

Dedication, Rabbi Dr. Sheldon Epstein, z”l

By: ASHER BENZION BUCHMAN



Sheldon (Sender) Epstein
 רב אלכסנדר בן ר' יהושע פאליק, ז"ל

Rav Yochanan Ben Zakkai (*Avos* 2:9) asked his most outstanding *talmidim*, איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם, “What is the straight path that a man should cling to [as a way of life]?” They each gave a different answer. Rav Yochanan Ben Zakkai preferred the response of Rebbe Eliezer—לב טוב, “a good heart”—explaining that it incorporated all the other perspectives. It is this quality that defined my friend, the multifaceted Rabbi Dr. Sender Epstein. The warmth and kindness of his personality was the engine that

Rabbi Asher Benzion Buchman, a *musmach* of RIETS, is the author of *Encountering the Creator: Divine Providence and Prayer in the Works of Rambam* (Targum, 2004) and *Rambam and Redemption* (Targum, 2005). He is the editor-in-chief of *Hakirah*.

drove him. From that heart came his עין טובה that caused him to see good in everyone. His respect for the *gedolim* of all camps, on the one hand, was complemented by the good he saw in each individual. He was never judgmental. Despite his superior intellect, he treated every person with the highest respect.

A חבר טוב—he was everyone’s friend, knew everyone’s problems and was their confidant. Was there anyone who had so many friends from so many circles—spanning all of Orthodoxy and far beyond? He was the prototype of a שכן טוב—“a good neighbor.” When I moved into this neighborhood, I had the same experience as hundreds of others—the first person to notice me, direct me, and make me feel comfortable was my soon-to-be friend, Sender. After he settled someone into the neighborhood, he kept an eye on them afterwards. Whenever there was a problem, his refrain was, “Can I help?” Many of these new neighbors became his *talmidim* and the connection he valued the most was one of Torah. His constant greeting was, “Take a look at this *Rashi*.” Our friendship was a bond of Torah.

This attribute of שכן טוב, however, went far beyond our Flatbush community—extending into his work for *Klal Yisrael*. He was the assistant director of AARTS, which provided hundreds of millions of dollars for yeshivos. His work with *Hakirah* and his own brilliant articles brought fresh insights and new ways of thinking to thousands about certain Torah issues. Together with Rabbi Zucker, he helped develop new programs for yeshivah boys, to find a way to get advanced secular education and to find *parnassah*. All this while giving 110% to the needs of his family (may Hashem give them strength) and while being a tenured professor of Applied Math in Seton Hall Business School, where he made a *kiddush Hashem* daily.

His work for the *tzibbur* was driven by his concern and vision for *Klal Yisrael*. To understand Rav Sender, one must know that he wore Rabbenu Tam’s *tefillin*—something one would not guess from the modest and unpretentious way he carried himself. These *tefillin* were a *yerushah* from his grandfather who was a *gadol b’Torah*—a *masmid* with a twinkle in his eye—who understood the world and human nature. The דמות דיוקנו of the best of Europe is what Sender strove to build in the new world.

The Rishonim struggle to understand the Gemara’s cryptic comments on why we blow shofar מיושב, “while sitting,” and then during the עמידה, the *Shemoneh Esrei*. The Gemara (*TB Rosh Ha-Shanah* 16) comments only לעררב את השטן, “to confuse the Satan.” In our last session of our *chavurah*, our small group that studied together and battled together on Shabbos afternoon—which will never be the same without Sender, the integrating

force behind it—we explained Rambam's *shittab* on this matter. לערבב את השטן is the preparatory process that Rambam defines in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (3:4) as עורו ישנים משנתכם, "Awake, sleepers, from your slumber." כאיל תערג על אפיקי מים כן נפשי תערג אליך אלהים (*Tehillim* 42:2). There is in the human spirit a natural longing for G-d and the sound of the shofar taps into a primal force within living beings. Once these feelings are aroused, the *tzibbur* can then jointly express their feelings of *tefillah* and *tze'akab*—אבל בציבור--כל זמן שעושין תשובה וצועקין בלב שלם הן נענין (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:6)—with the wordless cries of the shofar added to the מלכויות זכרונות of the עמידה. Sender was the *baal tokei'a* of his community, a leader in bringing the Torah way of life to his own generation. May his life and his Torah be an inspiration to the generation that follows.

יהי זכרו ברוך

