creator, through the vehicles of Torah and mitzvos, and each individual plays a significant role in unveiling the unity and completeness in creation.

"*Lech-lecha*," he would explain, is a directive to each of us: "Go into yourself" — reach down deep within yourself, into the very recesses of your heart and soul, and draw from there the inner strength. You can do it! One line at a time, one *blatt* at a time, one *masechta* at a time. And don't fool yourself in the process; make sure you understand each word on every level. Review constantly to make your learning your own; acquire and internalize, and thereby eternalize. Just as you must not cheat your fellow man, do not cheat yourself! You are destined for greatness.

The Rebbe spoke about the importance of greeting another Jew as if it were the very foundation of Torah. Indeed, how could one fail to show respect to a human being who is created in the image of G-d? The Rebbe would infuse people with an appreciation for the greatness of every Jew, the importance of offering encouraging words, of complimenting one's spouse, one's friend, one's child.... He would relate to

everyone with patience and with wisdom. He would evaluate others not according to where they had been or where they were likely to go, but "baasher hu sham," where their hearts were at that moment. His special concern for the less fortunate, the orphan, the widow, the underprivileged, the underachiever, epitomized a heart filled with compassion for others.

*I'll never forget the Rebbe's reaction when I told him about a thirty-one-year-old baalas teshuvah with whom our family had been close. She had become engaged to a young widower who had lost his wife suddenly and was left with six young orphans. He marveled at this young woman's courage and the faith she must have had to undertake such a daunting task. Tears streamed down the Rebbe's face, and he said "She is literally emulating the chessed of the Ribono shel Olam!"*

#### Reaching Every Jew

Rav Freifeld was a master teacher, a master orator and a master when it came to influencing people. Rav Moshe Sherer, *z"l*, once said that Rav Shlomo Freifeld was always among his first choices for the guest speaker to address Agudah functions. His style was unique. The energy he generated and his genius at bringing a point home and having it reach every one of his listeners, no matter what his particular learning level may have been, was extraordinary.

He wasn't just a speaker, he was an educator par excellence. Every *drashah*, every *shmoosze*, even his informal question-and-answer sessions or relaxed talks around a summer campfire were monumental lessons in pedagogical excellence. He took the deepest, most esoteric and delicate concepts, broke them into simple components and pasted them back together in the most beautiful, harmonious presentation. And he did it all in a way that was so down to earth, so human, with humor and wisdom. He cared so much about each of his listeners, about every one of his students, and wanted so much for everyone to be inspired with that which inspired him, that he put all of his energies into explaining each point until everyone had absorbed his message.

He succeeded in bridging the generational gap, connecting his students to an old, authentic world of Jews of all stripes — *chassidim, misnagdim, Sefardim, Ashkenazim*... and to the *mesorah* to which every Jew needs to connect. He opened our minds to the words of the Sfas Emes and of Rabbi Tzadok HaCohen of Lublin, yet at the same time he spoke with such great reverence about Rav Yisrael Salanter, Rav Simchah Zissel of Kelm, and the great *baalei mussar*. And the reverence with which he spoke about his own Rebbe, the Rosh Hayeshivah Harav Yitzchak Hutner, *zt"l*, was a lesson in honoring one's Rav that no *sefer* alone could have



taught.

When Rav Freifeld learned that Harav Dovid Lipshitz, zt"l, the Suvalker Rav, was arriving in New York from Europe with practically no possessions, that he didn't even own a set of Shas, he took his own brand-new set of Shas, for which he had saved up to buy, and brought it to the harbor. As soon as the Rav descended from the ship, Rav Freifeld presented him with the set of Shas as a gift. "I should own a Shas when the Suvalker Rav is lacking such a precious commodity? I cannot allow this to be," he declared.

Everything Rav Freifeld did was a lesson to learn from. His home was always open and he readily gave of his time to everyone. His *hachmasas orchim* was amazing, and those who were privileged to spend time in his home were witness to the deep respect and *derech eretz* he showed his first Rebbetzin, a "h, and, tlc" a, to Rebbetzin Sora Freifeld, *shetichyeh*. He always displayed great *hakaras hatov* and chose the words he used in conversation with them very carefully. Everything he did in his home was a real-life demonstration of honoring one's wife more than oneself.

I had the pleasure of sitting next to the Rebbe at a sheva brachos that a local member of the community was hosting for a talmid in the yeshivah. The hosts were extremely honored to have Rabbi Freifeld attend a simchah at their home. As we ate the main course, the Rebbe placed the *kugel* from his plate onto mine, saying, "Yehoshua, you eat this." At first I thought he was trying to turn a seasoned Litvak into a *chassid* by giving me *shirayim*. But he quickly explained that his special diet didn't allow him to eat such foods, and he was afraid that the hostess might be insulted should she notice something left uneaten on his plate.

He explained to us how the simplest things, such as picking up one's tie from the floor in one's bedroom, or refraining from

callously dropping a cigarette butt on the ground, was in fact *avodas Hashem* of the highest order, and one who failed to do so was succumbing to a *nisayon* and was in effect caving in to a "graffiti-oriented," desensitized and decayed society.

When the Satmar Rav, zt"l, arrived in America after the Holocaust, he quickly organized a weekly *shiur* in *maseches Brachos* for a small group of refugees, all of whom, like the Rebbe himself, had lost almost all of their close family members. Each week before beginning the *shiur*, he would go from person to person asking how his day had gone, where he had looked for employment, how his living conditions were and many other questions pertaining to their mundane existence. Before anyone even noticed, the hour flew by and the *shiur* ended without even having begun. The Rebbe would say, "We'll start, iy" H, next week."

But every week it was the same: his questions continued, but the *shiur* never began. Even the small group of *chassidim* were somewhat baffled. This went on for an entire year. At the end of a year they met once again, but this time the Rebbe, confident that his small talk over the course of the past year had helped rejuvenate the spirits of these unfortunate, broken individuals, told his *shiur*-goers, "Until now we had to learn 'daf aleph.' Now we are ready to begin *daf beis!*"

Rabbi Freifeld often said, "If we got together only to sit and eat and talk to one another, it was worthwhile." He es-

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tablished a rapport with everyone he met almost instantly. Sometimes it was with humor, sometimes with an amazing sense of the precise point that troubled that particular individual; most certainly his connection was forged with warmth and love. His rapport was based on genuine interest; he really wanted to know where the person came from and what he was about. So he spent a good portion of his life talking to people, advising them, solving their problems, giving them support. He had the ability to get to the core of an issue and had amazing insight in understanding the background of a problem, its roots and from where it stemmed. And he would give advice with unusual confidence; he instructed with a clear conscience, "This is what you must do...." Those who had the good fortune and the *zechus* to sit at his table, to speak with him, to sing, to celebrate, to discuss, would always grow from the experience.

#### Havdalah — Knowing Where We Stand

The *Yerushalmi* explains that the passage of *Ata chonantamu*, the *tefillah* of Havdalah in Shemoneh Esrei, is placed within the *brachah* of *daas*, understanding, because "If there is no understanding, how can there be any *havdalah*, separation?" The Rebbe taught us how to separate — between that which is holy and that which is profane; between light and darkness; between Jewish life and non-

Jewish values.

Yaakov Avinu davened, "Save me from the hands of my brother, from the hands of Esav." He was begging Hashem: Save me from Esav when he acts as my brother — when he invites me to live peacefully with him and engage in his way of life. The Rebbe taught us how to love and even how to hate; how to discern and how to build walls of protection. He made us aware of the clear danger of an Esav who acts as your brother and of the spiritual holocaust of Western culture, which continues to threaten our existence. Thus it requires great *daas* and *chochmah* to develop a secure and everlasting connection to Hashem.

One hot, humid summer afternoon, a young boy, baseball glove and ball in hand, anxiously awaits his father's return home from work, hoping that he will have some time to play ball with him. Most of the boy's friends are away at camp, and he is extremely bored.

Meanwhile, his father is driving home in heavy traffic on the dreaded Van Wyck Expressway. Nothing is moving, the air conditioning is not working properly, and the temperature has peaked to a record-breaking high. To top it off, he has tons of work to do at home and is not in a good mood.

As he pulls into the driveway, his son quickly approaches. "Hi, Dad! I've been waiting for you all day. Can we play ball?"

"Son! I would love to play ball with you, but you can't imagine what a hard day I've had, and I still have loads of work to do. I'm afraid you'll have to find someone else."

"Please, Dad! I've been waiting all day."

"No! I just can't."

The father walks into the house, takes out a drink, enters his study, opens his briefcase and gets down to work.

Five minutes later his son appears at the door. "Please, Dad! Can't we play for just five minutes?"

"I would love to, but I absolutely cannot!"

"Please!"

"The answer is no!"

Five minutes later the kid is back, but this time he's whining in that singsong, nagging voice, "It's not fair! All my friends are in camp, and

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my own father can't play ball with me. Please, Dad, just five minutes."

Quickly losing the little patience he has left, and feeling the pressures of a difficult day and now an unhappy child, the father can't take it anymore. In his anger and frustration he takes a magazine that happens to be open on his desk showing a full-page map of the world, rips it into hundreds of pieces and throws it on the floor. "Son," he says, when you can put that back together, I'll have time to play ball with you. Do you understand?"

Fifteen minutes later his son is back.

"Dad, can we play ball now? I did what you asked. I put the pieces back

together."

"Impossible! I ripped that map into hundreds of pieces! How could you possibly have put it back together?!"

"You see, Dad, on the other side of that picture of the map of the world was a picture of a little boy, and if you put together the little boy, then you've put together the whole world."

The Rebbe took hundreds of young men and women, little boys and little girls, and demonstrated his absolute belief that every individual is an *olam katan*, a microcosm of the larger world, a world unto himself. His world consists of himself, his family, his children and grandchildren, his friends and associates, all the people he influences, all the Torah he learns and teaches, all the mitzvos he performs, all that he elevates

to serve his Creator as he traverses the paths of life. It is an *olam katan* of monumental proportions — and if you put together the "little boy," then indeed, you've put together the whole world.

**Ultimate Simchah**

We sang many *niggunim* at the Rebbe's table, sometimes some unconventional ones. An old favorite we sang on Simchas Torah had a chorus of, *Od tireh kamah tov yihyeh ...*, "You will yet see how good it will be in the coming year." The Rebbe would sing these words of hope and promise in his deep, resonant, melodious voice, and the memory of it conjures up a smile, a warm feeling of hope for the future. As he often taught, the cry of a Jew is the

cry of hope and *deveikus* in Hashem!

The Rebbe left this world on the first day of *chol hamo'ed Sukkos, zeman simchaseinu*. Thus, even his passing imparted his eternal teaching that everything he did in his life was directed for the purpose of bringing true and genuine *simchah* to Jews, through Torah, *ahavas Yisrael* and *yiras Shamayim*.

May he be a true advocate of mercy for his wonderful family, for the hundreds of *talmidim* of the yeshivah, for his *kehillah* and for all of *Klal Yisrael*, whom he loved so deeply.

ת' נ' צ' ב' ה'

Rabbi Yehoshua Kurland was a *talmid* of Rav Freifeld and is now a *rebbe* in Shor Yoshuv Yeshivah, Rav Freifeld's yeshivah in Far Rockaway.