

BS"D Parashat Devarim 5783

Shalom Chaver

Last week's Friday edition of the Jerusalem Post printed a tribute to the late Rav Sholom Gold zt"l, penned by David M. Weinberg, entitled "The Most Passionate of Zionists". HaRav Sholom zt"l, passed away on the Shabbat of parashat Pinchas, and I lost one of my closest friends and confidants.

I need not describe the man, the Rav, the leader – Avraham Sholom Gold. His contributions to Am Yisrael in the years he served in the rabbinate in chutz la'aretz and during the over 40 years here in Medinat Yisrael are well known, including the establishment of the Zichron Yosef community in Har Nor, and his over his 1000 Torah videos, many books, and countless shiurim and lectures. He and his Rabbanit Bayla were role models.

The bond that connected us has an interesting history.

We met about 25 years ago and quickly formed a close relationship based on similar hashkafa (*world outlook*), experiences, and challenges. We would shed tears together when our nation took a hit from the goyim and rejoiced in the Medina's successes.

We quickly discovered that in our youth we overcame similar challenges on the spiritual battlefields of the American galut.

We came from the same imperfect village – Brooklyn , although from different sides of the road. Rav Gold was raised in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn ; I came from Flatbush. But

we both suffered from authentic-Torah malnutrition.

Rav Gold was surrounded by yeshivashe galut Torah, having learned at Yeshiva Torah Va'das and Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, where the Torah was devoid of any connection with contemporary Eretz Yisrael and the greatest miracle our nation is experiencing in the last 2000 years.

In contrast, due to our distance from the frum neighborhoods in Brooklyn , I spent eight years as a student at Yeshiva of Flatbush (YoF). My education was the opposite of Rav Gold's. In the Yeshiva of Flatbush of that time (today it is different), Zionism was an intricate part of the curriculum, but Yiddishkeit and yir'at shamayim did not pass through the door. I believe that in my class there was not a minyan of religious kids!

In a most surprising way, upon graduation from YoF I continued on to the Chareidi inspired Yeshiva Rabbi Jacob Joseph (RJJ) on Manhattan's lower east side), and then afterwards in the Bais Yosef Yeshiva in Boro Park where I received the first of several smichot.

Both our Torah studies and yeshiva atmosphere were oblivious to what was going on with the Jews in a faraway Asian land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean ocean called Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Sholom and I had to find our spiritual and ideological ways back to Eretz Yisrael against the currents of the Chareidi tides flowing away from the miracles of our times.

I respected my rabbis in RJJ, and for some I even felt great regard, although I knew deep down that they were missing the boat as far as meaningful Torah education for our generation was concerned. They were, in my opinion, on the wrong path to where HaShem was leading His chosen People. I never entered into discussions on Eretz Yisrael vs the galut because of my respect for their erudition and status.

There were two paths in the Chareidi world at the time and till now; one besmirched the Medina, the other was oblivious to it. To speak against the Medina was a preferred option because it aroused a discussion where points of view are shared; to be oblivious to the great miracle was to hide it in the attic, never to be seen.

An example:

I was 16 years old and in a shiur (class) of a Rebbe who I really respected. He was tough but succeeded in bringing out some of my hidden abilities (I received the Gemara award on graduation).

One spring day I arrived late to the shiur. I explained that it was Yom Ha'atzmaut and we recited the Hallel prayer in my father's shul, followed by a festive breakfast. The Rebbe banged his hand on the table and said in a very loud voice, "Hallel!? One has to say Kinot (said on Tish'a Be'av)". I had never heard words like that before. I blurted out, "but they saved Jewish lives! And the rebbe replied in anger, "they killed Jewish lives". This exchange was not what 16-year-old boys should have to hear from a respected Rebbe.

Eventually, this Rebbe came on aliya before me, and we resumed a close relationship until his death several years later. I had the feeling from our conversations that he had shifted his opinions to be a bit closer to mine.

Rav Gold was a passionate Religious Zionist. He was on the front line at pro-Israel demonstrations and preached the mitzva of living a life of Torah here in the holy land. We spent countless hours analyzing the ups and downs in our land and we reveled in the miracles that HaShem did for us personally by arousing our love and need to be in Eretz HaKodesh.

We, and the few others like us, had to find our way to Eretz Yisrael not with the 42 stations that our ancestors had to

experience in their desert trek, but enough in our personal galut desert to create challenges which had to be overcome.

As it appears today, nothing much has changed in the American Chareidi yeshiva scene except for the numbers. There are more bnei and bnot Torah who come here for a year or so to drink from the sweet Torah of the land of milk and honey and then hastily return to the land of milking you and money. There is Torah in North America and bnei torah with great potential, but it appears as though their time to come home has not yet arrived. But there is hope, because we here will continue to pull and the Judenhass anti-Semites will continue to push, with the final result being that the children of Rachel "will return to their borders".

I was told a very meaningful incident in the life of the great gaon HaRav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah in Bayit Vegan. A man came to him to clarify if there is a mitzva or requirement to be today in Eretz Yisrael and brought with him written opinions to the effect that there is no such requirement. At every source that he showed HaRav Shlomo Zalman, the Rav commented, "nisht vichtig" (irrelevant). At the end HaRav Shlomo Zalman pulled out a Chumash and began running through all the parshiot showing that every one had a deep connection with Eretz Yisrael.

I recall my first meetings with HaRav Auerbach zt"l, it was in 1964 when I began teaching as a rabbi in the Marom Tzion Yeshiva in Bayit Vegan. The bus stop was the first on the line back to the center of town and was nearly empty. A very imposing Rav got on, and despite all the empty seats he sat down right next to me! He asked me for my name and what I was doing in the area. I responded that I was a Rav in the yeshiva. He then asked me what I taught that day and we began discussing the sugya (the issue) in the Gemara. We exchanged ideas and then my station came up and I left the bus.

The same thing happened on the following days, until one day

the Rav did not appear. A passenger came over to me and said how fortunate I was that Rav Shlomo Zalman sits next to me every day. I was close to trembling, because the material that I taught to these high school boys and repeated to the great gaon was far below his level of expertise. From then on I made it my business to take the second bus.

To return to the issue at hand. I am not resentful at my rabbis for not feeling the things I realized, that no man can enter the palace of the King uninvited, and as it stood they were not invited in, and we were.

HaShem blessed the Golds and us with many – but not enough – wonderful children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, born and implanted in the holy land with not one in the galut.

Rav Gold and Rabbanit Bayla raised an illustrious family here. They were exceptions, as strong and influential leaders in a generation that produced weak and uncharismatic ones.

Their absence is just beginning to be felt.

SHALOM CHAVER.

Shabbat Shalom

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