

Weekly Biography / Prepared for publication by Rabbi Yitzchok Cohen

26 Av 5739/1979

Harav Yoel Teitelbaum *zt"l* — The Satmar Rebbe

The following are excerpts of a hesped given by Harav Moshe Wolfson, *shlita*, in Mesivta Torah Vodaath 30 years ago, during the sheloshim of the Satmar Rebbe, Harav Yoel Teitelbaum, *zt"l*

"You are all standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G-d." We read this *parashah* before Rosh Hashanah. *Sefarim* explain this *passuk* as referring to the *Yom Hadin*.

Imagine we were now holding in last year's Elul and were somehow aware of what was to transpire over the next year. - That is, we were able to see, last Elul, that which would be decided Rosh Hashanah. Surely we would come with deeper sincerity, a greater commitment. We would see one blow after another, one *Gadol* taken from us after another. Finally, the Satmar Rebbe, *zt"l*, was taken, the *Rabban shel Kol Bnei Hagolah*.

But we didn't see it. and the year's fateful events came to pass.

The Satmar Rebbe was a tremendous *Gaon* in Torah, as is well known. Harav Reuven Grozovsky, *zt"l*, Rosh Yeshivah of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, used to go to him frequently.

When he would come out, Reb Reuven would say, "I envy this Yid. The whole Torah is open before him."

There was no subject in Torah that he didn't know.

I remember him saying once that he had never forgotten anything he had ever seen in a *sefer*.

It was a gift from *Shamayim*.

Kedushah of the Rebbe

When we saw the Satmar Rebbe, we saw a person from two generations ago.

I was the Rebbe's neighbor for 20 years. We lived on the same block in Williamsburg. The Satmar Rebbe couldn't live a private life since everybody wanted to learn from him.

If it was 3:00 a.m. he would be sitting and learning. If it was 5:00 a.m., he was also learning.

In his life, there was no notion of sleep. The Rebbe would sometimes, in middle of speaking to someone, doze off for a few minutes; when he opened his eyes he knew exactly where the conversation was up to — to the word.

He was a Yid whose *guf* was a refined, a pure *guf*. I once saw him eating cherries on a Motzoei Shabbos, maybe to be *yotzei melaveh malkah*. It was amazing to see. He took a cherry in his hand and held it and was *mechaven*. It took him at least five minutes until he ate the cherry. Then he took another cherry.

His *avodah* during eating was evident every Friday night. I was *zocheh* to be at his Friday night *tisch* hundreds of times.

If it was 3:00 a.m., he would be sitting and learning. If it was 5:00 a.m., he was also learning.

Every time he ate the Shabbos fish, he ate with an enthusiasm. It wasn't the fish he was eating; it was Shabbos. His face was aflame as he ate the fish.

On Shabbos, the Rebbe looked different than on weekdays. He also had a special unique *tzurah* every Yom Tov.

It was the Rebbe's *minhag* every night of Chanukah to relate another answer to the famous question of the Beis Yosef — why is Chanukah celebrated for eight

days when there was nothing miraculous about the first night that the oil burned? Since he was a Rebbe for over 70 years at that point, he evidently had over 500 responses to this question.

Tremendous Impact on People

The Satmar Rebbe introduced the concept of giving *tzedakah* beyond a person's capabilities. He taught even poor people to give away a week's income for an appeal — even a month's income.

He had a *gabbai*, Reb Sholom Laufer, who was in charge of collecting these *tzedakos*. Many times when he needed *tzedakah* he sent Reb Sholom with the instructions, "Go collect *tzedakah*."

The Rebbe gave over to Reb Sholom a special *koach*. When he asked for *tzedakah* one felt compelled to give. He would go over to someone and say, "The



Elokim," you could feel that the *Ribbono shel Olam* is indeed the Creator of the world.

Williamsburg at that time was the center of *kedushah*. I remember great people having to push among the crowds in the packed *beis medrash*.

I remember watching Harav Yonasan Shteif, *zt"l*, who was then 80 years old, as he pushed through the crowd to hear the Rebbe's *Aseres Hadibros*. By the time he arrived, the Rav of the Viener *kehillah* had certainly already *davened*, eaten and rested. He would then come to the Satmar shul and wait — it might be a five-minute wait or a two-hour wait; it was unpredictable — just to hear the Rebbe *lein* the *Aseres Hadibros*.

The words of a *tzaddik* have a great *koach*. "Words that come from the heart enter the heart." Reading the *Megillah*

together with the Rebbe in a concentration camp.

He wrote how amazing it was to see the cleanliness of this great man.

Even in the concentration camp he was careful to keep himself clean.

The words of a tzaddik have a great koach.

"Words that come from the heart enter the heart."

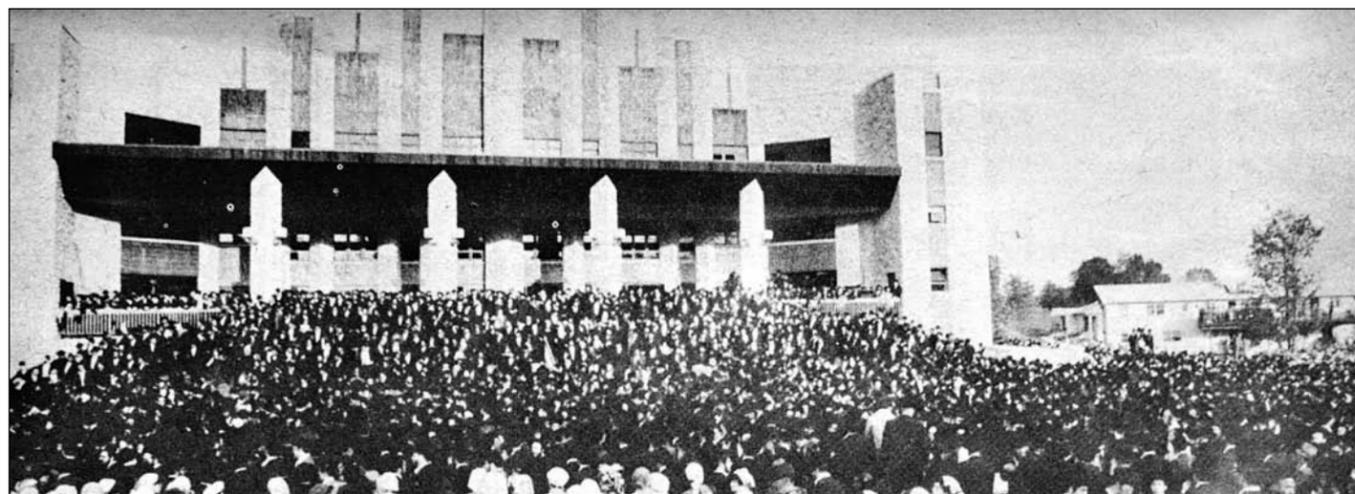
When the German doctor inspected him for cleanliness, the doctor looked at him and said, "*Zauber*." Clean. Even that angel of death had to admit, "He is *zauber* — he is clean. There is no deficiency in him."

Kochos of the Rebbe

It is well-known that the Shineva Rebbe wept at the Rebbe's *bris* because it was felt that this child would lead *Klal Yisrael* to greet Moshiach.

Alas, it was not fulfilled.

When the Rebbe became sick, Harav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik, *zt"l*, Rosh



The scene outside the *beis medresh* during the *levayah* in Kiryas Yoel.

Rebbe sent me for money — give me \$25." In those days \$25 was a lot of money.

"I don't have it," the man would say. "I can't give such a sum." As Reb Sholom would walk away the man would invariably run after him with the money.

Thousands of people attended his *Shovavim Torah*. They were like a pyramid, one person on top of the other. I remember one Motzoei Shabbos when I had to leave the *Shovavim Torah* to give a *shiur* in Torah Vodaath. When I started moving out, the whole pyramid began to fall.

I went to the Satmar Rebbe for dozens of years for the *Shovavim Torah*. There wasn't a dry eye in the whole *beis medrash*.

In my younger years I wanted to hear [the Rebbe's] *krias haTorah* on Shabbos, but it was difficult because he kept unusual hours.

Since it is written in *sefarim* that the entire Torah is included in *Parashas Bereishis*, I made a point of at least hearing him *lein Parashas Bereishis* every year. When he said "*Bereishis bara*

took him an hour and a half; sometimes two hours. One could hear his *chiddushei Torah* as he read the *Megillah*.

I remember him crying out, "And [Mordechai] sent letters to all the provinces of the king, the near ones and the distant ones."

When he said "*veha'rechokim* — and the distant ones," every Yid who felt far from the *Ribbono shel Olam* thought to himself, "I'm one of the *rechokim*, the distant ones. Mordechai sent a letter to me as well. The *Megillah* has a connection to me."

His *Ahavah Rabbah* took very long.

He spoke like a child talking to his father, pleading for *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*.

It was impossible not to melt away from his *Ahavah Rabba*.

The Satmar Rebbe, the *manhig* of the generation, had nothing else in mind except *kedushah* and *taharah*. One of the last things the Rebbe said was that the *kohanim* should not be in the *beis medrash* at his *levayah*.

I saw an article in the Israeli papers, written by a secular writer who had been

Yeshivah of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan — known as Yeshivah University — was speaking before a Mizrahi convention.

He told the assembled, "*Rabbosai*, we must be *mispallel* for the health of the Satmar Rebbe. Because the fact that we are still committed to *Yiddishkeit* is only for fear of how he would react. He keeps us in check."

With the passing of the Rebbe we have become smaller, but we have also grown.

When a mother sees her child lying in bed with fever, her *rachmanus* is much greater than for a healthy child.

We are sick — we have suffered *misas tzaddikim*. But Hashem has more *rachmanus* on us now because of it.

Yehi zichro baruch.

Please see our Magazine section for more about the Satmar Rebbe.

Harav Moshe Wolfson is *Mashgiach* of Mesivta Torah Vodaath and Rav of Beis Medrash Emunas Yisroel in Boro Park.