“Daddy, tell us again about the shul where you grew up,” my siblings and I used to joke. We knew our father was American-born, and that he spoke English eloquently. Yet there was always something of the foreigner about him. His parents were Gerrer Chassidim from Poland; his Yiddish was warm and rich. He spoke intimately and poignantly of the great Torah personalities of Poland, Russia, and Germany.

My father attended yeshivah for elementary and high school, which was highly unusual in those days. At the Yeshivas Rubbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (Yeshiva University), he was a talmid of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Other rebbeim he loved included Rav Moshe Bick and Rav Moshe Polayeff. Ultimately my father received his amichah and BA in philosophy from YU.

It was hard then to find a girl who wanted to marry a rabbinical student, but fortunately the Creator had prepared my mother, Shaindeh Freund (may she live to be 120). Like my Zeide Maimon, my Zeide Moshe Yocheid held on to Yiddisherkeit and all his might in America (“by his fingernails,” my mother says). Despite a limited Jewish education, my mother had a passionate desire to marry a yeshivah bachur. When my parents met, Adam truly found his rib.

They married in 1950 and my father became rabbi of a small shul in Danville, Virginia (the city where I was born). The shul, unlike many others, had a kosher matzah-laden balcony. To his dismay, my father discovered on erev Rosh Hashanah that the elderly women sat downstairs on Yom Tov, next to a dubious partition. A hastily kasheret matzah was not an aesthetic success, and there was much murmuring. One lady sat outside all morning in protest. My father scrapped his prepared sermon, and delivered an impassioned defense of the sanctity of the synagogue. His eloquence qualified the rebellion, and he remained in Danville for three more years. Many of his congregants became lifelong friends and supporters. A surprising number of Danville children were inspired by my father to pursue careers in kiruv, chinuch and the rabbinate.

After leaving Danville, my father served as YU’s mashgiach and (spiritual advisor) for a short time. My father ultimately moved away from the YU orbit, yet often expressed hakaras hatov (gratitude) for what he had gained there.

During the 1950s my father was one of the founders of NCSY, the OU program that brings thousands of immigrants to America. Many people who are now grandparents still remember his electrifying addresses at NCSY conventions.

In 1957, with four young children, my parents moved to Newport News, Virginia. The nearest day school was in Norfolk, an hour away. Our carpool was not always punctual, and one of the fathers threatened to put his daughter in public school. One day, when it was my father’s turn to drive, he was determined to get the children to school on time, despite a terrible snarl in his side. In Norfolk, my father collapsed with what proved to be a ruptured appendix. The other father made no more threats, and all his children grew up to build Torah-true homes.

The following year, my father started a day school in Newport News. He taught second grade himself. My siblings and I used to joke. We knew our classes were rushed and mispronounced, but fortunately the Creator had prepared our teacher.

My father attended yeshivah for elementary and high school, which was highly unusual in those days. At the Yeshivas Rubbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (Yeshiva University), he was a talmid of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Other rebbeim he loved included Rav Moshe Bick and Rav Moshe Polayeff. Ultimately my father received his amichah and BA in philosophy from YU. My father attended yeshivah for elementary and high school, which was highly unusual in those days.
A Unifier of Klal Yisrael

Rabbi Bulman had the ability to deliver a half-hour diatribe on the hashkafic deficiencies of a particular sect or shita, then pause and say, “Yet…” and begin an even longer shiur about the distinctive and special contribution made by that group. He believed in the beauty and importance of each shita as part of a spectrum of shalom, even while he condemned the limitations of total devotion to any specific one. 

Rabbi Chaim Alwinowitz is a general editor of the Schottenstein edition of the Talmud Bavli.

The Rambam writes that a person should always view himself as being responsible for tilting the entire universe in the direction of good or evil. Indeed, Rabbi Bulman always made a person feel that his struggles were cosmic, that they represented eternal and universal questions and that the resolution of his issues would result in tikun olam for the larger public.

It was these specific aspects of Rabbi Bulman’s makeup that made me feel that he was singularly suited to unify all the disparate parts of Klal Yisrael.
In 1950, when Rav Bulman came to the quiet mill town of Danville, Virginia, he immediately sought to increase the religious observance among his congregants at Aetz Chayim Synagogue. In the afternoons, he would teach our children; in the evenings, he taught our parents.

Rav Bulman was not only a tzaddik and shomer Shabbat, but he was the embodiment of all the Jewish virtues. He was a tzaddik shor, meaning he was compassionate, understanding, and devoted to the welfare of all. His approach to teaching was always with love and kindness.

Rav Bulman was a true teacher, and his influence on our generation cannot be overstated. He taught us the importance of hard work, dedication, and a strong work ethic. He encouraged us to be the best we could be, and he was always ready to help us achieve our goals.

Rav Bulman was a true leader, and his wisdom and guidance helped us navigate the challenges of life. He taught us the importance of maintaining a strong connection to our roots and our heritage.

Rav Bulman was a true friend, and his love and support helped us through the ups and downs of life. He was always there for us, and his guidance helped us make the right decisions.

Rav Bulman was a true role model, and his life and teachings continue to inspire us today. He taught us the importance of living a life of dedication, commitment, and service.

Rav Bulman was a true tzaddik, and his memory will live on in our hearts and minds forever. May his memory be a joy.

The Cosmic Importance of Each Jew

I first met Rabbi Bulman when I was 12. He was my Sunday school teacher.

He was a strange-looking man who spoke of esoteric things like the mission of Am Yisrael in the world and the cosmic importance of each Jew in the Divine scheme. But he also had a strong curiosity about everything that interested the youth of the town. We filled him in on our views of the world; he related to us with the utmost sincerity. No one of us ever realized that he was subtly not only listening, but guiding. By age 14, I was ready to start investigating ourselves.

I never thought Rabbi Bulman was extraordinary. It was only that I found out being a rabbi didn't mean you have to be extraordinary.

When Rabbi Bulman first came to Newport News, Virginia, in 1957, the median age in the Orthodox shul was 60. Though the shul had a mishpacha, a debate on whether to maintain the mishpacha was underway. The shul’s mishpacha was not in use.

By the time Rabbi Bulman left in 1962, a new shul had been built with a mishpacha, the mishpacha was in use, there was more than a minyan of shomer Shabbat families in town and a day school with 70 children had been established.

Lectures and shuirim had become staples in the community. Teenagers, for whom there was no formal Jewish education, were participating in NCSY’s activities and some even attended Jewish high schools out-of-town. Those who remained in the community for high school were encouraged to go to Yeshiva University or Stern College. As his congregants grew spiritually, Rabbi Bulman was with them every step of the way. He never told them what to do. He led them. He answered questions in a language they could understand and they inevitably wanted to follow.

Indeed, Rabbi Bulman was able to reach so many different people because he believed that every Jew is connected to each other.

Rabbi Bulman died in 1980, but his influence on our generation continues to be felt. His teachings and guidance have helped us navigate the challenges of life, and his memory will live on in our hearts and minds forever. May his memory be a joy.