



Rav Bulman, zt"l (1925-2002)

Rav Nachman Bulman, zt"l, taught and inspired thousands of individuals, but I have the privilege of being able to say, "He was my father." Although I cannot do him justice, I will try to convey something of the man my father was.

My grandfather, Meir Bulman, lost his first wife in childbirth, and his sec-

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"the comforter." All his life, my father kept a framed photograph of the Imrei Emes on his desk.

"Daddy, tell us again about the *shtetl* where you grew up," my siblings and I used to joke. We knew our father was American-born, and 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. In Yeshivas Rabbeinu 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 *semichah* 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, Shaindel Freund (may she live to be 120). Like my Zeide Meir, my Zeide Moshe Yechiel held on to *Yiddishkeit* with 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 *mechitzah*, a ladies' 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 *kasher* *mechitzah* 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 elo-

quence quelled the rebellion, and he remained in Danville for three more years. Many of his congregants became lifelong friends and loyalists. 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 ruchani* (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 irreligious teenagers to Torah. 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 pain 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 have vivid memories of him teaching our classes how to *daven*, telling us that every word of *tefillah* creates its own *malach* (angel)—but if the words are rushed and mispronounced, an army of crippled angels go up to heaven, with broken legs or arms! Like the people of Danville, many Newport News congregants maintain strong bonds with my family to this day.

From 1963 to 1967, my parents lived in the Bronx, New York, where my father served as a roving ambassador and troubleshooter for Torah Umesorah, the association of Jewish day schools. He founded *The Jewish Observer* and served as its first editor.

Working with his close friend, Eliyahu Kitov, he translated two of Kitov's classic books, *A Jew and His Home* and *The Book of Our Heritage*. My father's final resting place is on Har HaMenuchos, near that of his beloved friend.

My youngest brother was born just before the Six Day War, and soon after that my father became the rabbi of the Young Israel of Far Rockaway, a post he held for eight years. As time passed, my father's longing for Eretz Yisrael became more fervid; he finally fulfilled his lifelong dream of making *aliyah* in 1975.

My father won the respect and admiration of *rabbanim*, *roshei yeshivah* and Chassidic *rebbeim* in Israel across the Orthodox spectrum. He maintained a unique perspective, seeing all sides of every Orthodox group in Israel with perfect clarity. Identifying fully with no group, he was beloved and sought out by all. At his funeral, one of the speakers compared him to Queen Esther, who was claimed by each of the Persian Empire's 127 provinces as its own.

While living in Jerusalem, my father played a vital role in thwarting one of

The Early Years

Rabbi Bulman and I were classmates at Yeshiva University, and studied together under the Rav, zt"l. We were not part of the same *chavruta*, but we socialized together—especially on Friday nights, after the Shabbat meal, on Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn's Williamsburg section. Young Orthodox Jews of all schools—Torah Vodaath, Yeshiva University, Chaim Berlin, Chofetz Chaim—used to walk and talk, and the talk was often of the highest caliber (to the surprise, no doubt, of those who looked upon this weekly promenade with a jaundiced eye). What intrigued me about Nachman, and what evoked affection and respect, was both the content and form of his conversation. The content was always high and serious. He was a *yerei Shamayim* but never narrow or shallow. He lived and breathed *ahavat Yisrael*, and he was distressed about oh, so many things in the Jewish community that he loved! He was critical of the less *frum* and the too *frum*, let alone the non-*frum*. He approached almost all problems from the point of view of *musar* and

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Chassidut, and I was amazed at the range of his knowledge. Equally impressive was his delivery—in a somewhat high-pitched voice; he was truly eloquent in both Yiddish and English, but especially the former. How I envied him—and how much I learned from him!

Nachman and I agreed on many things, and disagreed about many others. But whether we were of the same opinion or not, there was a mutual feeling of respect and, at least from me to him, admiration. I never found him to be provincial, and he was a *modeh al haemet*. Our friendship was not diminished by distance or long lack of contact; the rare occasions we met after he made *aliyah* reawakened in us the old, warm feelings of our youth.

Nachman is gone now, to my great distress, but I know that in the empyrean abode where his pure *neshamah* now rests, he is passionately lecturing the angels on a host of great issues. And they, messengers of the Almighty who are supposed to know only Hebrew, will no doubt find their heavenly hearts warmed by his literary, yet expressive, idiomatic and *zaftig* Yiddish.

Zol er hobn a lichtign Gan Eder!

Mayor Teddy Kollek's more nefarious schemes. Kollek thought he could alter the city's religious character by building a sports stadium near a religious neighborhood. Bringing together Orthodox leaders from the left and the right, my father succeeded in stopping the mayor. As Rav Noach Heisler said at the funeral, Rav Bulman was owed a debt of gratitude not only by Sanhedria Murchevet but by all of Jerusalem, for having saved the sanctity of the holy city.

For many years my father was *mashgiach ruchani* at Ohr Somayach. With his dream of building up Eretz Yisrael, my father established Kiryat Nachliel, an English-speaking community in the northern town of Migdal Haemek. He commuted to Jerusalem weekly so that he could continue to deliver *shiurim* at Ohr Somayach.

My father envisioned that his community would be a *kehillah*, like Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch's in Frankfurt. It would have a *shul* and a yeshiva, with some community members learning Torah, others working to support Torah and others serving in the army.

Former Kiryat Nachliel residents Rabbi and Mrs. Dovid Levine remember the time they lived there as being the peak years of their lives. In his *hesped* of my father, Rabbi Levine said, "Rav Hirsch in Frankfurt had it easy. He only had to deal with Germans. Rav Bulman had to deal with Americans, Israelis, Georgians, Russians, *ba'alei teshuvah* and *frum* from birth, *kollel* and working men—and the amazing thing is that he kept them all in a state

of peace and harmony, with everyone feeling that they were working for a common goal—to serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*."

Unfortunately the community did not prove to be economically viable. Yet people who lived there during the 14 years it lasted remember with longing the years of inspiration, and the sense of different kinds of Jews being united in one great enterprise.

One story we heard during the *shivah* was somewhat amusing. A man from Kiryat Nachliel had a dog to which he was very attached. My father hated dogs, but he once saw this man's dog in the local shopping center and realized it was lost. He and another man coaxed the dog into the back seat of a car and returned it to its owner.

A year later, the dog was hit by a car

and killed. The grief-stricken owner buried the dog in his yard, and asked my father to say a few words. And he did! My siblings and I were convulsed with laughter. "Daddy made a *hesped* for a dog?!" But though the dog's owner realized his request was inappropriate, he remembered above all my father's kindness.

A man who visited my father in the hospital near the end of his life said gratefully, "I remember how you welcomed me to your community in Migdal Haemek even though I wore a knitted *kippah*, and how you even said to me, 'We need more *kippot serugot* in Migdal Haemek.'"

My father did not believe that the existence of the State of Israel indicated *aschalta deGeulah*, that the Redemption had already begun. Nor did he celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut. Yet he most certainly ascribed cosmic significance to the fact that Jews had control of *Eretz Yisrael*, that millions of Jews were living there and that there were more yeshivos and Torah learning there than at any time since the Destruction of the Temple. He believed we were in the times known as the "Footsteps of the Messiah."

My father inspired many American Jews to go on *aliyah*, but there were also many whom he advised to stay in America. In particular, having seen so many American youngsters lost to *Yiddishkeit* in Israel, he strongly dissuaded people from moving there with teenagers. "It is better to be in America and long for Eretz Yisrael than to be in Eretz Yisrael and long for America."

My father was an Agudist, but an unusual one: He had a sympathetic view of Mizrachi and a deep appreciation for the writings of Rav Kook. He once said to me, "Look at the students of the serious Mizrachi yeshivos and their wives. Their observance of *halachah* and their standards of *tzenius* are impeccable."

Another time, on a Friday night at the Kotel, we saw a group of students from Yeshivat Hakotel in their short-sleeved white shirts and black pants. My father said to me, "Look at those *bachurim*. They look so *Shabbosdik*, and they're dressed appropriately for this country. It's a pity our community didn't adopt their style of dress in Eretz Yisrael."

As a *Chassid* himself, my father had warm feelings towards fellow *Chassidim*. He was intimately acquainted with the writings of all the Chassidic masters, including those of Chabad. Despite his appreciation for Chabad, he was wary of what he considered to be their messianic excesses. He once told me, "We Jews have to stay on the broad highway. Lubavitch is an exotic garden off the side of the road." Yet he also said, "As long as they haven't gone over the line of *halachah*, you can't read them out of Klal Yisrael." His wariness was heightened by the bizarre behavior of many Lubavitchers after their rebbe's death. While he may not have agreed with every word, my father spoke warmly of David Berger's book (*The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*, Oxford, 2001) and said, "A blessing on his head."

My father once made a wry comment about various principles of Judaism that had been appropriated by one or another stream. "Because of the Zionists, we can't love Eretz Yisrael anymore. Because of Lubavitch, we've stopped yearning for Mashiah. Because of Reform, we can't have decorum in *shul*. If this keeps up, *frum* Jews will have to give up the whole Torah."

For many years after my marriage, my husband and I had no children. At one point, a woman in Israel, who had one son, asked my father for a *berachah* for more children. He told her what the Gemara says: If you pray for someone else, and you need the same thing yourself, you will be answered first. He gave her my name.

We were living in Tennessee when we received a call about a Jewish baby born with defective kidneys. Fearing the worst, the parents were placing him with a Christian couple for adoption. Would Michael and I take him? It was 3 AM Jerusalem time when I woke my father and asked him what to do. He replied, "Go get him. However long he lives, his *neshamah* will know that it is in a home where there is *Kiddush* Friday night, where there is Shabbos, where there is *kashrus*." Our miracle son, Shai, celebrated his Bar Mitzvah a few months ago. His health is fine, *baruch Hashem*.

When our son was two, my second child, Naomi, was born in Atlanta, Georgia. That very same day, in Israel,

A Day School Grows in the Catskills

Liberty, Monticello, South Fallsburg

The 1950s was a time of Jewish ferment and change in the towns sprinkled throughout the Catskill Mountains.

Each hamlet had a *shul* and typically a young Orthodox rabbi eager to spread the Torah way of life. But these rabbis faced daunting problems. The Eastern European immigrant generation, long the backbone of Jewish viability, was quickly dying out and its more assimilated children were far less interested in Jewish affiliation.

It was determined that only by establishing a day school in the area would the continuity of Orthodoxy be assured. Formative meetings were held with the local rabbis. As the plans progressed, the hostility of the general Jewish population increased. "It's 'un-American.'" "We live in a pluralistic society and must adapt to it." "We don't want our children 'ghettoized.'" These were but a few of the taunts hurled at the day school supporters. One *shul* president even told his rabbi not to expect a renewal of his contract if he continued to support the day school.

In many of these confrontations, the day school *ba'alei batim* relied heavily on the capabilities of Rabbi Bulman, *zt"l*—the leader of the South Fallsburg congregation. Superbly eloquent, with the diction of a professor of English, he spoke with such sincerity that his detractors soon became his best friends and eventually strong supporters of his views.

Yale Gibber has been an extremely effective and much beloved communal leader for over 50 years.

Once a day school was established in the region, the recruitment of children became the next hurdle. Here too Rabbi Bulman was an effective advocate. One participant in a parlor meeting insisted that he saw no reason to "force-feed" religion to young children. He would rather they make their own decision about religion when they are old enough to think for themselves. Calmly, Rabbi Bulman asked, "Would you wait that long to teach them to eat with a knife and fork?"

In his own congregation, Rabbi Bulman was able to convince many non-Orthodox parents to send their children to the day school. But at the end of the first year, many of them registered their children in the local public school. Members of the day school board of directors were angered, feeling that the parents had taken advantage of the day school's policy of early admission to provide their children with a head start in public school. Rabbi Bulman told the directors, "One day those children will grow up and eventually go to *Olam Haemes* where their good and bad deeds shall be measured in the *Bais Din shel Ma'alah*. That one year of day school—learning to say *Shema*, learning to say *berachos*, learning about Shabbos and Yom Tov—may be the deciding factor for a positive decision in their favor. How much is that worth?"

Almost 50 years have passed. The Hebrew Day School of Sullivan and Ulster Counties continues to be a center of Torah education in New York's Catskill Mountains—helped in its infancy by the vision, leadership and eloquence of Rabbi Nachman Bulman.

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 *shitta*, 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 *shitta* as part of a spectrum of *sheleimut*, even while he condemned the limitations of total devotion to any specific one.

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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 *tikkun 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.

the woman who had asked my father for a *berachah* gave birth to her long-awaited second child, a son. She called my parents to invite them to the *bris* (I also have another daughter, Shifra, now 9.)

The above story is found in *The Footsteps of the Maggid*, by Paysach Krohn (New York, 1992) but the names were changed at my father's request. He didn't see himself as a *rebbe*, he didn't want people to come to him expecting miracles.

My father also had a beautiful, haunting, tenor voice. In his youth he had learned the classical Modzitzer *niggunim*. When my father sang at the Shabbos table, one felt the presence of King David, the Sweet Singer of Israel. When my father read Megillas Esther, he read Esther's line, "If I perish, I perish," with tragic pathos.

No one in the world *davened* like my father. Once he told a student who had doubts regarding his *emunah*, "Come talk to me after *Musaf* on Rosh Hashanah." After hearing my father *daven*, the young man said he had no more doubts. Anyone who heard my father *daven* the *Neilah* prayer on Yom Kippur sprouted wings and flew to heaven. Not since Elijah on Mount Carmel did anyone cry out so exultantly as my father did: *Hashem Hu HaElokim!* The Lord, He alone is God!

The wife of the Novominsker Rebbe, Rebbetzin Yehudis Perlow, z"l, once said

to me, "No one has your father's combination of intellect and heart." My father knew every *sefer* in his vast library. At the same time, he felt deeply for every troubled Jew. He understood people in a profound, even uncanny, way. In a few words he could save a marriage, free an *agunah*, bring an errant child back into the fold, mend a broken heart.

My father was a very emotional man, who laughed and cried freely. He held nothing back when he spoke, taught, sang, *davened*. He lightened other people's burdens and shouldered them himself. He was a lion.

My father used to say that the Gemara was the math and science of Torah, while *Tanach*, Jewish history and Jewish philosophy were the liberal arts of Torah. My father's breadth encompassed everything in Torah, but he majored in the humanities. He could read a book or a *sefer* almost as fast as he could turn the pages. He didn't just read the *sefarim* in his library; he loved them, passionately.

Of all the *sefarim* he ever read, the one that had the greatest impact on his life was *The Nineteen Letters* of Rav Hirsch. He found this gem as a teenager in, of all places, the public library. Thereafter, his whole life was guided by

the principles of *Torah im Derech Eretz*.

To adumbrate just a few of the Hirschian themes that animated my father's life:

- Uncompromising intellectual defense of Orthodoxy.
- "*Da ma shetashuv*"—knowing how to respond to skeptics.
- Acquiring a command of language.
- Maintaining *Austritt*, Orthodox independence; not joining any body where Orthodox and non-Orthodox rabbis functioned as peers; having nothing to do with Federation; supporting Orthodox institutions with Orthodox money.
- Reaching out with warmth, friendship and intellectual clarity to non-religious Jews.
- Believing in the ideal of a *kehillah*.
- Seeing Klal Yisrael as a unified body consisting of 12 different tribes; respecting the followers of different Torah paths.
- Being an idealist, resisting cynicism.
- Knowing the intellectual currents of one's own time, and above all, what the Torah has to say about everything. Knowing that the Torah has something to say about everything. Intellectual fearlessness and self-confidence. No cowering behind intellectual walls, no defensiveness.
- Seeing Torah Jews as having something vital to contribute to the public square. Working to improve the morality and God-awareness of the nations.

Rav Bulman and My Brother Jimmy

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 us children; in the evenings, he taught our parents. Soon, homes were *kashered*, a daily *minyan* was started and a *mikveh* was built. In time, Rav Bulman began encouraging parents to send their high school age children to study in yeshivot in New York. My oldest brother Jimmy was the first to agree to go.

I will never forget bidding my 14-year-old brother goodbye at the Trailways bus station, together with my family and Rav Bulman. As brave Jimmy boarded the bus, we kissed

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him goodbye and Rav Bulman, with tears streaming down his cheeks, quietly said, "This is why I came to Danville."

Subsequently, many others followed my brother. Rav Bulman affected so many lives; because of him, new generations of Jews emerged from the unlikeliest of places within small-town America.

How did he do it? He dazzled you with his extraordinary knowledge, ranging from Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch to the Kotzker Rebbe, from Kant to Tennyson.

He challenged you by presenting piercing thoughts that questioned your assumptions.

He moved you with his sweet, melodic voice that lifted your *neshamah*.

But most significantly, he opened his enormously generous heart to every Jew with loving acceptance.

When his heart finally gave out this summer, I know it was because he had given so much of it to us.

• Valuing the unique contributions made by women to the Torah polity. Principled opposition to those who would lure women away from their time-honored Torah roles, as well as to those who would denigrate women.

• Deferring to *gedolei Torah*, honoring *talmidei chachamim*.

My father was a *tzaddik*, but he was not a perfect man. He was a real person. He could lose his temper. He could jump to conclusions, make mistakes, shout at people. He could also admit he'd been wrong, humble himself, apologize to someone much smaller than himself. He was always in a hurry, often late, always drove above the speed limit. He never wrote the books he meant to write, but he also never closed his door to any Jew. His shelves were full of books by writers he had helped and encouraged. Their books will stand in

place of the books he never wrote.

Two years ago, at the time of my parents' 50th anniversary, my siblings and I had a reunion in Jerusalem. As we lined up for a photograph, my father said, "I have one accomplishment in my life: five decent human beings." Not one of us can begin to approach our father's greatness, nor did he expect us to. But it is comforting to know that he was happy with the way we turned out.

In the last weeks of his life, my father suffered terribly, both physically and emotionally. We tried to ease his distress. Our efforts were not very successful.

He was visited one day by an elderly lady from Danville, a former congregant of his. My father was in bed, barely able to speak anymore. I told him Lillian was there to see him, and asked him if she could come in. He nodded yes.

She came in and spoke to my father in her lilting, soft Southern drawl. "Rabbi, I want you to know that you changed my life and the lives of so many people. You taught us to love the Torah. You taught us that there is a God and that He always takes care of us and we don't have to be afraid of anything. Rabbi, I love you and I will never forget you."

With these words she gave him comfort. She gave back to him what he had once given to her.

Three days later, on Shabbos morning, my father passed away in his home in Jerusalem. As my brother said at the funeral, it was fitting that it happened during the Three Weeks. It was truly a time of mourning for all Klal Yisrael.

Yes, we will remember: *Hashem Hu HaElokim*.

Goodbye Daddy. **JA**

The Cosmic Importance of Each Jew

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

To me 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. None one of us ever realized that he was subtly not only listening, but guiding. By age 14, I was ready to start investigating observance.

I never thought Rabbi Bulman was extraordinary. It was only later that I found out being a rabbi didn't mean you were like him.

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 *mehitzah*, a debate on whether to maintain the *mehitzah* was underway. The *shul's mikveh* was not in use.

By the time Rabbi Bulman left in 1962, a new *shul* had been built with a *mehitzah*, the *mikveh* 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 *shiurim* had become staples in the community. Teenagers, for whom there was no formal Jewish educa-

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tion, were participating in NCSY 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 *Netzach Yisrael*. Sometime after I married and moved to Rechovot, Israel, I invited the Bulmans for Shabbat. When they finally arrived, just minutes before candle lighting, I asked if they had gotten lost. "Certainly not," the *rebbetzin* replied. "We stopped at a gas station in Ramle and the rabbi got into a conversation with a young Sephardi Jew who was pumping gas. I couldn't get him back into the car." I could just see Rabbi Bulman, dressed for Shabbat, having an enthusiastic conversation with the attendant, also dressed for Shabbat, possibly in undershirt, running shorts and gold chains.

Rabbi Bulman did not leave institutions or a community, but he left individuals who went on to establish families of which he was very proud. I hope he is at peace knowing that an institution or community would have been too small to contain or define his passionate Torah personality.