

Hesped for Rabbi Freedman, Z"l

Bais Yaakov Convention in Cleveland, Kislev 5758

Someone once asked R' Yaakov Kamenetzky z"l why his Rebbe, the legendary Alter of Slabodka, R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel, z"l, left no seforim behind that he could very well have authored. R' Yaakov responded that he believed the Alter did not think of himself as Der Alter, but, humbly, as a Yid, just pushing his way through his years on earth, doing whatever each day called for. Rabbi Freedman was a great principal because he was an extraordinary Yid! His entire life was simply, I am here only to serve You, Hashem. His perspective was actually conveyed to me in his last days with his own expression "*asis*" – I did all I could. I believe that he may have said "*mah she'aly*". Imagine being able to make such a statement!! But his own particular brand of *avodah* from his youth to his last hours was, "How can I also draw others along"? He pined all his life – draw me Hashem, so I can be *mashpiah* on others! So, he was legendary – even among the gentile educators and government officials in Baltimore – for the unimaginable lengths he would go to, for the hundreds of research hours, for his enterprising efforts and trademark ingenuity and technological savvy, in helping **every single** student succeed and thrive. Including even a student born without any sight, today still blind yet happily married, whom he set on a successful course for life, as well as so many other extremely disabled individuals. No problem was too great to be tackled. As was said at a school gathering, Rabbi Freedman was practicing inclusion before it became a part of our lexicon. And Rabbi Freedman had the determination and courage to create a peanut free environment to protect an allergic student even before such restrictive policies were in vogue, and so many warned him that parents would simply not comply – and he would fail. He succeeded. He stood *doros* of students on their feet - and they became able, happy, wholesome members of *Klal Yisroel*.

Rabbi Freedman was utterly focused and serious – there was so much purpose in him. But Bais Yaakov children loved their *menahel* and felt tremendous, incomparable warmth in remembering their elementary school experience. His Hilarious Purim buffoonery, for example, year after year, reflected great inner *simcha*, through which he drew, inspired and brought joy to others with gladness, self-confidence, and the *simcha* he taught them.

Rabbi Freedman always looked neat – even when he was not "principal-ing". And he loved seeing his students looking neat and acting in a regal manner. He treated everyone with respect, including at times when he strongly disagreed with them - including people whose standards were clearly lower than his - or had to protest their actions or words, including Yid, gentile, teacher, student, janitor, adult and child. He actually fought battles for unadulterated Torah values, for uncompromised *minhag yisroel sabbah*, but always with *mentshlichkeit* and friendliness. His positions were reasoned, his logic unassailable and his manner always dignified. R' Mendel was truly a walking *kiddush Hashem*, so that all who encountered him, even Torah detractors, had a greater appreciation for his *Ribono Shel Olam*.

Rabbi Freedman was consummately *ehrllich* – he abhorred any deviation from complete integrity and genuineness, or the slightest form of *gneivas daas* – misleading others, or manipulative or insincere behavior. He kept his every word and commitment. He would never take advantage of your naiveté or ignorance, although he was more clever than just about anyone. He had such great *frumkeit*, and *yiras shamayim*, but in his modesty, he never put these on display. By the same token, he had little patience for anyone whose personal pursuit of *ruchniyus* goals might indirectly cause hardship or pain for others.

He didn't need to preach because he taught by example, and you learned enough from merely observing him. His Purim day was filled with entertaining old, forgotten, or lonely people with his spirited musical entertainment on his accordion. His life was *emes* and *chesed*. At the same time, Rabbi Freedman was so normal and regular, and although reserved, had a great deal of personality.

Rabbi Freedman loved Bais Yaakov of Baltimore because he so strongly identified with its responsiveness to the entire tzibur, while nevertheless brooking no compromise with highest Torah ideals and hopes, and all under the watchful eyes of *gedolei Yisroel* and our community *rabbanim*. Indeed, he loved all Jewish children. In turn, we all felt his goodness, his exaltedness, and his fearlessness and resolve. He was so very real as a loyal *eved Hashem*.

So thousands of his talmidos have gone, and will be going, forward, transmitting the purest forms of Yiddishkeit to their children and their students, and new generations will thus bring *zechuyos* to his *neshama*, as they call out: show us the *derech Hashem*! They too, learning from his example, are and will im yirtzeh Hashem draw others as he did.