

Moreinu Horav Chaim Yisroel Belsky זצ"ל

Horav Chaim Yisroel Belsky זצ"ל was destined for greatness from the time he was a small child. The oldest grandson of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath's founder, Reb Binyamin Wilhelm זצ"ל, his life mirrored the staunch determination of his renowned grandfather, a Polish immigrant who built a full day Yeshiva system in America in 1918, when the world thought it impossible. Born into a family that blazed the trail for Torah learning in 20th century America, Rav Belsky was immersed in the world of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, forging his own illustrious connection and contribution to the Yeshiva and its talmidim.

His father, Rav Berel Belsky זצ"ל, set the ultimate example for his son; being amongst the first groups of American Jewish boys to understand that learning Torah was the ultimate embodiment of the "American opportunity". After learning in Torah Vodaath, Rav Berel took courageous step of traveling to Europe to study in the Radin Yeshiva during the lifetime of the Chofetz Chaim.

His son, Yisroel, followed his father's and grandfather's examples of mesiras nefesh for Torah. He was an exceptional student, recognized as a prodigy from a young age. As he progressed through Yeshiva Torah Vodaath Elementary, Mesivta and Bais Medrash under the guidance of his Rebbi muvhak, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, and his other Rabeim, *zichronom l'vracha*, he learned to love and live a Torah life, as he famously turned down a full scholarship to college to stay in learning full time. In time, he spent several years at Bais Medrash Elyon in Monsey, where he was zocheh to interact with and learn from Rav Reuven Grozovsky זצ"ל. He received semicha from Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and gained practical experience in halacha from Rav Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל.

Initially, Rav Belsky was drawn to join other unique American talmidei chachamim in the then fledgling Bais Medrash Govoha. However, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky advised him that his future was linked by blood with Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. When Rav Zelig Epstein fell ill, Rav Belsky was called back to Brooklyn to take over his position.

Though a mere 25 years old, Rav Belsky's towering intellect quickly became clear to all. He was a natural Rebbe; his brilliance and vast Torah knowledge was enhanced by the genuine love and care he felt to each and every one of his beloved talmidim. He related to and inspired them to reach further, regardless of their stature, age or academic abilities. He used his many talents to reach them; whether music, nature, sports or constellations, Rav Belsky's incredible range enabled him to reach the hearts and minds of his students.

From his early 20's onward, Rav Belsky spent decades as a Rebbe in Bais Medrash Torah Vodaath, where he delivered steady shiurim on Daf Yomi, Chumash, Rashi, Maseches Chullin, Yoreh Deah and other topics. He taught Mesivta, Bais Medrash, and halacha until with the passing of Rav Avrohom Pam זת"ל, when he was appointed to deliver the Yoreh Deah Shiur and lead the semicha program for over a decade.

Subsequently, Rav Belsky became the Rosh HaYeshiva, where led the renaissance of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, improving and developing many aspects of chinuch and education to benefit talmidim of today as well as the future.

For over 40 years, Rav Belsky complemented his year-round dedication to Torah with his position as Rav and Manhig of the Masmidim Program and the entire Camp Agudah in Ferndale, NY, where his impact on generations of campers was truly legendary.

Throughout his myriad Torah obligations, Rav Belsky was a dedicated father. With his devoted Rebbetzin, as an indispensable life-partner, together they raised thirteen beautiful children, קע"ה. The Belsky children and their spouses are each in their own way pillars of Torah, avodah and gemilas chasadim, raising their children on the same path as their illustrious ancestors.

Rav Belsky's parents were deeply involved in being mekarev Jews from the Soviet Union. When the walls fell and a steady stream of Russian Jews began arriving in New York, many settled in Kensington near their home and Rav Belsky זצ"ל and his wife became their surrogate parents. He was instrumental in founding Be'er HaGolah to educate the children of these Russian immigrants. In his efforts to better communicate with the Russian population, he taught himself the Russian language, and for many years conducted his Pesach seder in three languages: English, Yiddish and Russian, to accommodate the numerous guests at his table. He was the spiritual guide to the Russian Jewish expatriate community under the leadership of Rav Avrohom Binsky, often gracing their events. Even after his illness, he traveled with Vaad L'hatzolas Nidchei Yisroel to the former Soviet Union with great mesiras nefesh.

Rav Belsky embarked on a decades' long involvement in the world of kashrus, first at the Kof K and later as a posek at the OU, where he received a steady stream of shailos from all over the world. His vast knowledge and depth of understanding of the intricacies of halacha along with the chemical and engineering aspects of kashrus enabled him to explain aspects of the operation, equipment and manufacturing process to the company owners which they themselves were unaware of.

As a shochet, Rav Belsky was familiar with every organ and sinew of an animal and had a tremendous impact on shechitah in the United States. As a mohel, he was instrumental in the fight to retain the legal status of metzitah bepeh. He trained young mashgichim in the complexities of machinery and equipment, taught young shoctim and mohalim how to excel in their Avodas Hakodesh. He helped doctors understand the interface between medicine and halachah, and his admirable character, courage, and integrity made him the ideal liaison between our community and the secular world on a variety of crucial issues.

Though Moreinu Horav Yisroel Chaim Belsky is no longer with us in this world, his legacy will burn bright for generations. May he be a mailitz yosher for his family, the Yeshiva, his talmidim and the entire Klal Yisroel.