

Reb Shimon Segal z"l

A Link to the Past, A View to the Future Upon His Second Yahrzeit, 4 Tammuz



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The Torah uses two terms to define the obligations on the night of *Pesach*. One is the obligation of “*haggadah*” and the other is the obligation of “*sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim*.” The word *haggadah* is best translated as testimony, and its defining characteristic is its reliability and its veracity. We certainly need to do that on the night of *Pesach*, for that is the cornerstone of our *emunah*. But what is the point of the “*sippur*”? The word “*sippur*” is usually translated as storytelling. The *Gemara* adds the meaning of *sefiras devorim*, which means an itemization of going through the details of an event. Why is “testimony” alone not enough? Why do we need a story as well?

The answer, perhaps, is that besides trusting and believing the events at *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, one also needs to see himself as having personally gone out of *Mitzrayim*. This facet of the obligation is not fulfilled through mere testimony, for testimony is best when it’s terse and factual and sticks to the salient points. *Sippur*, on the other hand, is at its best when it’s personal, detailed, and colored with the hues of life. Thus, there is a need to have both “*haggadah*” and “*sippur*” on *Pesach* night.

This is true of *mesirus haTorah* as well. There are people who give over the “facts” – *she’al avicha veyageidcha*. And then there are people who give over the flavor of that *mesorah*, the *zekeinecha veyomru loch*. Reb Shimon Segal z”l was one of those.

My father z”l was a survivor of the Kovno Ghetto, as was Reb Shimon Segal. My father was much older (probably a good twenty years or more), but they were very close friends. Since Reb Shimon was never *zocheh* to build a family, he was a frequent guest at our house. He was “Uncle Shimon” to us. We would sit spellbound – as almost anyone did – when he would tell

us stories about the people he met, both *gedolim* and ordinary folks. Most of the stories were not things that he had heard, but rather things he had lived.

He was involved in an incredible array of historical events in his life – Kovno, Slabodka, the ghetto, Dachau, a *yeshiva* in Paris that he helped found, the Kaminetzer Kollel, the Kaminetzer Yeshiva, Yeshiva Toras Emes, maintaining *kedushas Yerushalayim* and Eretz Yisroel, issues in Israeli

through it. It was remarkable.

Most unique were his descriptions of interactions with *gedolim*. They were not “*mofsim*” stories, nor stories that told of great superhuman feats that a big person performed. Rather, they conveyed the sense of the person himself. Thus, one could feel the regal *nichbadus* of the *Devar Avrohom*, the other worldliness of Rav Mottel Pogromansky, Rav Aharon Kotler’s fire, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky’s wisdom,

His ability to grasp people and culture as organically and as intuitively as he did explains a fascinating paradox about him. When the European *yeshiva* people came to America, it took them quite a long time to “get it.” The people, the mores, the mindset, all of it was alien to the classical European “*yeshiva man*.” Yet, Reb Shimon hit the ground running. He “got” it. Yet, all of us remember him for being the quintessential European, breathing the life of an “*amoliger*” (old-timer). The answer is that he was both. He resonated emotionally with so many worlds and so many people, and whatever was the setting at the moment was the person who he was. He interacted and gave to each as that person needed.

It was these qualities that also allowed him to shepherd the preeminent Torah institution that is Yeshiva Toras Emes and to navigate the American educational terrain and lead an institution that brings the *amolige gefeel* to the contemporary American *bochur* and produces true *bnei Torah*.

It was also something that allowed him to bridge the gap between American laymen who may have had no exposure to Torah in their youth and the *yeshiva* world. A bridge that generated and continues to generate great benefit to the Torah world in America and Eretz Yisroel and to *kedushas Eretz Yisroel*. A bridge that Reb Shimon utilized for the greater good of the *klal* and not just for his *mosdos*. As both Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky and Rav Moshe Feinstein said, all *bnei Torah* owe Reb Shimon a *yeyasher kochacha*.

Especially in our age, Reb Shimon’s loss is felt most keenly. His ability to transmit the true *gadlus ha’adam* and strengths that forged great people is something that has almost ceased to exist. May the *talmidim* of the *yeshiva* and the people he affected be an eternal blessing to his memory.



REB SHIMON WITH RAV LEVI KRUPENIA ZT”L AND RAV ELAZAR MENACHEM MAN SHACH ZT”L.

politics and much more.

He was a *ben bayis* by almost all of the *gedolim* of the post-war generation. They found him to be most understanding, extraordinarily insightful, and with the ability to get things done. He had an incredible eye for detail, and on the other hand, an ability to weave cloth out of many seemingly individual strands. One walked away from listening to him with an understanding of an event or a person, while simultaneously with a feeling of having lived

the Steipler Gaon’s unwavering principles, Rav Shach’s leadership, and so many more.

When people came to seek advice, his advice was sage, because he was able to sense what the person was going through emotionally. When giving advice, he would give it through the prism of the *gedolim* he had interacted with. Many big people looked forward to speaking with him, because he could establish an emotional rapport with almost anyone, no matter how different of a culture he was from.