



Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz, זצ"ל

An Appreciation

The passing of Rav Dovid Lifshitz, זצ"ל, a beloved and re-markably unique figure in the Torah community, on 9 Tamuz (June 30) this past summer, left us bereaved and poorer for his absence.

Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz was born in the year 5666/1906, in Minsk. His father, Rabbi Yaakov Aryeh Lifshitz, was the son of the *Gaon* Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, author of the well-known *sefer, Olas Shelomo*, on *Kadoshim*. As a result of the turmoil of World War I, the young Dovid was forced to flee Minsk with his parents, to join his grandfather in the city of Grodna. It was there that Reb Dovid met the towering figure of the yeshiva world, Rabbi Shimon Shkop, זצ"ל, under whom he had the privilege to learn for a period of time. Reb Shimon encouraged him to continue his studies in the Yeshiva of Mir, where Reb Dovid became the close *talmid* of the *Gaonim*, Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Finkel, זצ"ל, and the *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, זצ"ל. His seven years in Mir were distinguished by his

great *hasmada* (diligence) and his keen *lomdus* (analytic mind).

Reb Dovid married the daughter of Rabbi Yosef Yoselovitch, Suvalker Rav. His father-in-law passed away shortly after their wedding, and Reb Dovid was invited to succeed him. Reb Dovid was not yet thirty years old at this time, and many viewed his ascension to the position of Rav of Suvalk—a community with some 27 *batei midrashim*—with more than a little skepticism. Before long, however, the leaders of the *Kehilla* became aware that Reb Dovid was a man of exemplary Torah knowledge and exceptional *middos* (character), and most worthy of his position. Word of his stature spread, and Reb Dovid was soon a familiar figure at rabbinical conferences.

Typical of Reb Dovid's leadership in Suvalk was an incident regarding the local *Mikva*, which was in need of repair. Reb Dovid called a meeting of

the community leaders and they assured him that the matter would be handled. They were, however, less than ex-

peditious in taking action. The Rav purchased bags of cement, filled buckets with water, and was about to take the matter into his own hands, when the community leaders, much embarrassed by their footdragging, repaired it on their own.

When the Second World War broke out, Suvalk was turned over to the Communists, who did not look too kindly upon an activist Rav. That left Rabbi Lifshitz no choice but to flee to Lithuania with his family. A year later, in 1941, Reb Dovid joined a group that fled Lithuania to Japan, from where they embarked to America. He arrived in San Francisco on *Erev Shavuos* of that year, on the same ship as the Lomzer Rav, Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes, the Novaradoker *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Avrohom Yafen, יבדל לחיים, זכרונם לברכה, Rabbi Michel Feinstein, שליט"א.

Upon his arrival in America, Reb Dovid assumed a rabbinical position in Chicago, where he also served as *Rosh Hayeshiva* in Beis Medrash L'Torah. He was extremely active in strengthening Jewish observance in the community at large, and is credited with having influenced more than a hundred merchants to close their businesses on *Shabbos*. Shortly afterwards, he came to New York where he was invited to join the *Yeshivas Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan* as a *Rosh Hayeshiva*. In the years since then—close to half a century—thousands of *talmidim* studied under Reb Dovid, including a number who have emerged as outstanding *talmidei chachamim* and disseminators of Torah. Indeed, amongst the thousands of mourners who attended the funeral in Manhattan and Jerusalem were a number of prominent rabbinical figures who took pride in having been his *talmidim*.

In addition to his *Harbotzas HaTorah*, Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz, from the moment of his arrival in New York City, was deeply involved in many aspects of community activity. He was drafted immediately to the front line of the rescue efforts of the *Vaad Hatzolah*, along with other *Roshei Hayeshiva*, including Rabbi Aaron Kotler, Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz, and Rabbi Reuvain Grozovsky, זצ"ל. He was also an active member of the *Agudas Horabbonim*, along with Rabbi Eliezer Silver, and Rabbi Yisroel Rosenberg, זצ"ל. After the passing of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל, he assumed a leading role in that organization.

Rabbi Lifshitz was always concerned over *Eretz Yisroel* and the welfare of the Jews there. Along with leading *Roshei Yeshiva*, such as Rabbi Aaron Kotler and Rabbi Reuvain Grozovksy, he was a prominent presence at gatherings that protested the spiritual deprivation of *olim* from Yemen and various Sephardic lands. He was amongst the founders of *Chinuch Atzmai/Torah Schools* for Israel, and regularly graced the dais at their annual dinners. In addition, Rabbi Lifshitz was one of the eleven *Roshei Hayeshiva* and *Rabbonim* that issued a *psak* thirty-five years ago,

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prohibiting participation in religious association with Conservative and Reform congregational and rabbinical groups.

Rabbi Lifshitz was admired for his warm *Ahavas Yisroel* and his open friendship with every Jew, which were expressed in an active pursuit of *chesed*. It is therefore not surprising

that he was associated with *Ezras Torah*, the fund well-known for support of *talmidei chachamim* and *b'nei Torah* the world over, especially in *Eretz Yisroel*. Thus, with the passing of Rabbi Naftoli Rif, זצ"ל (who led *Ezras Torah* after the *petira* of the *Gaon*, Rabbi Eliyahu Henkin, זצ"ל), Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz became president of the organization. In addition to his own fruitful efforts on behalf of *Ezras Torah*, Rabbi Lifshitz succeeded in attracting a number of young, energetic forces to the organization.

Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz was always known by the title "Suvalker Rav," even though he spent most of his years on these shores as a *Rosh Yeshiva*, who had a profound impact on his *talmidim*. Perhaps, in his way, he epitomized the classic European *Rav*—*talmid chacham, poseik*, teacher to the young men of his community, guide to his people, doing his utmost to meet their myriad needs—both spiritual and material. ■

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