

# ALL IN GOOD TIME

For Rav Yehuda Zev Segal *ztz"l*, the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, every minute was another opportunity for a mitzvah, and the most seemingly insignificant event became a mussar lesson. Twenty-five years after his *petirah*, *talmidim* still integrate those messages in their own lives

BY **Riki Goldstein**  
PHOTOS *Personal archives*

# Tefillos

in the  
Manchester  
Yeshivah

were meticulous and lengthy, yet long after the last Kaddish for Maariv was over, the Rosh Yeshivah himself, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal *ztz"l*, would finally complete his davening. A *talmid* would then give the Rosh Yeshivah a ride home to 40 Broom Lane — but for the elderly sage, the ride was not a gap in the day's schedule. He got into the car carrying a sheaf of letters to mail. Originally, the foreign boys would give their letters to a bochur named Eliezer Heilpern to mail, but one time when they brought the letters, Rav Yehuda Zev asked if he could take them. The bochurim hesitated. Surely this wasn't *kavod* for the Rosh Yeshivah! But who were they to argue?

The yeshivah's driver asked if he could go out into the cold night instead of the Rosh Yeshivah. But Rav Yehuda Zev became very animated, exclaiming, "I would give you a million pounds for this mitzvah! Posting the letters is a *chesed* for the bochur, and brings great joy to the faraway parents."

Every evening, the car stopped by the red mailbox on Leicester Road, and the Rosh Yeshivah emerged. He would say "*Hineni muchan u'mezuman* to do a mitzvah of *chesed*," and mail the letters. When he got back into the car, he would exult, "Look how Hashem gives Olam Haba away. For a little nothing, you get so much!"

Sometimes, if young Eliezer did the mailing, the Rosh Yeshivah made sure to let his *talmid* know that it was a big opportunity, and he should have the right intentions while doing the mitzvah. One evening, the driver forgot to stop, and the Rosh Yeshivah brought the letters home. That night, he

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would quote Rav Simcha Zissel of Kelm, saying that “adding *machshavah* before a deed is adding the numeral before a bunch of zeros. An action that has little value on its own becomes billions — once a *l’sheim Shamayim* thought is added.”

Every time the Rosh Yeshivah sat down to eat, he stated his intention of doing the mitzvah of guarding one’s health. Then out came a small card with the brachos printed on it. It was his custom never to daven anything by heart, so one brachos card was kept at home and one in yeshivah. And he always said *asher yatzar* from a siddur.

*Shmuessen* were not just part of his job description, but a fulfillment of Hashem’s mandate of rebuking. Before every *shmuess* he gave in the yeshivah, Rav Segal would say quietly, “Now I will do the mitzvah of *hochei’ach tochiach es amisecha*.”

In the Rosh Yeshivah’s mitzvah-based mindset, any routine act became a mitzvah *bein adam l’chaveiro*. When the towels in yeshivah became damp, he told the boys that they should jump to change them. “When the towels become wet, people can’t dry their hands properly. When you change the towel, you’re doing a mitzvah of helping your friends not to get chapped hands. They should sell the privilege of changing the towel!”

By the same token, he taught them to pick up any peels and wrappers from the streets or public areas. “If you leave it there, someone can slip — but more than that, you’re causing someone else to bend down and pick it up.”

When the Rosh Yeshivah davened, it seemed as if the fire of the tefillos encompassed him as he spoke each word meticulously from the siddur. Occasionally he would add words of supplication in Yiddish. In those days, the variety of translated siddurim that abound today didn’t exist. The Rosh Yeshivah, who followed every word with his finger, used a “ladies’ siddur,” the *Korban Minchah*, because he liked the Yiddish translation it provided.

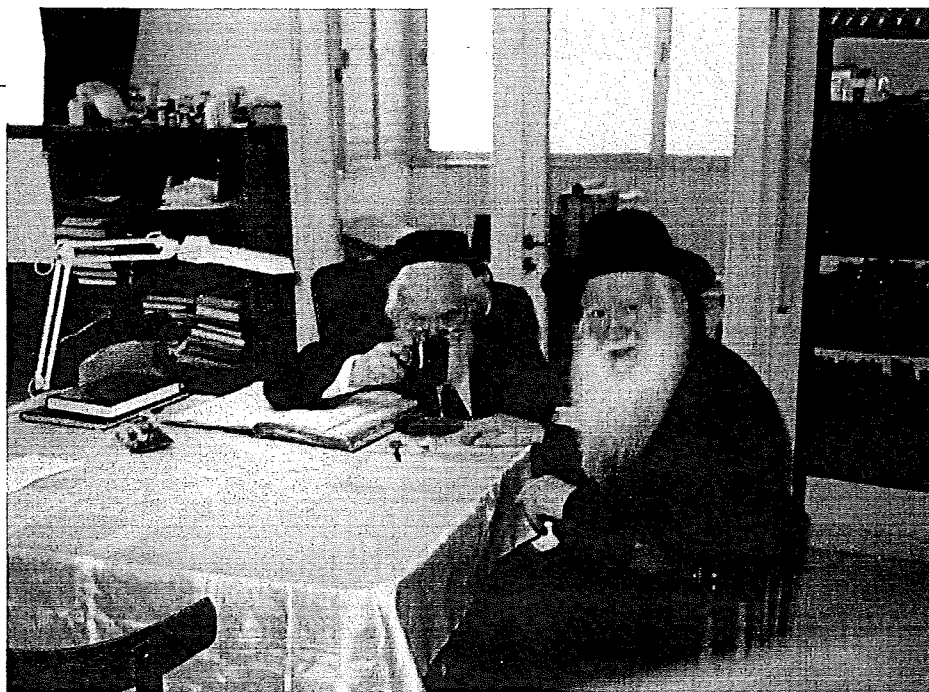


In Semmering (top), where the Rosh Yeshivah stayed for a few weeks each summer, together with his *talmidim* — and a young Rav Weissmandl on his right; (Inset) with Rebbe Yankele of Pshevorsk



The Rosh Yeshivah in conference with Rav Vosner, accompanied by his longtime traveling companion Reb Shimshon Mozes





Rav Segal on a visit with Rav Shach in Bnei Brak. In his many travels, his accommodation requirements were minimal, as he juggled meetings with other *gedolim* while running away from *kavod*

walked from his home back to the mailbox to mail them. Another time, Eliezer, the letter-gatherer — who is today Rabbi Eliezer Heilpern, popular Torah lecturer from Manchester — had no letters to bring. The Rosh Yeshivah turned to him in disappointment: “What, you don’t have an *esrog* [a *mitzvah*] today?”

**Every Minute a Mitzvah** Manchester is a medium-sized city in England’s northwest. In the cool month of Shevat, rain leaves the streets soaked and sidewalks shining. The water seems to trickle through every crack and crevice, leaving one’s very bones damp. Yet for the town’s venerated Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal *ztz”l* — whose 25th *yahrtzeit* is next week, on 22 Shevat — there was no mundane, there was no humdrum. No cracks existed in his day — every minute was a flowing stream of Hashem’s bounty and an opportunity to fulfill His wishes.

Inside the Rosh Yeshivah’s copy of the sefer *Shemiras Halashon*, which he learned during his simple meals, there was a small folded paper, containing personal resolutions for that year.

One year, a *bochur* got a peek. The

neatly numbered list contained 15 *kabbalos*. Among them: “*L’hishtadel shelo laasos shum maaseh, afilu katan, k’gon hashatas hayad, bli machshavah kodem* — To try not to do any action, even as small as stretching out a hand, without giving prior thought.”

An outsized goal? Every single action with thought? For the Rosh Yeshivah, this seemingly unrealistic existence was within reach. Seasons did not pass him by, nor did weeks, days, or even minutes. Instead of drifting, the Rosh Yeshivah allowed Hashem’s will to shape each minute — by working to elevate each and every increment of time into a *mitzvah* opportunity and taking gems of *mussar* from every corner.

Every minute, another *mitzvah*.

Putting a sefer back in the right place on the shelf was a *mitzvah* of *chesed*. “Just have in mind that you are doing this as a *chesed* so that your friend will be able to find it easily,” he’d say. Dancing at a *chasunah* was never a night out. “Have in mind that you are doing this dance *l’sheim Shamayim*, to gladden the *chassan* and *kallah*, and every moment of dancing becomes a *mitzvah*.” The Rosh Yeshivah

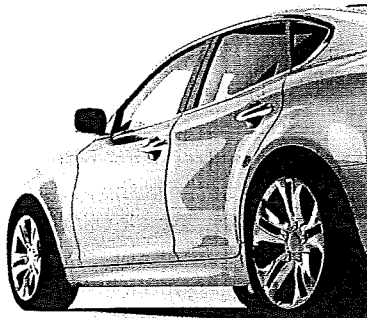
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## All in Good Time

Rosh Yeshivah could possibly come by to see his son, a young father, who was very ill.

"The Rosh Yeshivah was leaving for Bournemouth for some rest the next day. On the way, he had an appointment to see the well-known Dr. Shloime Adler in the Golders Green area, and he told the man that *bli neder* he would visit the sick son, who lived nearby. When we arrived, the young man, who was in the final stages of a terminal illness, was in bed downstairs, and the Rosh Yeshivah spent an hour talking to him and being *mechazeik* him. Above the bed was a picture of three very young children, and a siddur. The Rosh Yeshivah looked inside the siddur and saw it had a label — it had been given to one of his sons as a prize."

"What is this?" Rav Segal asked the father.

"It's a prize given to my older son," the father replied proudly. "He was the top of the class in *kriah*."

"Top of the class! How many boys are in the class?" the Rosh Yeshivah inquired.

The man gave the number.

"Wonderful! You must be so proud!" the Rosh Yeshivah said. Then he turned to Mr. Mozes. "Shimshon, do you hear this? His son was the top reader in a class of 16 children!"

The father beamed.

Then the Rosh Yeshivah indicated the photograph. "Please, give me the picture." Mr. Mozes passed it to him. "Such sweet children! Would you mind if I could see them and give them a brachah before I leave?"

After taking his leave of the patient, the Rosh Yeshivah spoke to his wife outside the room, offering her *chizuk*. Then he bentshed each child warmly, individually.

The young father passed away a week after this occurred.

"This was the Rosh Yeshivah's way," says Mr. Mozes, "to do everything possible that he could to help. In the later years, he was constantly sought after by callers who wanted his advice and tefillos. When we

# Everywhere You Look

With such heightened sensitivity to the idea that every action was weighed on a scale, Rav Segal was constantly drawing mussar from the nuances of everyday life. Some special memories from the *talmidim* who accompanied him through the journeys of life:



"It was Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul and the Rosh Yeshivah was returning home from Austria. We boarded the plane

and the pilot began the preflight announcements. 'Please fasten your seatbelt before takeoff.' The Rosh Yeshivah turned to me and said, 'You hear what they're saying? Elul is here. You have to first strap in before taking off. You have to first have a plan before you fly up.' "

—Mr. Yochi Herzog

"During the security briefing on a transatlantic flight, the Rosh Yeshivah said to me, 'Look around you. They are telling you how to save your life in an emergency, and no one is listening. So it is with the study of mussar. With mussar you can change your personality, save your life, you can do everything, but nobody wants to listen.' There was a sink upstairs in the yeshivah building where the Rosh Yeshivah used to wash his hands. To keep the water warm, you had to press down. Of course, there was mussar in that. He told me 'You see, *m'darf shtippen* — you have to push. If you leave off pushing and pressing, it cools off.' "

—Mr. Shimshon Mozes

"From the paper boy who distributed the newspaper in the early hours of Manchester's dark mornings, the Rosh Yeshivah learned *zerizus*. 'How can you be in bed when the paper boy is up to do his duties?' he'd ask. Another time, the Rosh Yeshivah was riding in a taxi, and he saw an advertisement for a bank. 'Everyone knows about that bank already, but they continually advertise. They're trying to *klap in kop* — to get their name into your consciousness. That is how mussar should be learned. Again and again until it finally goes in.' "

—Rabbi Eliezer Heilpern

"I was once fixing a carpet in the Rosh Yeshivah's home, and I asked him if he could please move. He asked for how long, and I said about ten minutes. The Rosh Yeshivah sighed and said, 'If only I were able to fix myself in ten minutes!'"

— Mr. Z.G.



"He once told me as we were flying, 'Look out the window when the plane gets higher; everything on the ground gets smaller.

If we elevate ourselves, earthly things will seem less significant.' Another time, when the Rosh Yeshivah arrived to catch a plane, he saw that the doors of the plane were closing in his group's face, and he begged to be allowed to board. He took this to heart, and on the next Yom Kippur, it was part of his Neilah address. Passionately, in a voice that melted the hearts of the large crowd who davened with him, he screamed '*Psach lanu shaar!* Hashem, please keep the doors open — don't shut them in our face. Give us the chance to board!'"

—Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl

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His *kavanah* was so famously intense that it was widely known that he never looked out of the lines, not even noticing if a student wrote a name in the margin.

Former students remember that a highlight of the Rosh Yeshivah's tefillah was the Ezras Avoseinu section before Shemoneh Esreh in Shacharis. Rav Segal would become very animated and emotional as he read the words describing Kri'as Yam Suf. Rabbi Yitzchok Nussbaum, a close *talmid* who today serves as mashgiach in Manchester's Yeshivah L'Zeirim, relates that the Rosh Yeshivah was once unwell, and he fainted during this section. When he awoke, he continued from the exact word he had stopped at. “When he davened, the Rosh Yeshivah wasn't just saying the words, he was living them. And therefore he knew exactly which parts of davening he had already lived that day.”

And davening wasn't only about living the day, it gave context to his entire week. Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl, rosh kollel at Heichal HaTorah in Manchester, says that “at the end of davening, before saying the Shir shel Yom, with its mention of the day of the week in relation to Shabbos, the Rosh Yeshivah would say quietly, ‘Now I am going to be *mekayeim zachor es yom haShabbos.*’”

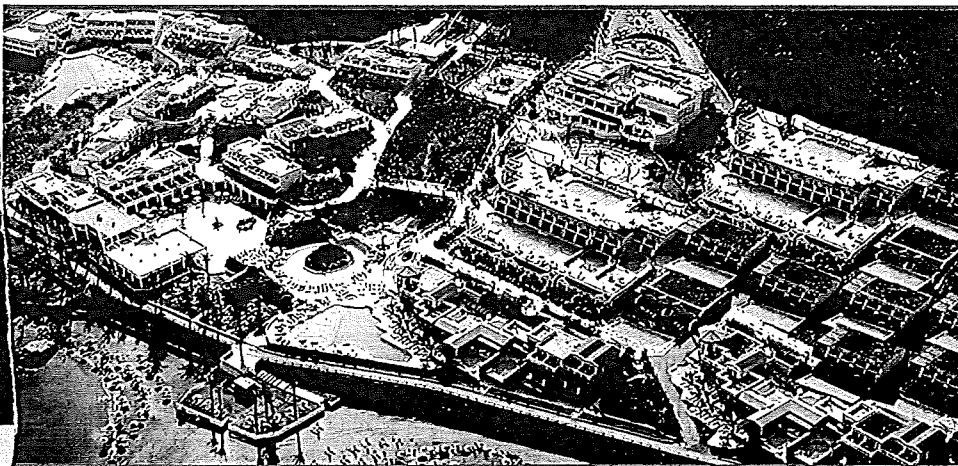
**He Suffered Their Pain** Although Rav Segal might have been oblivious to extraneous details while he was in conversation with Hashem, when it came to the people around him, he was totally tuned into their needs, and would do anything to alleviate another's suffering.

“Once, while the Rosh Yeshivah was staying in Stamford Hill, London, an elderly man came in,” recalls a close *talmid*, Mr. Shimshon Mozes. “He asked if the



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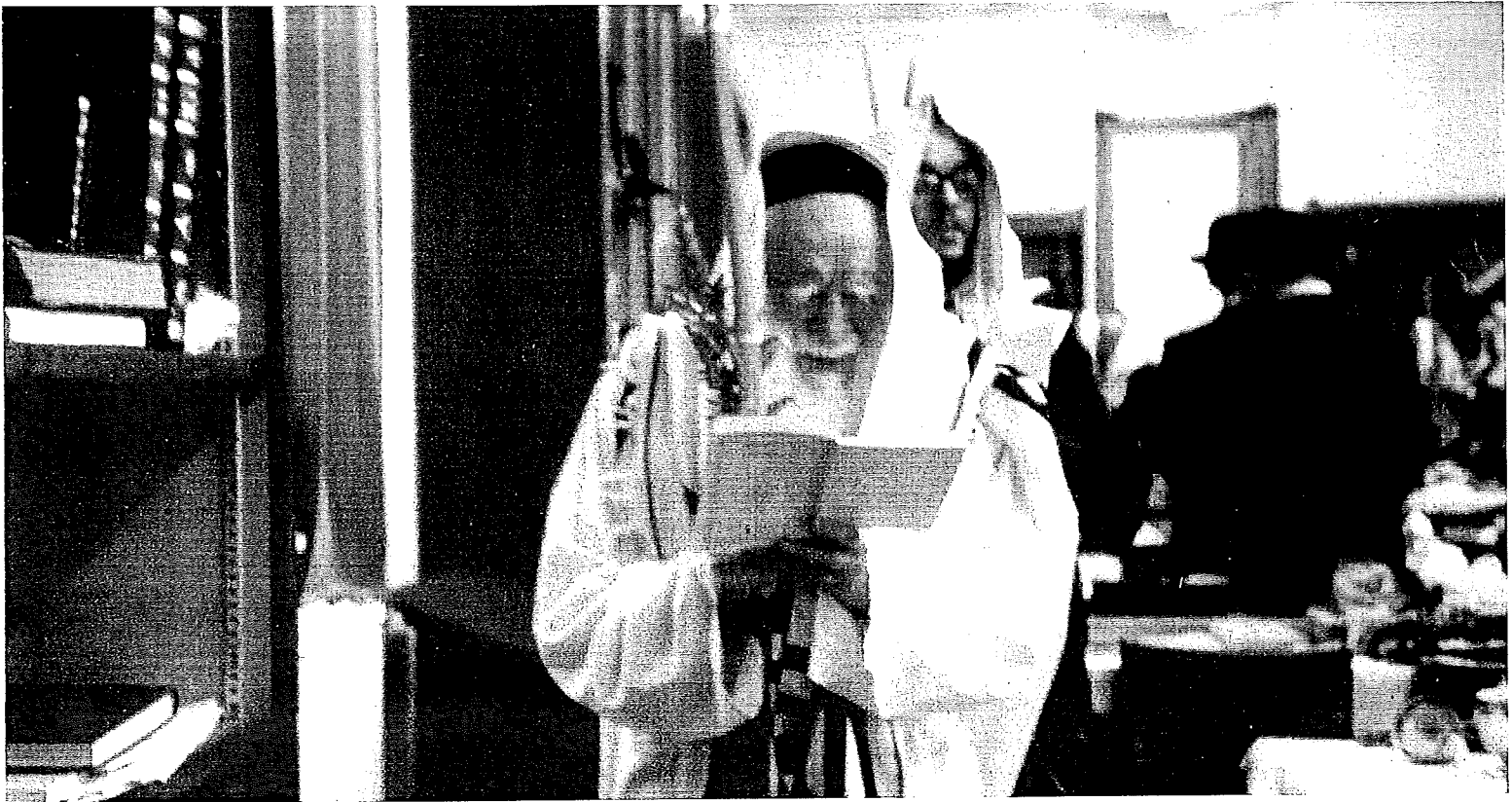
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Rav Segal was oblivious to extraneous details while he was in conversation with Hashem, but when it came to the people around him, he was totally tuned into their needs

were in Bournemouth on vacation, people would constantly call him, so sometimes we'd leave the phone off the hook in order to save his energy from the barrage of requests. But the Rosh Yeshivah *wanted* to be available to help people. So if it got too quiet, he'd ask us to please check if the phone was working."

As he walked along the street, Rav Segal was always careful to greet people first. If a man approached with two children, they didn't get one "Good Shabbos" from the Rosh Yeshivah — they got three. First the father, then a greeting for each young child. When he was asked to pose for photos, that too, was a chesed done willingly.

Hundreds of *talmidim* from all over the world would come to spend the Yamim Noraim with the Rosh Yeshivah. On Yom Kippur night, the Rosh Yeshivah would spend hours after davening giving individual brachos to the hundreds of people who davened together with him in the yeshivah's minyan.

When other Jews were in trouble, the Rosh Yeshivah suffered pain as well. Rabbi Michoel Ber Weissmandl

remembers the Rosh Yeshivah's angst during the Gulf War. "The Rosh Yeshivah didn't just say Tehillim and cry in general terms for the Yidden in Eretz Yisrael," says Rabbi Weissmandl. "He thought about every detail of the war. During a *vaad*, he told us to imagine the pain and fear, the panic of the little kids, the inconvenience for the young mothers, the terror of those outside. And then he cried and cried."

**Train Yourself to Resist** Needless to say, the Rosh Yeshivah was an incredible *masmid*; he learned during mealtimes, learned on every journey he took, learned with incredible *geshmak* and focus during every available minute. Yet at the same time he nurtured *talmidim* holistically, building a whole person, extending his love and guidance to every area of their lives. Many would become *klei kodesh*, but the majority were built into dedicated *balabatim*, although they felt no less close than the kollel men.

"There was a deep love for every *talmid*," explains Mr. Yochi Herzog of Kedem Wines. "The Rosh Yeshivah kept

up closely with hundreds of *talmidim*. His concern with their spiritual welfare, with their health, with their *parnassah*, with their children's progress, was unending."

When Mr. Herzog returned to Monsey after his yeshivah days were over, he became the evening *chavrusa* of the Rosh Yeshivah's grandson, Rabbi Moshe Yitzchok Ehrentrau. At one stage, his business required a lot of travel, and he had to cancel this *chavrusashaft* often. "But one day," he says "the Rosh Yeshivah got wind of this. He called up my wife at home and asked to speak to me.

" 'He's not in, who is calling, please?' she returned.

" 'It's Rabbi Segal, the Rosh Yeshivah from Manchester.'"

" 'Oh, Rosh Yeshivah! I'll make sure he calls you.'"

"I was in Baltimore on business and there were no cell phones in those days. I got the message that the Rosh Yeshivah needed me, and I quickly ran to find a public phone and dialed Manchester.

" 'Rosh Yeshivah, it's Yochanan,' I said.

"His voice came across strong and clear. 'Yochanan! *Vos iz mit dir?* What's



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happening to you? You are traveling so much, what will be with your *chavrusa*?' Right there, over the international pay phone line, the Rosh Yeshivah gave me a powerful mussar lecture. Over the next period I curtailed my business travels and tried to be in Monsey with my *chavrusa* at night. The Rosh Yeshivah was never afraid to give us mussar, but the more mussar he gave me, the more I loved him."

The Rosh Yeshivah gave life-changing *shmuessen* and *vaadim*, but every student knew that he directed the most mussar at himself. Rabbi Weissmandl recalls hearing the Rosh Yeshivah learning mussar, and castigating himself in the area of humility. "He was saying to himself 'Nu, so I have a longer beard...'"

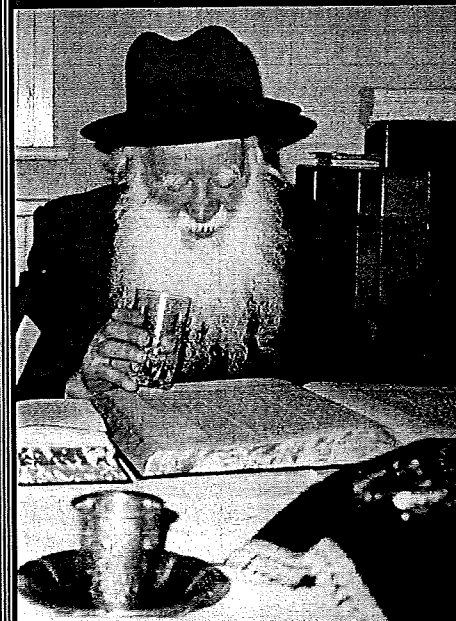
One of the things the Rosh Yeshivah taught the bochorim to work on from his own little list of *kabbalos* was *kevishas haratzon* — conquering desire. Rabbi Nussbaum says that the Rosh Yeshivah advised training oneself to resist something he wants to do, several times a day. "Every time you get ice cream, you need to eat it?" he thundered. "Every time someone walks into the beis hamedrash, you need to turn around and see who it is? If you get a letter, train yourself to hold back from opening it immediately. Rabbeinu Yonah says a person should train himself to have control, to resist, and that is how he will be able to resist the desire to do *aveiros*."

**No Interruptions** Traveling with the Rosh Yeshivah was an experience his *talmidim* never forgot. His saintly presence and his constant learning, the simplicity of physical arrangements, and his own never-ending spiritual demands impressed anyone who came in contact with him. A tiny Austrian town called Semmering, surrounded by dense pine forests and famous for its alpine skiing, merited the Rosh Yeshivah's presence for a few weeks each summer.

Rabbi Nussbaum recalls one late night



Before sitting down to his simple meal, the Rosh Yeshivah would state his intention of doing the mitzvah of guarding one's health. And the sefer he studied while he ate contained a piece of paper with his personal resolutions



in Semmering. "It was after 1 a.m., when we heard the sound of learning from the Rosh Yeshivah's room. We were supposed to help take care of the Rosh Yeshivah's health, so hesitantly, we knocked on the door to say it was late. He replied, 'But I can't go to bed. I didn't learn *mussar* yet today.' And he started again, his voice loud and strong as if he was in the beis medrash."

Rav Segal lived in the world of Hashem's mitzvos, not in the world bound by time constraints. Mr. Herzog recalls being in Austria one summer with the Rosh Yeshivah, and traveling with him to Zurich on the way back to see *talmidim* there. "We davened Minchah, and then the Rosh Yeshivah gave brachos to many *talmidim* who visited with their families. Then someone told him that Rav Moshe Soloveitchik was making an engagement that night, his daughter to the son of the Chevroner Rosh Yeshivah. The Rosh Yeshivah, who was very close to Rav Soloveitchik, said, '*Mir darf gein zugn mazel tov* — we have to go tell him mazel tov.' I told him that we'd miss the flight, but the Rosh Yeshivah was insistent. He felt that if he was in town on the day of the simchah, he couldn't not go and wish mazel tov. By the time we left there, it was almost six o' clock. We knew it was too late to make the flight, so we said, 'Rosh Yeshivah, maybe we should stay overnight and go back to Manchester tomorrow?'

"But he said, '*Nein, morgen iz Elul*, I have to be back in yeshivah.' So we headed to the airport, much too late.

"I ran ahead to the gate and I said, 'Please, the rabbi is coming, can you hold the flight?'

"They turned to me and said, 'The flight's been delayed an hour and a half.'

"The Rosh Yeshivah was walking slowly into the airport. I had a big grin as I updated him. He gave me a look: 'Why would the Eibeshter give me a missed flight if I'm busy with mitzvos?' Then he realized that we still had an hour left. 'We haven't learned mussar yet today.'