

להיו

זכרונות ונחמות



**Horav Hagaon Hachosid Hatomim
R' Michael Akiva Gershon Wagner**

A selection of memories shared during the *shiva*.

ב"ה

הזמן קצר והמלאכה מרובה. We gathered here a small selection of messages that were shared publicly during the week of the *shiva* of Rabbi Akiva Wagner *a"h*, as a glimpse into the persona that he was.

These are presented here with only the most minor editing, and - due to lack of time and manpower - the authors have not been contacted to look over their writing. We are reprinting them here relying on the fact that these were all shared publicly; nevertheless we chose to delete names and identifying features.

We hope that the stories being shared will inspire his *talmidim*, *yedidim* and *krovim* to fulfill the injunction of והחי יתן לבו אל לבו and take on new and heightened inspiration in their personal עבודת ה', ensuring that it be translated into מעשה בפועל practical.

At the same time, this is merely a preview of the organized ספר זכרון that the family hopes to publish בעז"ה. (In addition to many more ספרים of *farbrengens*, *shiurim* and *chidushim* that will be prepared and published בעז"ה in due time.)

All the memories and stories shared bring נחמה and התעוררות to the family, so please keep them coming!

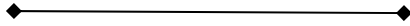
ויה"ר שבמהרה נזכו לקיום "והקיצו ורננו שוכני עפר" והוא בתוכם בביאת גואל צדק במה"ב אמן.

The Wagner and Labkowski Families.



Baruch Dayan Haemes. Heartbreaking.
What a legend of a *chosid* we lost.
Rabbi Akiva lost 24,000 *talmidim*.
Today 24,000 *talmidim* lost Rabbi Akiva.
Oy Hashem

N.G.



I woke up this morning and turned on my phone, looking for something to take my mind off the pain. I did something I never like doing: I started scrolling through Facebook. Post after post was of my father's former students, some much older than me and some younger, writing about how my father treated them like a son.



I don't think Facebook has enough server space to cover the impact my father had on this world. As one student put it, "During the Omer, Rabbi Akiva lost 24,000 students; today 24,000 students lost Rabbi Akiva."

But as everyone writes about my father's greatness as a leader and role model, I want to share two things that bring out how he was as a father.

In the last few weeks of my father's life, he was mostly immobile and struggled to get out of bed or even talk. He could not focus on anything and having a conversation of more than two sentences was difficult. Just under two weeks before his passing, all my siblings flew in to New York to spend two days with him. At the end of the two days, we were all sitting around when my sister pointed out that over those few days, my father had deliberately gone through every one of his kids and asked them to do things to care for him. He made sure we all had an opportunity to feel good that we were able to help and connect to our father. Despite him not being able to focus on almost anything else, the only thing on his mind was that all his children felt good.

Another example of this was on Sunday, the day before my father passed away. We all came in for his birthday to spend some time with him. This was when he had already stopped eating for a few days and was not in the mood for anything. We were all sitting around depressed, trying to figure out what we could do for his birthday, when he calls over one of my brothers and says, "Nu, what are we doing tonight?" He then said to make some food and he will try and have something from it to celebrate the birthday! We were all shocked since he clearly was not in the mood for anything. This was something he did only for us, having us all crowd in his room and him putting the effort to smile for all of us must have been tough, but all he thought about in the little energy he had left. It was about my mother and us, to make sure we could feel good about making him a birthday party.

TATTY WE MISS YOU!!! PLEASE DEMAND FROM HASHEM TO BRING AN END TO ALL THE SUFFERING IN THIS WORLD AND TO BRING MOSHIACH NOW!!

Y.W.

About a year and a half ago, I found myself sitting on my father's bed, chatting with him, my mother and my sister. As the conversation drew on, he mentioned that he was tired and needed to rest. He invited us to stay and continue talking while he rested.

I offered to leave and turn off the lights to help him rest, but he insisted it was fine for us to stay. He explained that he didn't need the lights off in order to sleep.



I suggested that he should at least get under the covers and make himself comfortable, but that's when he shared something I had never known. Over the years, I had often noticed that he slept over the blankets, but I never processed that he had consciously decided to do that. Now, though, he pointed out that he never slept under a blanket. Intrigued, I asked him why.

He explained that getting up on time in the morning is always a struggle; after all, sleep is *geshmak!*

Shortly after his marriage, he said, he decided that since sleeping under a blanket is far more cozy and comfortable, sleeping without one would remove one step in the process of getting out of bed, and it would be that much easier for him to overcome his inclination and get up!

My father excelled in so many areas that it is easy to see him as a superhuman, as

someone who was removed from the physical world, who is beyond the limitations we mere mortals share.

This story, though, brings out the reality: He was just like us! He liked to sleep, he enjoyed *olam hazeh* just like we all do, but he was driven by an intense desire to be a *chossid*, to be an *oiveid*, to work on himself and struggle against his nature in order to serve Hashem. The levels he attained were acquired through intense effort, but natural work which we are all equally *shayach* to. It was his *rotzon* and *cheishek* for *kedushah* which drew him apart, and that is a path that we all can, and must, follow.

To me, this conversation encapsulates my father's essence. He had incredible inborn talents, but was never satisfied with the heights those capabilities could bring him to. Life is not about achievements, he showed us, but about connecting to the Eibershter through your current efforts and struggles, every moment, to refine yourself and do that which goes against your nature *davka*.

M.W.

Boruch Dayan HaEmet!

Yesterday, I was wishing a classmate of mine a Happy birthday, with blessings and prayers for his full recovery. Today, I am asking of the rest of my class to ask forgiveness from him on my behalf, at his funeral.

In general, I was blessed with really good classmates. However, with Akiva (Wagner), it was an undeserved honor to have been his classmate, and to have had him ever refer to me as a friend.

Yes, he was a scholar, a *chosid*, a Rosh Yeshivah in Toronto, and yes, he comes from an esteemed Rabbinic family of scholars from Toronto —and none of this is to be trifled with. But what can I say? All of that to me, about Akiva, is but one big, “Nu, Nu...”

What was it about Akiva that was so different, that had me literally shy in reverence, struggling to even reach out to him in his time of suffering, with the, “Who am I to reach out to him...” paralysis?

And mind you, it is far easier to feel this way about someone older than you, or even someone younger than you, than about a classmate who shared a study-bench with you! And yet, the one and only classmate of whom I felt this way, was Akiva. Why?

Today, that I won't see nor hear from him, until Moshiach comes, I force myself to answer this question: Akiva, what is it about you that humbled me so, in both, my hormonal years as an adolescent, and in my present years weighed down by life's relentless beatings?

The Answer: You know those incidents which bleed over to all-encompassing discussions about a lack of sensitivity, “*mentschlichkeit*”, love, humility, and spirituality, among people?

Well, were you to have met Akiva, you would neither ask nor say those things, ever again!

Akiva was the true definition of a humble, caring, loving, and *mentsch*, who orthodoxy is meant to produce.

His existence was not just the answer to, but the removal of such disdain altogether!

To have known Akiva, is to have known the Torah's expectation of being a living sanctification of G-d, His Torah, and His people.

Akiva, you stood alone in your stature, and yet, you invited all us into your realm of beauty and bliss.

Please forgive me for any sort of slight or disrespect I may have ever shown you.

Your humbled classmate, who joins the many of family, students and friends, who mourn your passing deeply

A.L.



As a student in the Yeshiva in Toronto, I would often - as I still do - come across interesting situations and encounters in the course of my outreach work on Fridays.

Calling home was a real pain, as there were only three payphones for over 100 students, and the calling cards weren't cheap either. Sharing these interesting tidbits of my daily life with my family back home became rather difficult. Connecting with my family back home was especially important to me at the time, as my father had passed only a short few years prior, and family connection was very important to me.

One of my friends alerted me to the fact that just two blocks away from the Yeshiva was a public library where it was fairly simple to get a card, and that would guarantee me a solid hour of free internet each day. This seemed like a good idea; after all, I could transcribe my experiences, and send them to all of my family members at once!



I knew that the library was “off limits” according to the Yeshiva rules, but I figured I'd take the chance... Everything was going according to plan, until a community member happened to be going through the library. Seeing some Yeshiva students there, he reported us to Rabbi Wagner - the dean.

Shortly after the lunch break was over, I was called into Rabbi Wagner's office. “Where were you by lunch break?” he asked. “I went to the store,” I replied. “Ok,” Rabbi Wagner said, “you can go”.

While I had indeed gone to the store, I conveniently forgot to mention that I also went to the library.

A few days later, the same story repeated itself, with the same result.

The third time however, I was caught by a member of the Yeshiva staff. There was no way out of my trouble this time.

Sure enough I got called into the office, but this time I admitted that I had gone to the library to use the internet.

“Why do you need to use the internet?” Rabbi Wagner asked. I explained to him that I felt the need to share the interesting experiences I had with my family, and found it to be very hard and costly to do so over the phone. “In that case,” Rabbi Wagner replied, “you will let me know anytime you need to use the internet for an email, and you will use the computer in my office!”

And so it was. I no longer violated the Yeshiva rules, my family got the emails, and I improved my overall behavior as a result of the newly found respect shown to me by Rabbi Wagner.

(As a side note: Those original emails evolved, and have turned into these weekly Torah thoughts which have been sent out consistently for the last 11 years.)

Z.M.L.

The sun had long risen as I slowly made my way to the Yeshiva. I knew I was late, yet again. Rabbi Wagner, our Rosh Yeshiva, had given me numerous warnings about my tardiness, but I just couldn't seem to get out of bed on time. Despite my shortcomings in punctuality, Rabbi Wagner had recognized a different strength in me early on: my ability to handle responsibility.

Even though I was only in shiur Alef Zal, Rabbi Wagner had given me the task of teaching two younger boys during the afternoons. I took this responsibility seriously, but I was still struggling with my own issues in the mornings.

That day, Rabbi Wagner called me into his office, and I knew what was coming. As I entered, I braced myself for the admonishment I was about to receive. He didn't waste any time, immediately expressing his disappointment in my lack of punctuality and my general lack of commitment to my studies.

I tried to defend myself with childish excuses, but Rabbi Wagner was unrelenting. We went back and forth, with me feeling like I was trapped in a corner, unable to escape the consequences of my actions.

But then, something unexpected happened. Rabbi Wagner abruptly changed the topic to the two boys I was teaching in the afternoons. It was as if he flipped a switch, transforming from a disciplinarian dealing with a wayward student to a mentor addressing a responsible young adult.

That sudden shift in tone had an immediate impact on me. I felt as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders, and I instantly switched from the immature kid I was just a moment ago to a mature person taking responsibility for his actions.

We discussed the progress of the two boys and their specific needs, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of pride in the trust Rabbi Wagner had placed in me. It was during these conversations that I was blessed to have hours of fun banter with him.

Looking back, Rabbi Wagner's ability to navigate the delicate balance between discipline and encouragement, as well as his refusal to get caught up in the annoyance of dealing with young students, was nothing short of remarkable. His ability to educate in the most effective way left a lasting impression on me, shaping my growth as a person and my approach to responsibility.

Rabbi Wagner's impact on my life will forever be etched in my heart, and I am grateful for the time I spent under his guidance.

M.E.



These last 2 years, we brought the students who joined us for the Pegisha to visit him. It was hard for him to talk, but he wanted to share some inspiration. He talked about how important it is to view the world through a deeper spiritual lens and not just with the eyes of coarse materiality. He talked about how much strength he derived from the many Mitzvahs and added blessings people were doing in his honor. In fact, one student told us afterwards: I didn't catch much of what he said. But just the intensity with which he said the blessing before drinking water is an inspiration that I will always remember.

D.W.



I merited to spend 3 years at his Yeshiva in Toronto; the best years of my life. I was only 14 years old when I arrived and left at 17. There's not a single teacher in my life that shaped who I am as much as he did.

There will be lots written about him, but here's something short and personal:

Before Mushka and I moved to M., we were offered another opportunity to pursue. We were torn.

I reached out to Rabbi Wagner for direction. I was out of his Yeshiva for 8 years at that point.

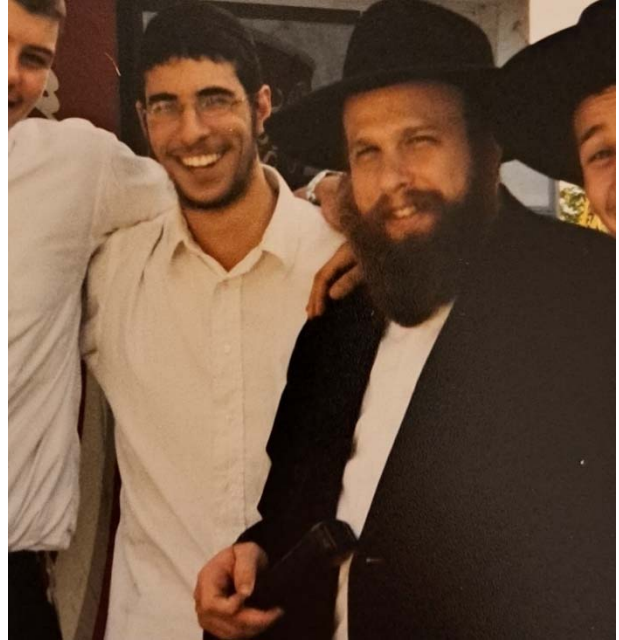
He got right to it and with his special touch guided me in making the correct decision.

I saw him for the last time in November at the Kinus convention. I joined a group of friends who went to visit him. He was his usual self. While weak and bedridden, he was a ball of life and spirit, oozing faith. Inspiring us with stories and anecdotes, he made himself available to us despite his obvious pain and discomfort.

He will be dearly, dearly missed.

Y.L.

The loss of someone we hold dear is always tragic and challenging, but this particular loss has affected me in ways I did not expect. The intensity of emotions, the profound sadness, and the void it has left behind—these are sentiments shared by all my Yeshiva classmates. As anyone who attends our Shul knows, I cherished Rabbi Wagner deeply. Yet, I am first now realizing just how much he truly meant to me, and I have been trying to figure out where that is coming from. I would like to take this opportunity to share some of my thoughts and reflections on my beloved teacher over the past week.



Sans ego: There must have been a malfunction when G-d designed Rabbi Wagner because the Manufacturer seemed to forget to install the ego. As a result, Rabbi Wagner was not busy with himself but with everyone around him. Each one of his hundreds (perhaps thousands) of students felt valued and cherished. It made no difference if the student was at the top of the class academically or at the very bottom. To him, each was a diamond. It was as simple as that.

I will never forget the *farbrengen* (informal Chassidic gathering and conversation) when he called out a particular student who may have been struggling somewhat with his self-image. Over and over again, Rabbi Wagner, passionately repeated to him the verse in which the prophet Samuel said to King Saul: **“You may be small in your eyes, but you are in fact the head of tribes.”**

Maybe that is why I miss him so much. How could I not. He was a teacher who believed in his students. Even when they doubted themselves.

A genius with childlike faith: Rabbi Wagner was a world class scholar. His lectures on all subjects, his Talmudic analysis and innovations were off the charts. When you encountered him, his insatiable love for learning was palpable. Every spare moment he had, he dedicated to the pursuit of Torah knowledge.

His mastery of every facet of Torah was legendary, and each lecture was a brilliant journey. Even if one was not able to fully follow one of his fast paced, highly complex Talmud lectures, you still gained from the experience. You walked away with his passion for the study and with a yearning to know more.

While his lectures were highly complex, his faith was simple. He didn't get entangled in trivial debates. When he spoke about G-d, life, and life's purpose, there was a profound simplicity in his words. "G-dliness should be obvious, and the world should be puzzling"—this passage from Chassidic philosophy was among his frequently cited quotes. When he spoke, you could sense his yearning, his passionate quest for truth. To him, the presence of G-d was self-evident, the

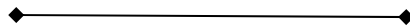
meaningfulness of life was unquestionable, and each of us possessed a divine purpose. **“I want the king,”** was another Midrashic line he often quoted. He yearned for truth, the "king", ultimate truth, and nothing but the truth. I struggle to explain it, but I believe his brilliance birthed his simplicity.

Perhaps that is why I miss him so profoundly. How could I not? Within each of us, there exists a place that resonates with the purity of faith, and the unwavering focus on what truly matters. Each time he spoke, that innermost part of us came alive. In fact, I wouldn't mind a dose of that right now...

Rabbi Wagner dedicated his life to serving others. He seized every chance to teach and inspire those in his presence. I consider myself truly fortunate to have been touched by his guidance and affection. It is my sincere hope that through these few words, I conveyed a small fraction of the impact he had on me.

Above all, I believe he would want me to remind you that while **“You may be small in your eyes, you are in fact the head of tribes.”**

B.P.



It's difficult to know where to begin. There is a good chance you've read many a tribute to Rabbi Wagner over the past few days, and I'm far from one of his prized students that has something special or insightful to add. Yet, I feel compelled to express something, to speak to what an immense *chassid*, teacher, and inspiration he was.

Meeting fellow students of Rabbi Wagner, you sense that they feel their class is the special one. It is them who has that extra special connection with Rabbi Wagner. Of course, I know that it is actually my class that has that close relationship with Rabbi Wagner.

Both individually and as classes, hundreds of *talmidim* kept in touch with Rabbi Wagner, even decades after learning in Toronto; maintaining the kind of relationship one has with a close friend you may not see for years at a time, but when you do reconnect, it is with the same warmth and closeness as the last day you were together.

Of all the Yeshivas I've been to and heard of, from all the *mashpiim*, *roshei yeshivos*, *menahelim*, and *magidei shiurim*, no one had that effect on so many students, year after year, class after class. It's not just the number of students but the types of students who were impacted. Whether or not you understood his *shiurim*, joined his *farbrengens*, or perhaps neither. Whether or not you went on *shlichus*, became a *chassidishe*



baal esek, or maybe aren't even that *frum* anymore, Rabbi Wagner is seemingly loved and admired by virtually all his alumni.

There are many educators with greater charisma, who are more polished, better trained, and of naturally more cheerful disposition. If you had to make a list of personality traits that would make a good *mashpia*, *rosh yeshiva*, or *menahel*, Rabbi Wagner would not be an obvious candidate. Sure, the man could learn and give a *shiur* with the best of them, he would *farbreneg* for hours on end week in, week out. But his moods were unpredictable, and his reactions to missing seder or other infractions were inconsistent. He didn't lower the standards of his *shiurim* to cater to *bochurim* not on the academic level of his classes. There was never any compromise to *seder hayeshivah* or the curriculum to appease anyone. I don't think any educational conferences were knocking on his door to have him share his educational "methods" or prowess. He'd laugh and scoff at the notion.

So why was he so universally loved and appreciated by every type of *bochur*?

He was so loved not because of any "method" he used or persona he portrayed. He was loved because he was genuine. A real *chassid* with true *ahavas Yisroel*. A teacher whose great demands of his *bachurim* were made in earnest with full confidence in their ability to live up to them.



When Rabbi Wagner *farbreneged* exclaiming "*Emes Havayah l'olam!*" or "*Elokus b'pshitus, olamos b'hischadshus,*" he wasn't espousing lofty concepts out of reach of regular teenage *bachurim*. He was sharing a very real world-view that was his reality, in full confidence we were right there with him.

The world got to see this especially clearly with every email update he sent after getting the dreaded *machlah*. He didn't express *emunah* in Hashem that things would be ok despite the dire predictions from the doctors. He expressed full *bitachon* that his reality was the Eibishter's reality, which is always good. Any negative prognosis just did not exist in his world. Even the biggest cynic couldn't help but be pulled into his *bitachon*.

Since Rosh Chodesh Kislev, Rabbi Wagner gave our class a weekly *shiur* on a *sicha*. At times, he was suffering tremendous pain, yet he went ahead with the *shiur* and delivered it with the same passion and excitement, his

voice hitting those unforgettable high-pitched notes that if I closed my eyes I'd think I was in 3055 Bathurst St hearing a *shiur* from a healthy teacher.

It's not that he gave the *shiurim* despite his ill health, it was the *shiurim* that gave him strength. That wasn't just something he said, although he did say it numerous times, it was visibly true to anyone watching. Just like before his diagnosis, learning Torah simply gave him strength.



When Rabbi Wagner *farbrenge*d about keeping *seder*, or about the importance of *limud haTorah*, we weren't hearing a speaker discuss concepts, we were hearing someone share their real life. It's impossible not to be affected by that. There is no way you can experience that kind of genuine passion for learning, *darchei hachassidus*, and the Rebbe and not develop at least a glimmer of that passion yourself.

When Rabbi Wagner told us the importance of keeping *seder* to the minute, we knew how important it was; because even if he was saying that at 3:00 am, we knew he'd be giving a complex *shiur* in *nigleh* a few hours later, on time. That would be after he had shown up for *chassidus* and *davened* with the Yeshiva *minyana*.

With Rabbi Wagner you knew his demands were never because he wanted the Yeshiva to look a certain way, or to be able to boast he had the best *bochurim*. Rabbi Wagner could have restricted acceptance into his Yeshiva only to *bochurim* who were exceptional learners. Yet I can attest that it did not take all that much to pass his entrance *farher*, and there was little to no gatekeeping. His rules and rejoinders were thus seen in the sincere context they were made, and not for ulterior motives like exerting power.

When I didn't keep *seder* or learn the way I should, when I had my head down during his *shiurim*, his admonishments (when they came) were never demeaning or belittling. He didn't tear me down, as is the wont of too many a *mashgiach*, but tried to lift me up. To my memory, I never received punishments for missing *seder*. I was not told off for falling asleep in his *shiur*. Other *magidei shiurim* would prefer you just not show up at the *shiur* altogether if you might fall asleep, but not Rabbi Wagner. His ego wasn't part of the equation. He gave his *shiur*, whether there was a *farbrenge*n the day before and only five *bochurim* showed up, or if there was a full house paying rapt attention.

While he didn't punish me, he also never allowed me to skip *seder*, or imply it was ok that I slept in the *shiur*. Rabbi Wagner would never compromise on *seder* or learning. If he had officially allowed me to skip his *shiurim*, I would have thought less of myself. I thought he expected me to understand his *shiurim*, which led me to believe it was possible, and at least sometimes put in the effort.

Once, when he called me into his office for a sort of “State of the Union” chat about how I was doing in Yeshivah, rather than harp on my *shemiras hasedarim* or how well I was learning, topics which would not have left me looking all that great, he asked me “*Vi davent zich?*” Now, I have no clue if he had realized I was putting in more effort at the time into *davening* slower and more intently, or if he was just asking about something unquantifiable that wasn’t objectively not good. Either way, I flashed a big goofy smile, and left his office floating on cloud-nine.



On another occasion, when he was writing a recommendation letter to send to a Yeshivah I was applying to for the next year, he had me sit down next to him as he wrote glowingly about me. I laughed and made some sort of comment about *midvar sheker tirchak*. He gave me his trademark side eye stare, and then showed me line by line how everything was true and he was not lying. For instance, rather than write that I had *kabalos ol* and kept *seider*, he wrote I was a “*baal mashmaas*” and adhered to the *hanhala’s* rules. Once again, I left his room feeling terrific about myself when he had every reason and opportunity to tear me down.

Rabbi Wagner’s ability to uplift continued after we left Yeshivah. After one fundraising campaign, he sent a personal email to thank me for contributing, meaning he likely sent out hundreds of such emails in the span of a couple of days.

When I was in Toronto, I didn’t realize it was out of the norm for Yeshiva alumni from years earlier to come to the Yeshiva for a Shabbos to *farbreng* with their *rosh yeshiva*. When I went a few years later with a couple of my classmates, I’m sure the *bochurim* in Toronto thought the same.

There are Yeshivos that are synonymous with their *rosh yeshiva* or *mashpia*, but none quite like Toronto is with Rabbi Wagner. In virtually no other Yeshivah would you find someone who was the Rosh Yeshivah, *mashpiah*, *mashgiach*, *menahel*, and sometimes *menahel gashmi*, dorm counselor, and more who, was able to not only keep the Yeshivah afloat, but it flourished for almost three decades.

It likely wasn’t always the best option to have him at the helm of certain areas, yet if there was a void that needed to be filled, he filled it. No position was below his dignity, no job too much for his already packed schedule. The yeshiva needed someone to fundraise? So he fundraised.

Rabbi Wagner seemed to possess infinite patience. He was a genius. He knew *nigleh* and *chassidus* on the deepest levels, and loved nothing more than to sit and learn. Yet young teenage *bochurim* would sit and talk with him, and talk, and talk. Our childish issues were not trivial to him.

In the summer following my stint in Toronto, I was a counselor in CGI Montreal, where Rabbi Wagner was running his summer Yeshiva as well. After the first month, the head staff decided it would be best to move me to a different position. I was devastated. To me, this was a huge catastrophe! Though I was no longer his student, and he had no obligation to care for me, he spent a significant amount of time late at night walking around the camp grounds hearing me out with a compassionate ear, never once belittling or dismissing my concerns. He likely knew full well that the head staff were perfectly justified in their decision, after all, he taught me for two years. I don't recall what he said, but I do remember leaving the conversation feeling calm and at peace, and sure enough, the next day the issues were resolved and the summer took a turn for the better.

Rabbi Wagner leaves an unfathomable void. It is impossible to quantify the impact he made on so many lives. While I didn't have the closest relationship with him, he was always there. The emails, the *farbrengens*, he was ever present in my life as he was for countless others. I miss him.

L.B.



My heart is broken.

Today the world feels a bit darker. The loss of such a great soul. A remarkable *chossid*, whose perspective on life was truly otherworldly. He was a giant in every sense of the word, and his ability to teach, *farbreng*, and guide Yeshiva students through their lives was unmatched. His impact on those around him, including *baale batim*, was immeasurable.

His love and care knew no bounds. He was truly dedicated to every student that walked through the Yeshiva doors.

He would tell endless stories of the Rebbes and Chassidim, with classic and truly novel interpretations.

His dedication to learning and teaching Torah was beyond impressive. Not just the hours he would spend learning and preparing, but the dedication to talk to *bochurim* even in middle of the night and learn with them.

I had the great merit to spend time learning Yeshiva in Toronto. To be one of the *bochurim* you would pull aside at night to learn with, to sit through hours of *farbrengens* and many private conversations.

You taught me to see the world from a deeper perspective, not a shallow, limited and mundane one. That learning Chassidus was something that would change me and who I am. That learning Torah was more than just an intellectual pursuit, a G-dly experience. And so much more...

Words cannot fully capture the greatness of this Chossid, but we honor his memory and legacy by doing what he would have wanted us to do: Study more Torah. Pray with more passion and fervor. Commit to truly being a Chassid. Do an extra Mitzvah in his memory.

R' Akiva we are waiting for the Nichamtanu!!!

D.L.



Everyone is talking about Rabbi Akiva Wagner's greatness, his love and care, his devotion and dedication, his brilliance and depth, his staunch and unwavering commitment – and for good reason.

"...[I am] overwhelmed by sadness for your personal loss and the world's loss."

"It sounds like he was an extremely loved *rosh yeshiva* and impacted a lot of lives..."

Monday evening, I got a call from someone in Australia who was on his 'alumni' list for the weekly email *farbrengen*. The thing is, this person is someone many years Rabbi Wagner's senior, and himself a big *talmid chochom* and *mashpia*. But everyone gained from Rabbi Wagner; his sphere of influence was mind-bogglingly wide.

A wise man pointed out to me on Tuesday, that since Reb Shlomo Chaim there is not one *rosh yeshiva* or *mashpia* about whom it

can be said that he deeply affected, impacted, and gave lifelong direction and perspective to thousands of *bochurim* and *yungeleit* as Rabbi Wagner did. I would dare add, that unlike Reb Shlomo Chaim, Rabbi Wagner was a teacher of both *nigleh* and *chassidus*. Both a *rosh yeshiva* and a *mashpia*.

Everyone is unique. Rabbi Akiva Wagner was uniquely one-of-a-kind. *Yochid Um'Yuchad*.

His brilliance in *nigleh* can only be appreciated by those of his caliber. I do not have the knowledge nor the vernacular to describe his level of genius. But, which Toronto Zal alumnus can forget his intense concentration and focus, pacing up and down the *zal* with his trademark furrowed brow minutes before delivering a shiur? A sure sign of someone with true *yegi'ah*, in the words of this week's Rashi, "*Shetih'yu ameilim b'Torah*."

His knowledge of Chassidus, his familiarity with the Rebbe's *sichos* and *ma'amarim* was legendary. As any talmid will remember Seder Niggunim on Shabbos afternoon when there would not be a bochur ready with a *ma'amar ba'al peh*, Rabbi Wagner would quietly go to the shelf, pull out a volume of Melukat, open to a timely *ma'amar*, scan the first paragraph, close the *sefer*, and proceed to repeat it by heart, word-for-word. Yes, he would hold his hand in the place, and as he once told me, this was in case he would forget and need to look inside, yet, as we can all remember and attest, he rarely needed to look inside.

His care for his *bochurim*? Where do we even begin...



Personally bringing the food to the *bochurim* on Shabbos, holding the hot *cholent* pot with the edges of his *kapota* – this is an image seared into the memories of any of us who spent a summer in his Yeshiva.

All these traits are not necessarily unique in as of themselves. But when they all come together in one person; a person with tremendous talents, a *gadol shebigdolim*, who initiated and maintained a personal connection with each and every *katan shebiktanim*, the image of a *chad bedoro* (one in a generation) emerges.

Tuesday morning, Lag Ba'omer, I sat down to learn a *ma'amar* (Lehavin Inyan Rashbi 5745). In it the Rebbe explains the uniqueness of Rashbi over all the Tannaim, in that Rashbi lived a fusion of *nigleh* and *chassidus*. With *nigleh* being Torah's discussion of the world and *chassidus* being Torah's discussion of Hashem, Rashbi's special *avodah* was to draw awareness of Hashem into Torah's discussion of the world, infusing the technical legalities of Torah's laws with the holiness of Hashem's Presence.

As I was learning these words, a chill spread over me. This sounded familiar. **I did not learn by Rashbi, but I did learn by Rabbi Akiva.**

If you would walk into *zal* in the middle of a *shiur*, close your ears and just look at Rabbi Wagner, you would not know if he was in middle of explaining a *perek* of Tanya or a *shtikel* of a Rashba. His body language while explaining a Tosfos exuded the same Divine fervor as while learning a Maamar. The same holy passion and sanctity expressed in his davening and *farbrenging*, screaming “EMES, HAVAYAH, LE’OLAM!! KINDERLACH!”, was expressed in his shiurim on Chiddushei Rabbeinu Dovid. (Yes, my Shiur Alef year with him was Pesachim.)

A holistic fusion of *nigleh* and *chassidus*, a living example of what we are taught in the books, that learning Torah is learning Hashem's Torah and must be approached with the necessary humility.

Indeed, I believe that this – humility – was Rabbi Wagner's core ingredient. This was what enabled him to learn *nigleh* like *chassidus*, to treat a child like an adult, a struggling bochur with love and *mentchlichkeit*. Rabbi Wagner was a true *eved Hashem*, and like the prototypical *eved* in *chassidus*, his *bittul* was the primary factor shaping all his interactions, both towards Hashem, as well as towards other people.

S.W.





As we approach Shabbos, I wanted to share something about Reb Akiva Wagner A"H who was *niftar* earlier this week.

Since Project Likutei Sichos began I have been in touch with many Rosh Yeshivas, Rabonim and Mashpiim, asking them to be involved with the Project. Specifically, to give *iyun shiurim*.

Reb Akiva got sick right as the project began, and I felt very guilty even asking him. But he wanted to give *shiurim* in the Rebbe's Torah and was the easiest person to approach. He always had time, he felt it was important and went out of his way to give the *shiurim*. From listening to his *shiurim*, which were **geonische shiurim**, that took a long time to prepare, you would never know that he was sick, and that his *shiurim* were given from his bed, sometimes in the hospital. Many times, his *shiurim* had to be woven together because they were broken into so many pieces. The reason for this was because he was too sick to deliver all at once and had to take breaks to give it. I once met him in New York and he told me that he spent hours learning a specific *sicha* and really wanted to give a *shiur* on it, but he felt that he couldn't give a *shiur* since he didn't understand it properly. If you listen to his *shiurim* (which there are many on the website), you will hear how a *chossid* asks a question on a *sicha*, how a *chossid* gives an answer and the true *bittul* that should come along while learning a *sicha*.

It was a *zechus* to know someone who as a Rosh Yeshiva, felt the *achrayus* to give *shiurim* and to **koch** in the Rebbe's Torah and try to truly understand it.

May we be *zoche* to learn from Reb Akiva how to learn a *sicha*, how to be *mekushar* to the Rebbe מפשך ובכל לבבך ובכל נפשך, and to do this with נפש.

Y.W.

This week was rough. Lag B' Omer at the park was fun, but it was overshadowed with the untimely passing of my dear Rosh Yeshiva from Toronto, Rabbi Akiva Wagner, at just 55.

It's hard to explain who this giant was.

I've had quite a few amazing teachers and mentors, and learned lots from all of them. But he was unique.

When I shared the news with my father, his immediate reaction was, "I'm sorry. Rabbi Wagner really had a big part in shaping who you are today." He was right.

I called a Rov (higher pay grade rabbi than me) to ask if I should tear *kriah* (the rending of garments) which is normally done when one loses a parent or a "Rabbi who taught you the majority of your wisdom."

That's who he was to me. Without him, I don't know who I would be today. Definitely not the person you know. It's unusual for me to go a couple weeks without quoting him.

He was an extremely gifted person. Most people are gifted in one or two ways. He was gifted in many, many ways.

He was a genius in Talmud, Halacha and Chassidus. He was charismatic and inspiring. He was fun, and often spoke of his time as a camp counselor in Simcha Monica. Apparently, he was very popular with nonreligious public-school kids too. He had superhuman energy to somehow wake up at six in the morning and toggle back and forth between study, prayers, taking carpool, fundraising, giving deep, hours-long head dizzying Talmud lectures during the day, and then making himself available to any student who wanted his advice in the evening (indeed those years of 16-19 are extremely formative years and lots of guys have questions). He would spend hours typing his lectures (I have binders of his typed lectures on my bookshelves) and then around 12 AM, he would come out to “*farbrengr*”.



As gifted as he was as a Talmud scholar and teacher (definitely world class), his gift as a *chossid* to *farbrengr* (literally, get together) was parallel to none.

He was a showman of the highest caliber (or in Jewish terms, a *maggid*). He knew how to hold a crowd, be entertaining enough for everyone to stay, and keep the *farbrengr* full of substance for hours and hours.

We would sing, listen to him teach Torah in a more “casual” setting, usually starting off with something from the Torah portion or holiday, and then digress into stories of Chassidim (his mind was a steel trap for details and he was a master storyteller- not *bubbe maasos*, factual and accurate stories of what happened in previous generations), conversations about the purpose of life, and he would always make his *farbrengrs* relevant to the struggles of Chabad teenagers, pushing our inner boundaries to make ourselves better people.

Sometimes they would turn into a public conversation between him and one yeshiva boy about his personal struggles. I deeply wish this gift on the teenagers of today.

He had this unique ability to put things in perspective and drill them into us, again and again, and again until they become one with us. Most of what I learned from him was at his *farbrengrs*.

Here are some themes that stick out to me:

G-dliness should be normal, and materialism should be novel- To the extent that we internalize the message of Torah, our priorities will change. The significance we attribute to the “world” wanes, and the fact that we can’t see G-d starts to bother us. The next step is that we can actually appreciate G-d more, and care less about “what the world says”.

Extreme obedience and extreme intellectual challenging- Most people are inclined to either live a life of submission (*kabolas ol*) or internalizing the message of Torah, which happens through critical thinking and challenging what you’re taught. He drilled in us that it’s possible to excel in both extremes, and it’s possible to master the art of this contradiction.

Seder starts at 7:30, not 7:31- The yeshiva day (seder) starts at 7:30 AM and finishes at 9:30 PM. It's not all "classtime". At least half of the yeshiva day is studying with study partners (*chavrusa*), so what's the big deal if you come one minute late. He drilled into us that we are soldiers, and that you can learn lots of Torah at all hours of the day, but if you want to be a soldier of the Rebbe, that train leaves at 7:30.

It's okay to learn a *maamor chassidus* over and over again- Every year on various special days, you knew what he was going to talk about. He lived with certain *maamorim* and went back to them, year after year, never getting bored. The obsessive review is what brands the teachings into your soul and body.

If I'm communicating effectively, you're wanting to join a *farbrengen* of his. Talmud classes are enough to make someone knowledgeable and even refined. But without *farbrengens*, a scholar could just be a lifeless bookshelf.

Which was another one of his unique qualities. I've studied under many scholars. Deeply devoted, brilliant, and caring people. People who really are special. However, I've never met such a "regular" special person. Rabbi Wagner didn't carry the persona of the giant he was. He was approachable, relatable and fun. I wouldn't even call him humble because he didn't "lower himself" to humility. He just carried himself like a regular guy, who happened to be a super genius, super heart, and super energy. He didn't command the reverence that was probably due to him. I've never seen any yeshiva personnel as beloved and close to their students as Rabbi Wagner was to ALL of his students.



He was my mentor (*mashpia*), as well as the mentor of many of the *bochurim* in yeshiva. I told him my heart. Everything I was struggling with. I wouldn't make a big decision without consulting him. Looking back, many of those "big decisions" were trivial and I don't know why he didn't throw me out of his office for wasting his time, but that's how much he cared. When

it was cold outside (and Toronto gets cold) he would shuttle us back and forth to the dorm in his little Plymouth minivan.

I had always wanted to become a Shliach in the Toronto metro area so I could continue growing and learning from him.

However, sometime after graduating from Toronto and moving on to the next stages of life, I found myself losing touch with him. He started writing "email farbrengens" to keep in touch with us, and I skimmed through most of them, but I was losing the fiery inspiration I used to get. He was a very extreme person on many levels, all in holiness. It was perfect for 18 year olds, but I felt like I "grew out of his style".

I had a guilty conscience about it. I knew that he shaped me as a person. I loved him like a father, but somehow found different mentors for the next stages of my life.

I would always say hello when I saw him in New York but didn't have much to talk about. I rarely responded to emails and never called him. Maybe I was embarrassed by the trivial things I wasted his time with in my youth.

Around a year ago, as his disease was progressing, I made a point to go visit him.

It had been a long time since I sat with him one on one. He immediately picked up from our last conversation which was about 16 years prior.

The one thing I regret not telling him in that sitting, is how much he meant to me. I hope that my distance from him didn't cause him pain, because he did mean the world to me and I owe everything good about me today, to him. I've broken down crying multiple times writing this email, something I don't know if I've ever done before.

Even in the past few years, I daydreamed of sending my boys to Yeshiva in Toronto. I wanted to give him the chance to do for them what he did for me (hopefully better than me). I wanted him to teach them and mold them into *chassidim* of the Rebbe.

This is the saddest thing for me. That my children's Rosh Yeshiva will not be Rabbi Akiva Wagner. The best I can do for them is to revisit, reflect and renew the lessons he taught me.

And then my children will have him through me.

R.A.



The following is based on an Alumni email Rabbi Wagner sent during his sickness, and a subsequent email conversation I had with the Rosh Yeshiva dealing with some of the *chiddushim* he postulated to explain this Gemara.

The topic he wrote then is one that pops out with relevance now:

The Gemara, Brachos 5b recounts:

“Rabbi Elazar became ill (I don’t know if people were taking their vaccination that year...), and Rabbi Yochanan came to visit him. When he arrived, he saw that the dwelling in which Rabbi Elazar was residing was dark (due to his poverty). So Rabbi Yochanan rolled up his sleeves, and the beauty of his skin illuminated the entire room (because Rabbi Yochanan possessed unnatural beauty, that was able to light up the darkness).

In the light, Rabbi Yochanan noticed that Rabbi Elazar was crying. “Why are you crying”, Rabbi Yochanan questioned. “If the reason is because you did not manage to learn as much Torah as you wished, that does not warrant your tears, because we know that *אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט ובלבד שיכוון את לו לשמים* (to Hashem it is equally precious one who accomplishes less but does it for the sake of Heaven). And if the reason is because you don’t earn a proper livelihood and you never were wealthy, that also doesn’t justify your crying. You, after all, are immersed in learning Torah, and not everyone can expect to have “two tables” (both Torah learning and wealth, so the fact that you are able to learn Torah should justify your being deprived of wealth).

“And perhaps”, Rabbi Yochanan reasoned further, “you are crying because you did not merit to have children. But that is still not grounds to cry. Look at me, I suffered worse”. (Rabbi Yochanan had had ten sons, and they all passed away in his lifetime). And Rabbi Yochanan removed from his pocket the bone of his tenth deceased son (which he would carry around with him), saying to Rabbi Elazar “see, here are the bones of my tenth son. None survived”.

So Rabbi Elazar clarified: “I was crying for none of those reasons. I was crying, rather, upon noticing your extraordinary beauty (that is capable of lighting up a dark room), and realizing that it is destined, in the end, to be swallowed up by the earth!” So, Rabbi Yochanan said to him: “That, indeed, is cause to cry. And they both cried together.

After a while, Rabbi Yochanan asked him “Are you enjoying your suffering?” To which Rabbi Elazar replied “I would be happy to forego both them and the reward that they would bring me”. “In that case”, Rabbi Yochanan said to him, “give me your hand”. And Rabbi Yochanan took Rabbi Elazar’s hand, and cured him.”

On this Gemara, the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Wagner Z”L asked:





“(This) sounds very puzzling! Let’s think about this: To cry about not having managed to learn more, which is something that every Jew is supposed to yearn for and strive for, is not justifiable, because – ultimately – the Eibishter accepts the “*maamit*”, the one who does less, equally. The fact that אחד הממעיעט surely doesn’t change the fact that there is an advantage to learning more – as there is in doing more of any good thing. But, still, he is not justified to feel bad about missing out on that.

To cry about his poverty is also not acceptable, because many people

don’t merit to enjoy both wealth and Torah, so he doesn’t have the right to wish for both! I think it is self-understood that Rabbi Elazar wouldn’t have wanted wealth to be able to take a cruise in Cancun and go scuba diving in Eilat *ch”v*. He would have wanted money to be able to serve Hashem better, whether in communal affairs or in providing adequately for his family. And yet his lacking it should not bother him because he has Torah. Remember – the Torah he had was already determined to (possibly) be merely הממעיעט, something to be satisfied with, and yet that should suffice to compensate him for his lack of material possessions, since other people have to also make do with “just one table”!

And even if he was saddened by not having children, which meant he was unable to fulfill the first mitzvah of the Torah, and all of the hardship that accompanies the absence of this blessing, it was still indefensible. We can’t say that it’s not the norm for one to have children, or that it’s not a reasonable expectation. On the contrary, Chazal tell us (on the Possuk ואם אין מתה אנכי) that lack of children is compared to death. And yet – it’s still not something he may cry about. If R’ Yochanan lost all of his children *r”l*, then Rabbi Elazar can’t cry over his not having merited any!

Okay, so perhaps R’ Yochanan didn’t see any circumstance as an excuse to cry. Maybe he wanted to find the rationale to accept any and every *gzeirah* with equanimity. But, then, when R’ Elazar reveals that he’s crying over R’ Yochanan’s beauty facing – ultimately – burial, R’ Yochanan accepts that as a valid reason, and even joined him! One second, what happened?

Aren't all of the objections even more applicable here?! If you can't cry about the lack of money, because some other people in your circumstance don't merit it, and you can't cry about lack of children, because (although most people merit it) R' Yochanan suffered worse, then how can you cry over the body's ultimate burial, which is something that is the lot and destiny of every single person?! Every single person finds his end in the earth – עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב – and to expect otherwise should surely be considered unreasonable. Why was this explanation more acceptable to Rabbi Yochanan than any of the others?!"

Typical of the Rosh Yeshiva, though when he wrote the email he too was dealing with his own illness, he focused his resolution to this *sugya* with explaining that R. Yochanan was explaining that indeed a person shouldn't cry for himself. As long as R. Eliezer was crying for himself his tears were illegitimate, when he was crying for R. Yochanan his tears became legitimate.

While this explanation already exemplifies the life of the Rosh Yeshiva, always giving all his *yechida* and *etzem* to lead and be an example for his *talmidim*, and provides a powerful lesson of *והחי יתן אל לבו*, of what we can learn from the life of רבאי גברא רבא, perhaps there are additional perspectives to explain this *sugya*.

From the straightforward meaning of the *sugya* it seems that R. Yochanan himself agreed that while crying over illness, poverty, troubles, and even not studying enough Torah is trivial, it's truly worth crying over the loss of his own beauty—to the point that in *peshat* it seems that R. Yochanan to wept together with R. Eliezer about the loss of his own beauty!

What can be so powerful about R. Yochanan's beauty that it's worth weeping about?!

Perhaps some light can be shed on this *sugya* by way of an anecdote I read *bh"p* this week. (There are some variations in *girsas* of the story.):

"The elder *chossid*, Reb Sa'adya Lieberow, known as the Mashpia of Antwerp, was visiting 770 for his first time.

Reb Sa'adya was on his way from 770 to his hosts. Emerging from 770, the Rebbe noticed Reb Sa'adya walking on Eastern Parkway towards Brooklyn Avenue and stood to watch. As the Rebbe watched the nearby *bochurim* began watching too.



Reb Sa'adya's steps were purposeful, focused and he walked with his eyes cast down to the ground, so as to avoid seeing any inappropriate sights.

The Rebbe said to the *bochurim*, "*Kukt zich tzu vi a chassidisher yid geit* (look, and take note how a *chassidisher yid* walks)."

(Alternatively, it's told that when the Rebbe came into 770 he told R. Leibel Groner that he "just saw a *chossid*.")

It's told as well that once when Reb Sa'adya was davening *shachris* in the halls of 770, and the Rebbe came out for *mincha*, the Rebbe stopped and watched him *daven*.

It's understood from the *gemara* that R. Yochanan's beauty was not personal (*perati*), but rather a general (*klali*), beauty that was relevant to *klal Yisroel*. More than the relevance of his physical beauty, is the spiritual relevance of his beauty and the effect of his presence on *klal Yisroel*.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia 84a recounts:

"R. Yochanan said: I alone remain of the beautiful people of Yerushalayim...R. Yochanan would go and sit by the entrance to the *mikva*. He said to himself: When Jewish women come up from their immersion for the sake of a *mitzva*, they should encounter me first, so that they have beautiful children like me, and sons learned in Torah like me."

It's told about the Mashpia of Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch, Reb Michael der Alter, that when he got old, the

hanhala deliberated whether to keep paying him. The Rashab told them "it's worth paying him the few rubles just so that the *talmidim* can see him walk to the *zal*."

R. Yochanan's beauty was one that indicated on the beauty of



Yerushalayim—*yira shaleim*. Seeing him was so powerful that it brought to a state that even the offspring of those who saw him developed a *koch* in Torah learning and a somewhat similar beautiful *yira shalem* that he embodied.

For such a beautiful figure whose mere presence "light up a room," (Brachos 5b), and who so deeply positively affected all those who just saw him, is surely reason to cry when such a figure is swallowed by the ground.

(Additionally, R. Yochanan's Torah was in a way of light, as he was the *chassima* of Talmud Yerushalmi compared to the Torah of Bavli which is (Sanhedrin 24a) במחשכים הושיבני, or compared to a *בית אפל* a dark house in relation. Losing the last remaining beauty of the luminescent *derech* of Yerushalayim to go into the *derech* of Bavel is surely a reason to cry— notwithstanding the advantage of Talmud Bavli.)

All the *talmidim* of Rabbi Wagner Z"l can attest like R. Tarfon did (Kiddushin 66b) "Akiva, anyone who separates from you, it is as though he has separated from life itself." To be in his presence was to be in a presence of light.

While perhaps not every student can repeat the intricate details of *shiur*—with all its *chakiros* and *diyyukim*—a combination of Brisk *higayon*, *pilpul* and heavily nursing from the Rebbe's Torah, they all declare that being in his presence was to bask in a light of the rarest kind.

Whether it was watching him *daven* with intensity, *deveikus* and *bren* for hours on end, or Koch in each page of *gemara* with the relish of מים קרים על מים קרים each time he studied it afresh, or watching him *farbreng* with his familiar "CD's" each time with the same vigor, was not only to be exposed to his light, but be taken by it and effected by it so deeply that your life was changed by it.

His oft repeated phrase "אלקות בפשיטות ועולמות בהתחדשות" or "אמת הוי' לעולם," were not merely clichés to be quoted, but the guiding principle of his life.

To him, there was no reality outside the *emes* of a *vort chassidus*, or a saying of the Rebbe. He couldn't agree to a perspective that our world has somehow changed with all its modernity since the opening of Tomchei Temimim, and he with all his indefatigable strength impart to his *talmidim*, day and night, day in and day out that they too can and must live in such a manner.

He sought to build a Yeshiva that was not only a continuation of Tomchei Temimim of Lubavitch in some detached fashion, but Tomchei Temimim itself, and he succeeded!

He sought to develop *bochurim* who *koched* in Torah and he succeeded! Evident in the many students of his that became *magidei shiurim* or *mashpi'im* and *marbitzei Torah* in their own right—to the point that perhaps it can be said of him, like the original R. Akiva, that כולוהו אליבא דר' עקיבא.

He changed the rhythm of the relationship of Roshei Yeshivos and their *talmidim* that his example was admired, emulated and sought to be replicated by so many Lubavitch Yeshivas the world over.

But perhaps most of all he sought to create *chassidim* of the Rebbe whose whole identity is *chassidus*. To do this is not enough all the books, and *farbrengens* but to see someone who embodies the ethos of *chassidus* as the consummate דוגמא חיה, living example in every fiber of being.

To no longer be able to see such a beautiful person is surely reason to cry!

D.M.



The story was that V. L. and myself tried to compose a song.

At some point we got stuck, and in an attempt to save us some embarrassment, Rabbi Wagner spent his own time fixing up the song, to be עולה על שלחן מלכים.

We were able to come away feeling good that we made a our own *niggun*.

This was typical Reb Akiva, he went above and beyond to use any opportunity to build up the young *bachurim* in the Yeshiva. All in the same time as he was trying to run a *Yeshivas kayitz begashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*.

Y.D.C.

Shiva was a week filled with stories. In person, on WhatsApp, online. People told us about Akiva's heart: the students he let in without tuition, the loving care he constantly showered on his students, the way each one felt appreciated and loved. The student who was "busted" sneaking away to the library to use the free internet to email his mother - who instead of being punished was given open access to Akiva's office for whenever he would need to send an email again.

People told us about Akiva's head: The two volumes of his Torah insights currently in publication, the thousands of pages and hours of recordings still to be compiled, his near genius ability to assimilate information into novel expositions. The time he made up to test a potential student at 1:30 in the morning after a lively *farbrengen*. Though he seemed completely exhausted and out of it, he still astounded the brilliant student by rattling off - by heart and with his eyes closed, sprawled on the couch - page after page of intricate and involved Talmudic teachings.

They told us about his humility: how he would often himself cook for the Yeshiva when needed. How if a student fell asleep during a late *farbrengen* on a couch in his home, he'd wake up to find a pillow and blanket lovingly placed. How he exemplified to his students respect and dedication to his teachers and mentors. And they told us about his dedication: every day, praying deliberately and word-by-word in passionate devotion, complete faith and care even through unimaginable pain in the past few years.

What they didn't know as much about was his personal life: his incredible attention to each of his children, the deep impact he made on each of his siblings, his devotion to our parents through thick and thin.

There are so many lessons to learn and apply. Greater care in prayers and blessings, greater devotion to Torah study, deeper passion for the spiritual life of a *chassid*.

D.W.





R' Akiva holds a very special place in my heart. When he was in California and spent time in S. Monica, I was a little boy that looked up to him in so many ways.

When I was 14, I went to Mesivta in Toronto. I was there in the 1st years of the yeshiva. I came the year it moved to Lawrence ('97, '98).

My family has a very unique story; 9 children with 3 that are special needs.

One day when I was in Yeshiva I was having a very hard time dealing with understanding why we were put through this unique situation. So by lunch I walked in to R' Akiva's office and began crying uncontrollable tears. He sat there and let me cry, till I had the

words to say why I was there. I told him "Why me? Why was I put in to this situation that was far from any revealed good? " He looked at me with the most caring eyes and expression on his face (I still see it in my head) and asked me to come back the next day by lunch. We chit chatted till I got myself back in order and I left his office.

The next day by lunch I came in to his office. He started telling me a *moshel* of glass cups; one that is super refined and expensive and one that is mixed with other elements and cheaper, and explained how if you put boiling water in them, the refined one will smash in to pieces and the other could hold it. The *nimshal* he said is with נשמות. There are very "hot" *neshmos* that come to this world and get put in to bodies that are very pure and what happens is they can't handle the "heat". That he said is what your siblings are, super special נשמות in very refined bodies. So really they are beyond special people and very holy souls.

He then looked at me and said words that changed my life forever. He said the question is not "Why me?" The question is WHY ME? What did I or who am I to have been picked to have not 1 not 2 but 3 siblings like this.

I can't tell you what that did for me. It turned my whole outlook in life.

Yes, years later, I re-thanked him for it (he claimed he didn't remember that conversation).

I have passed that message to many who have come to me that are in a similar situation.

I can not thank him enough for it.

I figured it's time to pass this on to his family.

Will forever miss him and forever owe him for that.

Y.M.



On Monday, I was overcome by grief, sadness, and tears as I heard that my teacher and mentor, Rabbi Akiva Wagner OB" M, tragically passed away at age 55.

It would not be a stretch to say he was one of the most influential people in my life, as my teacher and mentor when I was 18,19 and beyond.

He was an immense scholar, talented orator, and writer; he could teach and inspire for hours and hours without running out of what to say. On top of that, he was witty and entertaining. But all of this is not why he had such an impact on me (and so many others).

I have known many talented individuals throughout my life; as I think about why his passing so shook me, a few things came to mind, and I want to share a few of them.

#1 and most important. To quote President Roosevelt: People only care about what you know after they see that you care.

His dedication to his students was unparalleled; he would show up in yeshivah at all hours of the day. But he wasn't just dedicated to the student body as a whole; he had a way of making each individual feel special. Even at a large *farbrengen's* (Google the word), he would call out to particular students with love. He would interact not just with the group but with the individual.

Why? Because he not only cared, he believed in everyone. He often pushed me to do things I didn't feel I could, but if someone believes in you, you can do more than you think.

It's an important lesson we can learn in how we treat our children and others around us. Show them you love them unconditionally and that you care and believe in them, and they will exceed your expectations.

#2 His ability to understand his audience. Despite living such a dedicated life to Torah and Mitzvot, he was not aloof and out of touch with his students' struggles. Anyone can teach an outstanding lesson; he had the ability to show how the lesson would apply to one's personal struggle.

I often think about this when I give a sermon, or class, or write an email. I work to figure out how the idea would be relevant not only to me but to the audience as well.

#3 His excellent mood and humor. It cannot be understated: people want to be around happy people.

He was a serious person, but he had a great sense of humor and an infectious smile, which would surface so often. Even when he was battling his illness and describing his struggles, he always made sure there was a positive message.

#4 His continuous connection with his alumni. Despite his many responsibilities, he would dedicate time to write up inspirational messages (otherwise known as a *farbrengen*) in an email that he would send out sometimes weekly to his alumni.

Whenever I saw his email in my inbox, I was excited. His emails were like getting a recharge and a boost, a reminder of what is really important and meaningful. Often before holidays, I would keep checking to see if he had sent something new.

I am sorely going to miss those precious inspiring messages.

I want to end with one of his main messages and themes.

G-d is the only truth worth investing in. What we think is real and where we invest most of our time is just an elaborate Ponzi scheme. It's all smoke and mirrors. It's a bad investment.

The world's physicality hides this truth; we see the world with physical eyes. Money, honor, and pleasure are our highest calling. After we pass on, we will recognize the truth that only G-d is real, and everything in this world is being created to serve Him.

It's not that the world is bad. Yes, we need to eat and drink, but we sometimes get lost investing our time in the vanities of the world, forgetting why we are here and what we can and should accomplish. Forgetting that G-d brings the physical world into existence every moment only so we can do something positive. Yet so often, we remember the world and forget about G-d. We remember ourselves, and we forget about our creator.

This is a difficult message to present; it's hard to penetrate our minds and hearts with this truth because, let's face it, we love ourselves, and we love this world. We love our chocolate cake, vacations, and cars (and whatever else one may be into).

Yet through humor and a deep understanding of his audience, he never failed to inspire. More than that, you could see he wasn't preaching; he lived this truth.

I do not doubt that he has a special place on high, and I have no doubt he is begging Hashem for what he asked for all his life. That Moshiach should come already and bring the day when G-d's glory will be revealed, and Hashem will wipe away all of our tears.

May that day come very soon.

P.A.





Some personal thoughts and feelings over the past few days.

Rabbi Akiva Wagner had a deep and strong impact in my life from the three years learning in Toronto Yeshiva and the years after. All of the major decisions that I needed to make from dating to *shlichus* and even college, Rabbi Wagner spent time and gently guided me through the decision-making process, either over the phone or via email, always encouraging and listening with love and care.

Since his passing many memories have been surfacing. Below are some of my thoughts and memories.

My first interaction was when I came to yeshivas Toronto for my *farher*. I was learning in a small Mesivta and during the *farher* in the office, Rabbi Wagner asked, "What do you enjoy doing?" It seems that my learning didn't impress him. I said that I enjoy sports and exercise. He followed up with asking which type of exercise and I responded, push ups. He asked "How many can you do?" I said, "Around 20," and with a smirk on his face and deep penetrating eyes he said go ahead and do them. I got off the chair and did 20 push ups. At that point he said "Good!" and my *farher* was over.

At one point during my years in Yeshiva, I was going through some personal struggles. I didn't have the courage to open up or speak to anyone in Yeshiva about what I was going through. After a few days, Rabbi Wagner called me into his office. He opened up a Rambam and began reading and translating a few paragraphs. After which he spoke with me for a few minutes. I walked out of the office feeling a sense of support and tremendous love. I remember thinking to myself, this giant in Torah with so many responsibilities, took the time to be sensitive and notice what I was going through. Furthermore, he took action to help me at that pivotal moment.

During my 2nd year in Yeshiva, there were some concerns about security and the potential danger to the US and beyond. As a naive *bochur*, I came to Rabbi Wagner sharing my concerns. Instead of brushing them off as nonsense (which they were), he took time to acknowledge my worries and engaged me in a talk about *אמונת ה'* and Bitachon.

There are so many impressionable memories of Rabbi Wagner, some examples are the way he would *daven*, his deep penetrating eyes and his *shiurim*.

One of the items I brought with me to Yeshiva was a pair of roller blades. I enjoyed roller blading and would do so every so often. At one point my roller blades were confiscated by Rabbi Wagner and he left them in his van. *Es chatasi ani maskir hayom*. Knowing that the van is never locked, during lunch time I went and took them out of his van and brought them to the dorm. The following day when I came into Yeshiva, Rabbi Wagner didn't say a word to me, just gave me a deep stare, and continued his warm relationship as if nothing took place. In hindsight, the lesson in *chinuch* that he taught was very powerful.

I recall going on *talucha* one year and walking to a *shul* with Rabbi Wagner. He spoke in Torah, *chassidus* and stories through the walk. He walked like any other *chossid* doing the will of the Rebbe. His humility was visible for all to witness.

A few years after leaving Yeshivas Toronto, I came back for a Purim *farbrengen* with a few friends. The *farbrengens* were always uplifting and motivating, hearing the stories and messages that he shared and lived with was inspiring. As I walked in Rabbi Wagner called me over to sit next to him and showered me with a tremendous amount of love and care. This love was expressed in many ways.

When it came to dating, I wasn't sure if I was ready or if it was the right time. I turned to Rabbi Wagner, who helped me through the process spending many hours guiding me. I was lucky to have Rabbi Wagner *farbreng* by my *ufruf* in 770 and then just over a year later to make the Brachos at my oldest son's bris.

After marriage, Rabbi Wagner was a pillar of support and always available to help and guide me. Some examples, are the decision with taking up a rabbinic position in a local shul. Rabbi Wagner encouraged me to remain where I was, saying how one never knows what would become of this opportunity; and indeed I went from teaching to principal as well as going to college in order to obtain my Master's degree. Rabbi Wagner was always available to guide and help me make my decision, putting aside his own responsibilities from Yeshiva and family to hear me and help with navigating these decisions.

Rabbi Akiva Wagner, our dear Rosh Yeshiva, was a giant of a man, with enormous heart and love for his students. He imbued in us *talmidim* love for Hashem, Torah, *davening*, each other and a love for the Rebbe. He was a beacon of light. May his נשמה have an *aliya*. Will miss him dearly.

M.W.



It's been incredible to see the outpouring of love and memories from the "talmidei Rabbi Akiva", who spent years in Toronto since the opening of the Yeshiva. I thought you might all want to know the impact your father had on those that never set foot in Toronto.

My connection to your father began one Purim in Copenhagen, Denmark. I was learning in London at the time, and we had gone to help the Shluchim for Purim. As we were sitting down to *farbreng* after the *seudah*, and inevitably everyone looks around nervously for someone to say something, one of the Talmidim HaShluchim pulled out his phone and began to read off page after page of the most *geshmakke* Purim *farbrenegen* one could imagine. Written in a beautiful, flowing English, but packed with *toichen* and *varemkait*. I was shocked. Where was he pulling this out from? He looked at me with a smile. "I learned in Toronto. Rabbi Wagner sends out emails periodically to all his Talmidim."



I went through one more year of Shluchim who had learned in Toronto before I worked up the courage to email Rabbi Wagner and ask him if he'd add me to the mailing list.

To this day, there are 241 emails in my inbox that are marked "Rabbi Wagner". Not more than a few weeks goes by that I don't look thru them, hoping to glean some wisdom and *varemkait*, especially in connection with a Chassidishe Yoma Depagra. For all the great content that is available for purchase these days online, it doesn't remotely come to the genuine *toichen* being shared from a *chossid* to his *talmidim*.

Fast forward a couple years. One day, Rabbi Wagner in the flesh, *kapoto* and all, shows up in my *makom hashlichus*. He went to *mikveh*, *davened*, and came into our offices. My father was out that morning, and so my being alone in the office, he walks up to my desk and pulls up a chair. I had a Tanya *shiur* that night, so I'm sitting at my desk preparing.

"Nu, what are you learning there? A *shiur* Tanya? Wow, beautiful. Who comes? How do you give it over? What *nekudah* do you want them to leave with?"

As the minutes dragged on, I made sure the roles began to switch. I was asking the questions and he was answering. It went on for 2 and a half hours. It occurred to me throughout that the legendary Mashpia could have picked up and moved to any town in the world that same morning to open a Chabad House, and in short order would've been accomplishing even more than the current Shliach. His *hashkafa* on life, his approach to issues that felt daunting before the conversation, his boundless *emunah* and *ahavas Yisroel*...it was 2 and a half hours that changed my *shlichus*. To date, there is no area of Tanya I feel more comfortable teaching than *perokim ches* thru *yud zayin*.

Mah nomar umah nedaber - there was no one quite like Rabbi Wagner. I'm confident that the doros of Talmidim that he established, both the ones that passed thru the doors of YLT, and the countless others like me that were *mekabel* from him in other ways, will continue to live the lifestyles he put in place for us, and will continue doing so *ad biyas goel*, something which I'm sure he's taking care of on High.

A.T.

“Dear Rabbi: I am not allowing myself to get depressed, as you would not be happy. What can I do for you?” These are the exact words that I wrote in an email to my beloved Rosh Yeshiva and personal *mashpia*, Rabbi Akiva Wagner A”H, on 16 Teves 5780 – soon after I heard about his being diagnosed with the dreaded illness.



Before I share his answer, which is something that we all – and especially his *talmidim* – need to take to heart, I would like to share some personal thoughts and reflections on the Rabbi Akiva Wagner that I merited to learn from and be connected to.

The public image of Rabbi Wagner is that he was an extrovert that was blessed with a “*geonische kup*”. The Rabbi Wagner that I came to know was a natural introvert that pushed himself – beyond himself – because he was a Gaon in Ahavas Yisroel. Yes, all those hours of *farbrengen*, and time reaching out to individual *bochurim*, was an *avodah* for him that he pushed himself to do out of true caring and Ahavas Yisroel.

While Rabbi Wagner was known for his *chessed* and warmth, he was uncompromising and stubborn in his *chinuch* decisions. He was the pioneer for mandatory learning throughout the summer for all *bochurim* (Mesivta and Zal), and he sacrificed much (he *shlepped* his family to Postville, CGI Montreal, Budapest Hungary – amongst other places – and then spent thousands to buy grounds in Star Lake NY) to make sure the *talmidim* learned in the summer. In addition, he stubbornly started each Shnas Halimmudim on Rosh Chodesh Elul – even if *talmidim* had to leave overnight camp early – so that they have a real “Elul Zman” in Yeshiva. Many of these radical *chinuch* decisions have become mainstream today and it is all his *zechus*.

Above all, he innately understood something about the responsibility of *mechanchim* today – especially after Gimmel Tammuz. While in years back, we naturally felt capable and conceited (and the *yetzer hara* pushed the feeling of *yeshus*) the *tafkid* of the *mashpia* was to ingrain *bittul* into his *talmidim*. Today things have changed: The *yetzer hara* of today tries very hard – and is very successful – at convincing us that we are worthless and we will never account for anything in life. The *mashpia* today needs to empower the self-esteem and aspirations of his *talmidim*. The *talmid* must see in his *mashpia* that complete faith and belief that he has the ability to grow and be successful (in a *bittul* way).

In this regard, Rabbi Akiva Wagner – and his *farbrengens* – were unmatched. His *emuna* in the Rebbe, and in the Rebbe’s children, was always felt and permeated everything he said. He exemplified the saying of the Baal Shem Tov – the Hayom Yom of the day of his untimely *petirah* (17 Iyar) – “The Baal Shem Tov concluded: “I want to bring Jews to the point that they will yield the kind of harvest that G-d’s ‘cherished land’ can yield.”

There is so much to reflect, to internalize and to share. The time will come for that, but now let’s focus on Rabbi Wagner’s response to my original question: **“Simcha, and Torah *umitzvos*.**

Someone sent me a picture of *Tehillim* in Cincinnati, thank you so much! We should only share with one another *besuros tovos umesamchos, mitoch simcha vetov levov!*"

This response encapsulates his entire essence: He lived to inspire his *talmidim* to serve Hashem – and the *shlichus* of the Rebbe – with joy in all of life's circumstances. It is easy to be joyful when things are good in an apparent way, but it takes true *avodah* to be joyful through the pain. We, the *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva, must realize that we need to continue doing our *shlichus* with joy. That will bring him joy.

G.A.



Over the past few days all my group chats have been filled with msgs, stories and memories of your distinguished brother. The countless *bochrim* and *anash* that he inspired is truly unbelievable.

I had the great fortune of being by his *fabrengens* and even once or twice listening in while he was giving shiur. But truthfully I had very little personal interaction with Rav Akiva. I'm not sure he even knew my name.

But there is something that I can share from my experience crossing paths in shul or in the supermarket with the great Rav and *chossid*. I was instantly met with the warmest Wagner smile. The moment we locked eyes he would get me with it every time.

מְקַבְּלֵן בְּסִבְרָ פְּנִים יְפוֹת

A few days ago I was learning Rambam with Z. H. and we both stopped at these words and spoke about the great *kiddush Hashem* that happens when a sage takes time for us simple minded people.

May your holy brother's memories serve to keep us on the right path and may you and your family find comfort along with all of am Yisroel.

B.T.

I feel myself at a complete loss of words. I have spent some time collecting my thoughts and memories of your brother. Although I did not maintain a very personal relationship with him after leaving Yeshiva, he has impacted my life very profoundly. Starting Yeshiva in its first year on Edinburgh he taught and lived in a way that growing up in Thronhill we never experienced before. His *Avodas Hatfilah* was something that I still have a vivid image of. Being at a *farbrengen* with him was both a *geshmak* and a shift in reality. Not being in the dorm that year I tried sneaking in opportunities to stay late at Yeshiva to be there.

I still recall *leil Purim* in his house, (If I recall that might have been one of the first times we met) and how he tried impressing upon us what it means to be a *tomim* in Tomchei Tmimim. I still think about his *divrei hisorerus* before going to the Rebbe and the famous *nafkeh minos* from the Ragochetover. He showed us what it meant to live with the Rebbe today, after Gimme Tamuz. He used to come up north for night seder in the first year of Yeshiva and had a way of showing us in a more relaxed way the *geshmak* of learning a *chiddush* in *gemara* and such. For my father and I imagine the entire *kehilla*, it was a real treat when he would join for a Shabbos or give a *shiur*.



At the same time he was the first person to teach me how to clean a chicken. It was a Friday afternoon that first year and the bochur who took care of Shabbos was out of town. I offered to help and he went about showing me what to do. I recall he even highlighted about not trying to do the same with the wings.

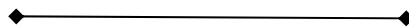
I know he expected more from us, his *talmidim* and at times we could see his frustration written all over his very animated facial expressions and hand gestures, yet he never made us feel bad. While working on the *mareches*, I believe I accidentally deleted a large amount of a *kovetz* or reverted to an older version. I felt terrible about it. He just kept on attacking the keyboard to produce the *kovetz* in time for 11 Nissan. He never made me feel bad nor did he not allow me to continue being involved in the *mareches* in some capacity.

There was an incident that once happened on an off Shabbos with a number of bochurim at my house. I was feeling terrible and expecting a *knas* and/or a serious talking to. He dealt with it in a way that didn't make me feel like an *oivsvorf*.

His dedication to us his *talmidim* made us feel so special and valued. He had an open him for us bochurim and who could forget his white minivan that I believe the axle broke from carrying too many *bochurim*. He just demonstrated to us what it means to live as a *yid* and a *chossid*. His weekly emails which were an infusion of *chayus* and *chassidishkeit* that added much to my family and Shabbosim.

I am not great at communication. I never thanked him properly for all he did.

A.Y.



BDE. I am so sorry for the loss of Rabbi Wagner. A really special and kind person. my sons went to Yeshiva in Toronto, and really (for lack of a better word) loved him. He was always kind and really connected with the boys, no matter what level they were on. A real loss for Klal Yisroel. E.R.

Huge loss.. my husband wouldn't be the same nor his path in life if not for Rabbi Wagner.
M.D.



As a *bochur*, when I finished my five-year stint in the Lubavitch Yeshiva in Toronto, on my last night there I cried like a baby.

Invariably, in the subsequent years whenever I would meet my Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Wagner and we'd speak he'd ask me to explain my tears. I usually shrugged off from replying.

Once, when he was visiting Yerushalayim and we spent a morning together and when he asked me again, I told him something to the effect that:

"I think it was the realization that such a precious time of my life was coming to an end and I'd never have a chance to get back the moments lost."

But I know that that wasn't the truth.

The truth is that I loved him deeply, there was so much I needed to learn from him, and I knew I would miss him deeply, and though I'd still connect with him it wouldn't be quite the same.

I don't know why it was too hard to tell a *rosh yeshiva* who treated me like a father treats a child that I loved him and knew I'd miss him.

I love him still deeply.

Much more now.

And I cry again deeply.

As I already miss him too much.

There's still so much I need to learn.

D.M.

I first met Akiva during Sukkos of '89. Although he was fully aware from the outset that I didn't exactly share his warm and energized Chassidic enthusiasm, he in no way allowed that to at all inhibit his ability to be a friendly and attentive, welcoming host. Whether it was boundless Ahavas Yisroel, or maybe he just plain liked me, we were able to become quite good friends during the time, making for a memorable Yom tov indeed. And it was with that same warmth and mutual respect that he greeted me and thanked me for coming to his chassunah in Crown Heights a year or so later.



A.B.

Rabbi Wagner wasn't just an amazing Rosh Yeshiva, that gave an amazing *shiur*. He was the Yeshiva. Everything revolved around him.

I was lucky enough to be the first class of LYT. I spent four years under this great giant.

Being with Rabbi Wagner was like being in a bubble of *emes* and *hiskashrus*. Every idea of the Rebbe was alive and experienced. Everything was real. It was the closest thing to bring a *bochur* before Gimel Tamuz. Rabbi Wagner lived and embodied the Rebbe and *chassidus* and Torah, and he took you along for the journey.

It is amazing how he always allowed us in to his home. He took us in with such love. His *farbrengens* were life changing events. I didn't realize how lucky we were to have these opportunities and experiences.

We didn't dorm in *shiur alef*. We didn't have Yeshiva on Shabbos. A few months in to the year we had an "in-Shabbos" where we all stayed in homes near Yeshiva. I remember walking in to the *farbrengen* like a *קטן שלא נפקחו עיניו*, he calls out to me "Chaim, בותב גט בריתות לאשתו, forget your parents forget the world!" Those words are etched in my mind (at least that is how

I remember them (🙄). It was said with such conviction It was the beginning of my "journey" towards becoming a *bochur*.

When the dormitories were temporarily closed, his home and his mother's home became dormitories. He never seemed to need a break from us.

I recall how one night I woke up in middle of the night and I saw him walking through my dorm room checking each of us. In the morning a number of us mentioned we saw him. So we asked him why he visited the dorms that night. He replied that he fell asleep on the couch and woke up from a thud. A picture of the Rebbe had fallen. He went to check on each bochur to make sure everyone was ok.

Those bochurim who stayed up *leil shishi* would go to sleep on chairs in *zal*. He would lovingly wake them up. Get *negel vasser* for those that forgot.

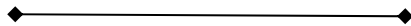
I don't recall a negative word even his *divrei "mussar"* had such positivity. He uplifted.

When I entered Yeshiva I didn't show up to Seder and I didn't learn. It is thanks to him that I left Yeshiva a completely different person.

It is common for people to exaggerate during times like this. It's no exaggeration to say that Rabbi Wagner has given me a love for learning. A drive for seeking the *emes*. The need to never be content with my *avodah*.

I will always feel regret for not staying in touch with Rabbi Wagner, nevertheless I will always feel lucky to consider myself as one of the בני עקיבא.

C.J.



Look, all of us were *talmidim* of Rabbi Wagner, and even if not all of us were exceptionally close with him, we all benefited greatly from having a connection with him, and we value the importance of his השפעה. We all enjoy his *shiurim*, *farbrengens*, and emails, and we cherish him and anything having to do with him so much that we will even listen to a recording of him *davening Shacharis*. It follows, then, that everyone feels an urge to do something as quick as possible to make sure we can both preserve whatever media we have of him, and also 'share' Rabbi Wagner with the world so everyone can benefit from him. We want to print *seforim* of his *shiurim*, websites with videos of him, and books of his emails etc.

However, it is important to remember that although (to a certain extent) he belonged to all of us, he has a *mishpocho* to whom he belongs first and foremost.

Therefore, any project like the above needs to be done in a מסודר'דיקע way, and only after the approval and oversight of the *mishpocho*.

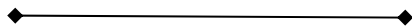
This applies especially to things that were never published in an official way.



When I was in yeshiva, there wasn't yet a *shliach* in downtown Toronto. As Chanukah approached, I got permission to place a huge menorah in the Eaton Center. Rabbi Wagner granted us permission to spend two hours a day at the *menorah*, running *mitzvoim*. But, being the enthusiastic bochorim we were, we ended up spending much more time there than we had agreed upon.

Later, we were all called in and gently reprimanded for not sticking to the agreed-upon time. But just as we thought our meeting was over, Rabbi Wagner took out a check and said, "This is my participation in your activity." The check was made out for \$1,000. Even though he had just scolded us, he showed his unwavering support and encouragement for our efforts to spread the light of Chanukah.

S.S.



This story took place before Shavuos during one of the (3) years that I had the *zechus* of learning in Toronto. I approached Rabbi Wagner and asked him if I could get permission to go home for Shavuos, as it was my father's birthday and I wanted to celebrate with him and my family. Rabbi Wagner felt that it was important for me to be in Yeshiva for Yom Tov and did not give me permission. Although I was sad, I understood and respected his decision. During our discussion he had jokingly asked me if the reason I wanted to go home was because of my mother's cheesecake. With a smile, he offered to bring me (and my friends) cheesecake for Shavuos.



Sure enough, on Erev Shavuos Rabbi Wagner came into the *Zal* carrying a stack of many cheesecakes that his amazing Rebbetzin (may Hashem continue to give her strength and good health) had lovingly prepared for us. That year I didn't get to celebrate Shavuos with my father, but I was indeed blessed to celebrate it as a *Tamim* together with my spiritual father.

I would like to add that Rabbi Wagner is not the type of Rabbi and father that could ever truly be lost from us. (Even now, I can clearly hear him saying *דעת עליון* etc.). We will always carry him with us, and very soon we will merit to walk together with him as we go to greet Melech haMoshiach!

S.M.



Song composed by Rabbi Wagner *a'h*. This is when he was a learning teacher in Detroit. He was sitting in the laundromat contemplating the difficulties of having a *hashpaah* on the campers and composed this song.

T.T.T.O The Search JEP

Sitting by the table, under the trees
Bothered by spiders, mosquitoes and bees
The learning teacher standing there, trying to teach
Searching for a way, his children to reach
I know how you want to learn, to do what is right
But you find it so difficult to put up the fight
So many distractions are constantly there
So hard to overcome, it's really not fair
But the things that come difficult, are so much more dear
And to help you out in this fight, is why we are here
Working together, hand in hand
True soldiers, awaiting the Rebbe's command
If only I knew, how to come across to you
How much we would accomplish, how much we could do
I spend so much time with you on my mind
Your path to Hatzlachah I'm trying to find
If you'd only realize, we're not working on opposite ends
Your counselors and your learning teachers are your best friends
Our summers we're devoting, to help you excel
I only beg of you, to help us as well
Together, we both can reach the greatest heights
Together, we can't be stopped by the most difficult fights
And we can be sure, that in a very short while
Together, we will succeed to make the Rebbe smile



A small cup of wine, he holds in his hand,
Young Mendele, at a farbrengen does stand,
Thousands of men, standing in awe,
Their attention, to the Rebbe is drawn.
Though Mendel stood there, his mind was elsewhere,
To hear the farbrengen, he did not care,
He just could not wait, until it was done,
So he could go home and have fun.
As he walked down the street, his friends he would meet,
They'd teach him to lie, and they'd teach him to cheat,
He would look to all sides, to be sure no one saw,
Then Mendel would break every law.
It occurred to him, at a farbrengen one week,
After all it's to me that the Rebbe does speak,
His words to my heart I must take,
What a difference in me, it will make.
How can I stand every week, and ignore,
The words being said, by the Nassi Hador,
He decides, with tears in his eyes
Enough of my cheating and lies.
As he walked down the street, he met his best friend,
He told him my bad ways, have come to end,
I have come to regret, all the things that I did,
From now on, I'll be a Chossid.



לע"נ הרה"ח הגה"ת ר' מיכאל עקיבא גרשון בן הת' ר' רפאל מנחם נחום
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לז"נ

הרה"ח התמים אי"א נו"נ

הרב מיכאל עקיבא גרשון

בן הרה"ת רפאל מנחם נחום ע"ה וגנר

מקושר בלו"נ לכ"ק אדמו"ר

בעל מרץ זרב פעלים

החזיר עטרה ליושנה וחידש את

ישיבת ליובאוויטש טורונטו שנוסדה ע"י הרבי

ושימש בה ראש הישיבה ומשפיע

מסוד ונתון לתלמידיו בכל נפשו

העמיד אלפי תלמידים חסידים ומקושרים לרבו"נ

עסק בעבודת התפילה ובמבצעי הרבי

ובמיוחד בעניני גאולה ומשיח

הצטיין במצות הצדקה

העמיד דור ישרים יבורך מהם שלוחים

נפטר בדמי ימיו

ביום שני י"ז אדר ה'תשפ"ג

ת' נ' צ' ב' ה'