

Beyond the Words of Kaddish



As a 12-year-old boy, R' Pam (1913–2001), who lived in Lithuania, was sent by his parents to a yeshiva in a different town. When his parents heard that the wagon driver from their city was headed to where R' Pam was learning in yeshiva, they would send him regards. When he would receive those regards, he felt such a thrill because he felt lonely as a 12-year-old boy away from home. When his parents had more notice that the wagon driver was headed there, they would write a letter and send it. Upon receiving it, R' Pam was overjoyed. When his parents had even more notice, his mother would make him a fresh kugel. When R' Pam received that, he felt tremendous joy. Later in life, after his parents passed away, he took it as a lesson, as he would say the following. When I recite *kaddish*, I am sending my parents regards. When I learn Torah, I am sending them a letter. And when I strengthen public Torah learning, I am sending them a fresh kugel.

At age 14, R' Ruderman¹ (1900–1987) learned in the Slobodka Yeshiva. One Erev Rosh Hashana, he accepted upon himself to finish *shas* by Pesach. Prior to the new *zeman* after Succos, a message came to the Alter of Slobodka² that the father of R' Ruderman passed away (his mother passed away when he was seven). The Alter of Slobodka (1849–1927), who knew R' Ruderman committed himself to completing *shas*, didn't tell R' Ruderman that his father died, which meant that he did not say *kaddish* for his father. Only after R' Ruderman finished *shas* by Pesach did the Alter tell him that his father had died. The Alter explained to him that his learning *shas* was worth more than saying *kaddish* for his father. (If he had told him when it happened, R' Ruderman wouldn't have finished *shas* due to the mourning.)

Once, on his mother's *yahrtzeit*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Telz, R' Elya Meir Bloch (1894–1954), was in a foreign city trying to raise funds for Jews who had had their house destroyed by a fire. Due to this, he was unable to say *kaddish* since there was no *minyan*. R' Bloch's response to this was, "What does my mother want — to say *kadish* or to actually live it?!" His action to help other Jews was a living *yisgadal v'yiskadash*... making Hashem's name great.

The Divrei Malkiel (4:96) was asked about a child who didn't want to say *kadish* for his father. In answering the question, he writes that people have forgotten the big picture around *kaddish*: The masses have thought that the essence is to lead davening and say *kaddish*. And there are those who say *kaddish* as much as possible, but all day they do whatever they want. In truth, the essence is to increase Torah and good deeds, and keep away from forbidden things. And in this a child confers merit on his parent.

Endnotes

1, He founded and served as Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Yisrael in Baltimore. In 1926, two years after his marriage, he received semicha from the Rosh Yeshiva in Slobodka, R' Moshe Mordechai Epstein. In 1933, with his father-in-law's encouragement, he moved to Baltimore from Cleveland, where he was immediately offered a rabbinical post at the shul Tiferes Yisrael. R' Ruderman accepted the position on the condition that he be permitted to open a yeshiva using the shul's facilities. He began with six students and named the newly formed Yeshivas Ner Yisrael, after R' Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Mussar movement. The yeshiva grew quickly, and R' Ruderman approached R' Shimon Schwab (who at the time was the rabbi of another Baltimore congregation) inviting him to join the faculty. R' Schwab taught the first-year shiur in Ner Yisrael for several years, until he moved to Washington Heights. R' Ruderman led the yeshiva for 54 years until his death when R' Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg, his son-in-law, took over. R' Ruderman was Rosh Yeshiva, while his brother-in-law, R' Naftali (Herman) Neuberger took care of the financial side. His son-in-law, R' Weinberg, who married his only child, Chana, succeeded him as Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisrael until R' Weinberg's death in 1999.

2, This was R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel, also known as Nota Hirsch. Because he was so concerned for his students, he became known as the Alter ("elder," i.e., father) of Slobodka. He spent ten out of every twelve months with his students full-time, only returning to his wife for Yom Tov. He had special agents who would keep an eye out all over Europe for teenagers with an aptitude for both scholarship and leadership, recruiting them and bringing them to Slobodka. He attained unusual success, and his students subsequently reflected that he was a master of the human psyche and knew just which psychological buttons to press to give direction to his students' lives. He would monitor the extracurricular behavior of students, judging their character faults and strengths. He was responsible for deciding which boys would share rooms together, weighing the strengths of one against the other. Some were chosen to be his personal assistants. He stressed the importance of outer appearance and the need for neatness and cleanliness. He didn't want the image of the poor, tattered, downtrodden yeshiva student to be associated with the alumni of his institution. He would send teams of his trained prized pupils to places that needed a boost in religious observance and learning of Torah. During his lifetime, he moulded many who would eventually become the Roshei Yeshiva of most of the so-called Lithuanian-style yeshivos that were established in the United States and Eretz Yisrael during the 20th century, and which continue to grow dramatically in the 21st century. Some of his more famous students are R' Yitzchak Hutner, R' Yaakov Kamenetzky, R' Aharon Kotler, R' Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman and R' Yechezkel Sarna (head of Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim). The Alter did not author any sefarim or essays personally, but some of his ethical discourses were published under the name Ohr Hatzafun, The Hidden Light (also meaning "The Light of the Hidden [One]") - the word Hatzafun also being the four initials of his name, but not in order — Hirsch, Tzvi, Finkel, Nota. The title alludes to the arcane, mysterious and hidden nature of its subject, as he used to sign his name as Hatzafun.



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