



To Be With Hashem

... וַיִּדָּם אַהֲרֹן.

... and Aharon was silent (10:3).

It was on the joyous day of Rosh Chodesh Nissan, when the *Mishkan* was erected, Aharon became the *Kohen Gadol*, and the *Shechinah* descended upon the *Mishkan*, that tragedy struck. Aharon's two oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, died when they attempted to offer incense which Hashem had not commanded.

Aharon remained silent as he accepted the Divine decree with perfect faith.

Aharon's reaction to adversity remains a symbol for all time of the inner strength that *emunah* can create, a strength that can make a very difficult situation manageable and even a catalyst for spiritual growth.

The following is from a *hesped* delivered by Rabbi Yaakov Bender in memory of Menachem Mendel Puloshik, who was a talmid at Mesivta Chaim Shlomo and Beis Medrash Heichal Dovid:

Many of you never knew Menachem Mendel Puloshik, ל"ז, who passed away around one month ago on the day before Erev Rosh Hashanah. He was an extraordinary talmid in our mesivta and beis medrash, and most recently was learning in Eretz Yisrael. There is so much that we can learn from Menachem Mendel about how to deal with the problems that come our way in life.

I first met Menachem Mendel in Camp Naarim, when he was a delightful boy of twelve. I learned at that time that he suffered from serious liver problems. When he was graduating eighth grade, I asked his parents to send him to our mesivta, and they consented. We watched him grow in so many ways.

We are a generation that has it very good in a material sense. *Baruch Hashem*, no one in our community is starving. We don't know the hunger that earlier generations knew. Even families that struggle to make ends meet can eat spaghetti for supper. At the other end of the spectrum are those who are so affluent and so particular with their food that they buy "take-out" if the delicious meal served in their yeshivah dining room does not suit them.

In America, “What’s for supper?” is heard in homes everywhere. Sometimes, the mother’s response is greeted with a groan. How awful! A mother’s efforts in the kitchen should always be greeted with appreciation. It is truly unfortunate that this is not always the case.

Menachem Mendel, because of his health issues, was on a very difficult diet. The dishes that he cooked for himself in his dormitory room actually had an unpleasant odor; sometimes, *bachurim* felt forced to leave the room because of it.^[1]

His *hasmadah* (diligent study) was incredible. Whenever he came to my office to speak with me, he brought along a *sefer*. The moment I had to interrupt our conversation, he opened the *sefer* and began to learn.

He did not want his special diet to cause him to lose time from his learning. In Eretz Yisrael, he would go to the *shuk* once a week, on Friday afternoon, to purchase *sixty pounds* of the fruits and vegetables that, doctors said, he should eat every day in the hope that this would prolong his life.

One night in camp, when Menachem Mendel was around fourteen, I walked into the dining room during supper and saw that it was “Kosher-Country Night” — hot dogs, fries, and pickles. And there was Menachem Mendel, with his plate of fruit and vegetables.

I asked him, “Would you like to eat what the other boys are eating?”

“Sure,” he replied.

“Do you feel bad that you can’t eat it?” I asked.

“Not at all,” he responded, and I knew that he meant it.

“Why not?” I countered.

“Because I’ve worked on myself,” said this wise boy. He said those words matter-of-factly, without a trace of pride.

After he passed away, his parents wrote me three letters and enclosed some notes that Menachem Mendel had written to himself that he would carry in his pocket. One note read:

When eating, just concentrate on the food, except for the taste. Speak before eating, and thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for every aspect of the food. Concentrate on the food, that I need to eat this food, and ignore the taste. This helps in two ways. It helps in avodas Hashem and it helps digestion.

One would think that a person with such difficulties would be preoccupied with himself. But Menachem Mendel’s *chesed* was truly amazing.

Once, a friend who was involved with a *shidduch* came to discuss it with him. Menachem Mendel listened, pondered, and advised. That night, he wrote his friend a three-page letter, analyzing how to view the issues from a Torah perspective.

^[1] Rabbi Bender added that one boy volunteered to be Menachem Mendel’s roommate despite the odor that the foods emitted. The two boys remained close friends until Menachem Mendel’s passing.

He wrote with such love and respect for his rebbeim and the Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Shlomo Avigdor Altusky. He described the Rosh Yeshivah as someone who is at the same time a man of nobility and someone to whom one can get close. At age twenty-six, he still yearned to return to hear the Rosh Yeshivah's *shiurim*.

With all his difficulties — and he had many — he was a happy person who had but one interest: to do Hashem's will.

His father writes:

If there was a common denominator in all his years, it was that he never complained.

But I must tell you that he was not born this way. His father reminded me that when I first got to know him, Menachem Mendel did complain. He would complain when other children his age would run and play and he could not.

But he worked on himself to become the angelic individual that we all remember, that wonderful, special *eved Hashem*. He was that individual who beamed with joy when the doctors found a way to make him somewhat more comfortable.

He was a desired *chavrusa* (study partner), and for good reason. He learned diligently, without interruption, until the last two years of his life when illness sapped him of his strength and he was confined to bed most of the time.

He was a true *baal mussar*. His *hakaras hatov* to anyone who helped him was extraordinary. There is a certain individual who helped him shop for food when he was in camp. His gratitude towards him was incredible.

During the *shivah* in Eretz Yisrael, a *Toldos Aharon* chassid came to the Polishuks to say that he will never forget Menachem Mendel. Why? "Two years ago, I walked by a beis midrash and heard someone singing the words of the Gemara with a *lebedikeit* (liveliness) and *geshmak* (pleasure) like I never heard before. I said to myself, 'I have to see who this is.' I walked into the shul and found it dark and empty, except for one light in a corner where a lone *bachur* sat learning. It was Menachem Mendel. I stood watching him, but he did not know that I was there, so involved was he in his learning."

A note which he wrote to himself reads:

Stop judging. Stop analyzing. Have bitachon (trust in Hashem). If you have bitachon, you'll enjoy life. If not, you'll become confused. Confusion will make you sick, angry, poor, and you will not fully enjoy life.

Just sit back and have bitachon in Hashem. Be confident, sit back and enjoy life. Hashem made it amazing; stop messing around with life. Don't confuse it, enjoy it ... Be with Hashem.