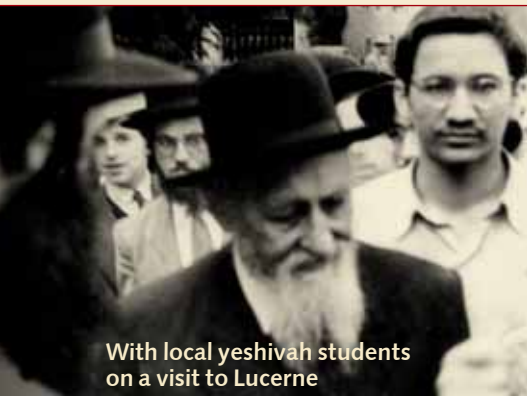


THE LAST DAYS OF THE BRISKER

RAV



With local yeshivah students on a visit to Lucerne

Over forty-seven years have passed since the petirah of the Brisker Rav, ztz"l, on erev Yom Kippur of 5720/1959. Recent research gives new insight on his final weeks, in which his famous exactitude in halachah intensified and he alluded constantly to his approaching death.

Adapted from Rav Shimon Yosef Meller's sefer HaRav MiBrisk, Volume IV

Jerusalem. The Aseres Ymei Teshuvah. The Ten Days of Repentance, 5720/1959. The home of Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik. The Brisker Rav was bedridden, his strength waning alarmingly. His students entered his room, bringing *esrogim* for his inspection. Everyone knew that at this time of year, "The Griz" was always entirely absorbed in the search for the most kosher and beautiful *arba minim*. But this year, to everyone's surprise, the sight of the *esrogim* elicited no response. He said only, "Nu, *olam k'min-hago noheg* [Nu, life goes on]."

Rabbi Shlomo Lorenz had visited right after Rosh HaShanah with wonderful news: he'd managed to obtain official permission to import an *esrog* from Morocco for the Rav. Then, too, the only reaction had been, "Nu, *vus hub Ich shoin az Ich hub an esrog? Nu, what do I have now from an esrog?*"

If the Rav's family and students had been open to grasping the meaning of these and other cryptic expressions, they would have realized that their beloved father and teacher was trying to prepare them for his imminent departure from this world.

Optimism Rav Yitzchak Zev HaLevi Soloveitchik had suffered from weakness and ill health all his life. As a young man starting in the rabbinate, he'd been compelled to leave Brisk every summer, for some weeks in a resort village. During his final two decades, when he lived in Eretz Yisrael, he traveled several times to Switzerland to bathe in healing springs there.

In 5717/1957, after a routine physical examination, Professor Tzundek his doctor, sadly informed the Rav's son, Rabbi Meshulam David that his father was very ill. But the medicines he prescribed were effective, and the Rav's condition improved significantly. His family's optimism lasted until Iyar of 5719/1959, when the Griz began to feel the effects of his illness more severely. But no one realized just how ill he was.

No American Doctors As the illness intensified, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, ztz"l, the Ponevezher Rav, suggested that the Griz travel to the United States, where there were top doctors. When the Griz objected that he had no money for such a trip and treatment, the Ponevezher Rav declared that

he would consider it an honor to cover all expenses.

The Griz was shocked. "How could you suggest taking money belonging to the Ponevezh Yeshivah and using it for medical purposes?!"

The Ponevezher Rav answered: "Isn't the purpose of a yeshivah to strengthen and spread Torah? So nothing is more obvious than that the yeshivah would help in the recovery of the Brisker Rav, who is the Torah of *klal Yisrael*. Therefore, it is most certainly possible to designate some of the yeshivah funds for your medical treatments..."

The trip never took place. During the final stages of the Rav's illness, it was suggested that a specialist be flown in from the United States. But the Griz, who viewed the American atmosphere of permissiveness and materialism as a palpable spiritual danger, refused. He feared that the doctor would likely recommend a continued course of treatment in an American medical center, and that this recommendation might be followed.

At that time, Rabbi Shach, ztz"l, asked in surprise, "Isn't this a case of *pikuach nefesh*? In which one is obligated to make every effort to save his life?"

"*Alles vus m'ken in Eretz Yisrael hat men shoin getun?*" the Griz retorted. [And everything that can be done here has already been done?]

The Doctor Changed His Mind The Griz refused to be hospitalized; all his treatments were administered in his home. The hospital staff was willing to provide a private room for him, where a family member could be on hand to help him. His family repeatedly begged him to agree, claiming that treatment at the hospital was better than at home.

One day, it seemed that Reb Velvel was finally agreeing. Two of his students hurried to the doctor. To their great surprise, although the doctor had always urged hospitalization, he now said that he felt that the Rav's current condition no longer required this. There was no apparent reason for this sudden change of heart; the family sensed a fulfillment of the verse, "The will of those who fear Him, He will do."

The "Borrowed" Rosh Yeshivah The Griz asked Rabbi Shach, ztz"l, to stay near his sickbed. Rabbi Shach, then the Ponevezher *rosh yeshivah*, explained that it



With his sons Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Rafael, and nephew Rabbi Moshe



Boarding a plane to Switzerland

Rav Shimon Yosef Meller, author of the four-volume *HaRav MiBrisk* (the fourth volume, from which this article was adapted, is scheduled for publication this year), began his fascinating campaign twenty-two years ago; it has consumed hours upon hours of his life. The day that he left Yeshivas Hevron to learn in a "kibbutz" in Yeshivas Brisk, led by Rav David Soloveitchik, *shlita*, was the first page in this project, which grew to astounding proportions.

Rav Meller heard the first stories during the *rosh yeshiva*'s weekly Chumash *shiurim*. After reflecting on these anecdotes, he decided to record them in a notebook. That notebook was soon joined by another, and another; a few years later, he realized that he had a treasure: stories, modes of conduct, commentaries, and explanations. What he had was the beginnings of a biographical sketch of the Brisker Rav, *ztz"l*.

Rav Meller's first foray into the world of print was a series called *Shai l'Torah*, Brisker insights on the weekly *parshah* and holidays. After that series, he published *Uvdos v'Hanhagos l'Beis Brisk*, a series of books listing about 3,000 facts and modes of conduct in Brisk. He says that those publications were the long route that brought him to the point of compiling a biography.

All *yeshiva bochurim* are familiar with the famous *Stencils* of Rav Chaim of Brisk. This sefer was permitted to be printed only in draft form, which testifies to the utmost seriousness accorded toward the written word in Brisk. As a result of this stringency, for almost forty-six years after his passing, no biography was published about him. The stories weren't recorded, the archive material remained in the hands of family members and students, and the wider public remained unaware of the story of the Soloveitchik family.

The widening of the Brisker circle to include thousands of students led to a deep thirst to understand the Brisker method and its originators. The family realized that if the biography wasn't recorded properly, it was bound to be published by some other, unauthorized source, not necessarily reflecting Brisker *emes*.

With his two previous publications, Rav Meller had proven to be a trustworthy and exact historian. So for twenty years, two of the Rav's sons, Rav David and Rav Meir, *shlita*, have been reviewing every story and quote unearthed by Rav Meller. They sift, edit, and approve each word.

Rav Meller has retraced the footsteps of the Brisker Rav, traveling to Volozhin, Brisk, Vilna, Israel, and Switzerland. He has interviewed scores of students living in Europe and the United States; and spent hours digging through archives in Eastern Europe.

That's how he learned of Reb David Heller, of Lugano, who had spent time with the Brisker Rav in Switzerland. Hearing that Reb Heller had some good stories to share, he took the first available flight to Switzerland. For three days, they sat recording Reb Heller's memories of the Rav, covering several chapters in the sefer.

Rav Aharon Baruch Englander, an elderly American Jew whose parents had owned a hotel in the Polish resort town Krinitza, was also a good source of information. As a child, Rav Englander served the Brisker Rav whenever he visited the hotel. Rav Meller spent some days with him, filling yet another notebook filled with valuable material.

Rav Meller brings otherworldly *tzaddikim* to life for his readers with the aid of thousands of rare photos, acquired through great effort and at significant cost. Each volume of his work has some 400 photos.

A number of such photos were located in the home of an elderly non-Jewish woman in Brisk who had worked in the local old age home, and collected photos depicting the life of the Jewish community. Rav Meller even gained access to the photo archives of the German army, which used to photograph its victims before murdering them. He's grateful to the late community leader of Brisk, Reb Shlomo Weinstein, *z"l*, for obtaining permission for him to look through the archives. Rav Meller found photos of the rebbe's children, *Hy"d*, who were murdered during the Holocaust. These photos aroused tremendous emotion within the family.

On *motzaei Rosh HaShanah 5767*, when Rav Meller brought his newly published volume to Rav Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz, a man approached him. He said that his British-born father had studied in Yeshivas Ponevezh forty-seven years earlier, and had owned a camera, a rare possession in those days. The son had discovered some film still inside the old camera, developed it, and found that the roll contained twelve historic pictures of the Brisker Rav's *levayah*.

Gedolim have expressed great amazement at the scope and content of his sefer. As Rav Moshe Sternbuch, *shlita*, head of the Eida HaChareidis writes in his approbation, this is "a sefer halachah in every respect, since all the practices of the Brisker Rav, *ztz"l*, were performed with exceptional halachic precision."



The author with his mentor, Rabbi Meir Soloveitchik

would be proper to ask the Ponevezher Rav's permission for such prolonged absences from the yeshiva.

The Griz did indeed ask Rabbi Kahaneman to "borrow" Rabbi Shach, who remained faithfully at his sickbed throughout — about half a year — returning home to Bnei Brak only for Shabbos.

Every time the Griz, exhausted by illness, would fall asleep, Rabbi Shach would hurry to the nearby Zichron Moshe shul and immerse himself in learning. When the Griz would wake up, one of the Soloveitchik sons would run to Zichron Moshe and knock on the window with a prearranged signal. Rabbi Shach would close his Gemara immediately and rush back to the bedside. They often discussed lofty matters.

During his illness, the Griz kept asking his sons to remind him of *chiddushim* that he'd said over the years. Wracked with pain, he then wrote them down. A large portion of the well-known sefer *Chiddushei Maran Ri"z HaLevi al HaTorah* was written then, a tiny portion of his many *chiddushim*.

Broken Body, Perfect Deeds During those final months, his spiritual magnificence was more awe inspiring than ever. Despite his suffering, not a halachic stringency or mitzvah beautification was overlooked or neglected.

Among other torments, the Griz suffered from a slipped disc, which made lying in bed agonizing and every shift in position excruciating. A famous doctor was summoned about this. After comprehensive tests, he advised that the Griz sleep on his back, the recommended position for this condition, which would substantially ease his pain. The Griz refused, however, because of the prohibition cited in the *Shulchan Aruch*.

"But if it's good for one's health?" the doctor argued.

"It's impossible that anything against halachah can bring about a recovery!" the Rav shot back.

The Brisker Rav was extremely particular never to accept gifts. A male nurse was found for him, but the man refused payment, seeing it as a merit and honor to serve the Torah leader of the generation. The Griz vehemently opposed such an arrangement, and the man was finally convinced to accept payment. Three days before the Griz passed away, he asked whether the man was owed any money.

These were his worries in the extremity of his illness. Even as he sensed the approach of his transition to the Next World, he remained fully involved in the task of perfecting his every earthly deed.

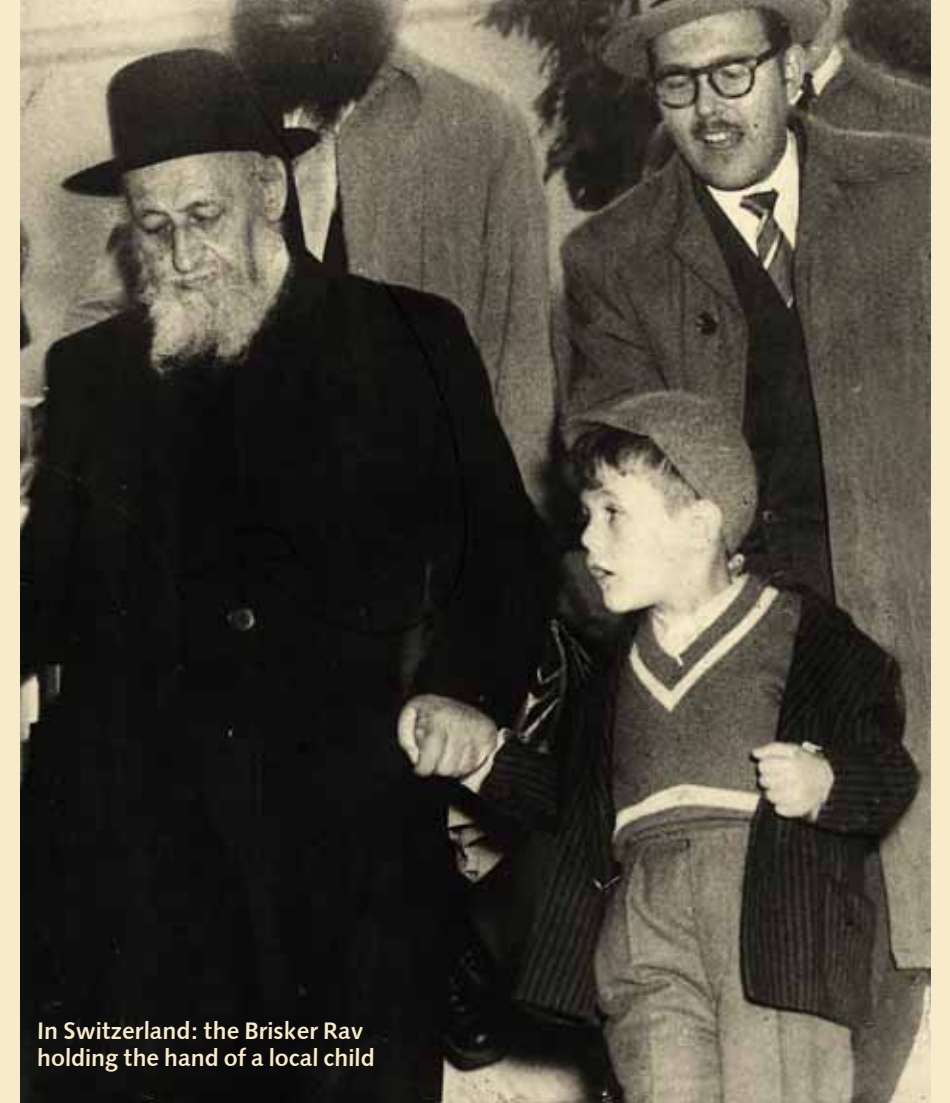
"What About Birchos HaTorah?" The Brisker Rav's focus was unwaveringly on mitzvos and halachah rather than on his deteriorating condition. As a result of his illness, it was hard for him to sleep. On one sleepless night, he was obviously anxious, and expressed his worry to his son Rabbi Meir: "*Ich vill nisht schluffen, un vus veht zein mit birchos haTorah?* [I can't sleep, and what will be with the morning Torah blessings?]" This problem was allowing him no rest.

Rabbi Meir reminded his father that Rabbi Akiva Eiger (*Orach Chaim 47*) rules that one who slept during the previous day, even if he didn't sleep at all that night, must say the *birchos HaTorah*. But the Griz was still not at ease; he continued debating the matter at length. When they'd settled the issue, he fell asleep.

To Disturb the Gaon At one point, the doctor warned the family to prevent the Griz from sleeping, since sleep was dangerous for him then. They began a "disturbance campaign," keeping up a loud and stormy Torah debate near his bed. But it wasn't working. The Griz lay on his bed, eyes closed, face serene, the surrounding clamor making no impression.

As they continued their debate, the voice of the Griz suddenly rang out. One of his sons had put forth a certain explanation. "How could you possibly entertain such a *svara* [line of reasoning]!?" his father demanded.

Seize the Opportunity Contrary to his practice until then, the Griz now began davening as soon as the clock indicated *zman tefillah*. Especially Maariv. He had always waited until it was close to midnight to begin davening, though this delayed his dinner and meant that he went to sleep very late. Now, at the end of his life, he began preparing for Maariv as soon as night approached, asking every few moments if the "*acht"l*" (halachic eighth of a day) had passed. As soon as it had, he immediately began to daven.



In Switzerland: the Brisker Rav holding the hand of a local child

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Rabbi Yosef Dov asked his father why he'd never before davened Maariv at the earlier time, and whether this wouldn't have benefited his health.

The Griz answered that when a person is young, he thinks he's his own authority and can determine his hours of davening as he sees fit. But when he's lying on his sickbed, he's not sure if he will have enough strength to daven altogether. He has to quickly grab the opportunity to merit another tefillah, as long as he's able to do so.

"At Least that Zchus" The Rav now became even more stringent about kashrus, especially that of medications whose kashrus status wasn't clear. His family was shocked, since the Griz had always been stringent about the mitzvah of guarding one's health.

"On the contrary," the Griz answered. "When a person is young, he must carefully preserve his strength and health to serve Hashem properly, and it's worthwhile to be lenient for this purpose. But when one reaches a condition such as this, in which no *hishtadlus* [human effort] will help, being lenient for health's sake will make no difference. So I want to at least have the *zchus* of being especially stringent in matters of food."

He told Rabbi Meir that for someone like himself, accustomed to acting only according to the *Shulchan Aruch* at every step, the illness made it very difficult to gauge every action according to the requirements of halachah.

Through terrible suffering, the Griz was heard murmuring words of Torah, and repeating verses of *emunah* and *bitachon*, such as "*ein od milvado*, there

is none else besides Him,” “*Ani Hashem...*, I am Hashem Who took you out of the land of Egypt,” and “*Yehiyu l’ratzon...*, May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable before You...”

When he muttered in his sleep, there was a marked difference between words of learning and words of davening. When he murmured words of Torah, it was impossible to follow the hurried stream, the lightning-quick thoughts connecting *inyanim* from many *masechtos*. But when he murmured Kriyas Shema, every word was pronounced clearly.

A Reckoning The Griz received his last *aliyah* on Shabbos *parshas Masei*, in early Tammuz. As he read the *haftarah* and said the brachos, his eyes filled with tears. He finished the brachos, with, “*Baruch Atah ... Mkadesh haShabbos,*” and added, “*Nu, ess veht noch zein gut* [it will yet be good].”

That Shabbos, the congregants realized just how ill he was; mass prayers for his recovery began to be held in the various yeshivos and shuls.

But as summer faded, the Griz’s illness intensified. From the first days of Elul 5719/1959, the Griz began recounting to some of his children the events of his life, starting from age five. Eventually, he reviewed close to seventy years, dwelling on the smallest details of some incidents, and asking his listeners’ opinions: “Did I act correctly? ... Could I have acted better in such-and-such a case?”

His family at first feared that this was due to his illness, but then they realized that the Griz was conducting an exacting *cheshbon hanefesh*, a reckoning of all his deeds.

At one point, he mentioned that he had no fears that he’d ever given incorrect advice, because he’d never given

advice to anyone. This statement caused great amazement. “Isn’t it well known that Rabbeinu would advise various people in several matters?” his listeners asked him.

The Griz explained that even then, he’d never instructed anyone to follow a specific course; he had merely “pointed out a *mareh makom*,” a source, and told the questioner of the ramifications of taking such-and-such a step. But this had never fallen into the category of “giving advice.”

Davening for Him The Griz asked, several times, that Divine mercy be sought on his behalf, and that people never stop davening for his health. To Rabbi Eliezer Yehudah Finkel, *ztz”l*, *rosh yeshivah* of Mir, he once complained, “Why aren’t the students davening for my recovery?”

“*Chalilah!* [Heaven forbid!] Of course, they’re davening!” the *Mirror rosh yeshivah* answered.

“Maybe,” the Griz said. “But they’re not davening properly; *einer farlast zich oif’n tzveiten* [each is relying on the other to daven]. Because if they’d been davening properly, I would have felt it, since every time the *tzibbur* davened well, I felt an improvement ...”

When Rabbi Eliezer Pluchinsky visited him, the Griz said, “Have you come to fulfill the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* [visiting the sick]? Doesn’t the Gemara say, ‘If he [the patient] is a Torah scholar, one must make himself ill for his sake’?”

Rabbi Eliezer didn’t tell the Griz that he was fasting at that moment, and davening for the Rav’s recovery.



The Brisker Rav (center) in the Polish resort town of Krynitz

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A rare photograph of the Brisker Rav’s funeral procession as it left his home



The Brisker Rav in Switzerland, accompanied by Rabbi Naftali Halberstam



The Brisker Rav in Munich.

A Delegation to "Reb Shimon" One Thursday during his last Elul, the Griz conveyed to Rabbi Shach his desire that a delegation travel to Meron to beseech Divine mercy at the gravesite of the Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

That same night, two taxis made the long trip from Bnei Brak to Meron, carrying a delegation that included the Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Shach, Rabbi Gedalia Nadel, Rabbi Elazar Tzadok Torchin, Rabbi Baruch Rosenberg (a native of Brisk), Rabbi Chaim Brim, Rabbi Yosef Liss, Rabbi Dovid Frankel, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Steinman (born in Brisk), Rabbi

Chaim Greineman, and Rabbi Yehudah Shapira. They recited the entire *Sefer Tehillim*, and prayed for the recovery of the Torah leader.

When Rabbi Shach returned, the Rav's first question was, "Have you been to Meron yet?" When he answered that *talmidei chachamim* had indeed made the trip, the Griz said, "*Yasher koach!*"

On *erev Rosh HaShanah*, a Pe'ilim van took a minyan to Meron for Selichos. Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman was *shaliach tzibbur*; afterwards, they recited several chapters of *Tehillim* for the recovery of the Brisker Rav.

Only Later Did They Learn ... Between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur of 5720, the Brisker Rav's condition worsened. He could barely eat. He made several statements which seemed enigmatic. Later, the family understood to their sorrow that these had been warnings, which their hearts had been unable to absorb:

When people wished him, "*Ah gut yahr,*" he answered with the unusual phrasing, "*Ah gut yahr far alle Yidden!* [a good year for all the Jews]."

He told his family several times: "This year, there will be two Yom Kippurs. And don't think that they'll be far apart; one will end and the next will begin ..."

Rabbi Shmuel David HaCohen Munk recorded Rabbi Shach's account of the Rav's words, days before his passing: "I won't have a Rosh HaShanah, because I couldn't daven properly due to my illness. And apparently I won't have a Yom Kippur. And isn't Yom Kippur a luxury? But I would have wanted to have another Yom Kippur ..."

He told his son Rabbi Meir: "*Es iz far-macht gevoren alle toiren* [all the gates have been closed]."

During that time, whenever his children tried to do anything to ease his pain, he told them, "*Kinder, chapt arein mitzvas kibud av* [Children, grab the opportunity to do the mitzvah of honoring your father, while you still can] ..."

To Rabbi Amram Blau, *ztz"l*, who visited him during one of the Ten Days of Repentance, he commented: "After I merited to be saved from the war and reached Eretz Yisrael, I had a strong desire, and I was sure that I would indeed fulfill it: to sit in a *beis medrash* in Jerusalem and learn, since Jerusalem is *ah shveire shtadt* [a difficult city]. Eventually, I learned that I couldn't do so, and I began to be a little more active [in community affairs]. Today, it pains me that I wasn't more active ..."

This Year Will Be Different On Shabbos Shuvah, 8 Tishrei, he tried to recite Kiddush in bed. When his daugh-

ter brought him some ground meat to strengthen his heart, he mentioned that it was Shabbos, and that one should eat fish, too.

All day, wracked with intense suffering, he repeated, "What will be on Yom Kippur?" As someone whose whole life was centered on Hashem's will and His mitzvos, his focus remained on the approaching Yom Kippur.

Motzaei Shabbos Shuvah. The Griz had been lying in bed for hours, weary and spent, since Shabbos afternoon. He awoke late at night and asked for a cup of wine to recite Havdalah.

His medicine was brought; he refused to take it. Asked if he no longer intended to take it, he answered, "*Ihr zehnt noch nisht?!* [You still don't realize?!]"

With Sealed Lips Usually, the Griz did not recite HaMapil, fearing that he might not manage to fall asleep and his brachah would then be in vain. But during his illness, realizing that weakness was causing him to sleep, he said HaMapil a number of times. On that *motzei Shabbos parshas Haazinu*, his last night, as soon as he finished Havdalah, he said the brachah of HaMapil with Hashem's Name.

He said nothing more aloud, but his family heard him whispering repeatedly, "*Rachamim mrubim ...* [abundant mercy]."

Late in the night, the male nurse who had been treating him realized that his condition had worsened, and injected him with a drug to strengthen his heart. Early in the morning, Professor Tzundek was summoned. When the Griz was told that the doctor had arrived, he acknowledged this by a flicker of his eyelids.

After a thorough examination, Dr. Tzundek calmed the family: "*De hartz arbeit gut, der dofek is oichet gut, ken men zein optimi* [The heart is working well, the pulse is also good. We can be optimistic]."

He left a medicine, but the Griz refused to take it. Even when told that Professor Tzundek, whom he trusted, was the one who'd decided that he should take it, he still refused to give in to his family pleas. Then his daughter realized what was happening. "*Tatte!*" she said. "*Es is noch nisht Yom Kippur!* [Tatte, it's not Yom Kippur yet!]" Only then did he take the medicine.

But despite the doctor's words, the Rav's condition appeared to be worsening. He was still lying silently, his eyes closed. At 3 p.m., the famous Professor Halperin was summoned. After a series of examinations, he concluded in a voice

continued on page 58

continued from page 50

filled with pain, tears streaming: “*Di alle funktzios fun lebben faleshen zich ois* ... [All the vital functions are shutting down].”

The family immediately summoned Rabbi Shach from Bnei Brak, who phoned the Griz’s daughter and son-in-law in Tel Aviv, urging them to hurry to Jerusalem as well. Despite the late hour, Rabbi Shach managed to arrive at the home of the Griz on time.

Sunset The sun dipped low onto the horizon; shuls throughout the country filled with masses of Jews, fearfully beginning Kol Nidrei. In the home of the Griz, the usual minyan was slowly assembling, preparing to daven. The two usual *baalei tefillah*, Rabbi Shmuel Aharon Yudelevitz and Rabbi Avraham David Friedman, were reciting *Shir HaShirim* with great emotion.

Some of the Rav’s sons were reciting the Tefillah Zakah. His son Rabbi Rafael, *ztz”l*, was trying to adjust the oxygen mask to ease his father’s breathing. Suddenly, the Griz opened his piercing eyes, lifted his head, and leaned toward him. An otherworldly smile lit his pain-etched face; perhaps it was the smile of a son greeting his fathers, as they prepared a seat for him in the Yeshivah on High.

With the last rays of the sun, *erev Yom Kippur* 5720, as all those present cried out the Shema, the pure *neshamah* of the Brisker Rav ascended Heavenward.

We Are Left Orphans The bitter news spread quickly through the yeshivos and shuls of Jerusalem, leaving those who heard it shocked and pained. As the davening ended, masses streamed toward the home of the Griz, to recite Tehillim beside him.

A student of Mir Yeshivah describes the reaction of the *rosh yeshivah*, Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, *ztz”l*: “On *motzaei Yom Kippur*, I entered his home. There I saw the *rosh yeshivah*, crying bitterly. Hot tears streamed from his eyes, and his sobs were growing stronger and stronger. It’s hard to describe to someone who wasn’t there. I never saw a person cry and wail to that extent; it wasn’t like a son crying for his father, or for any other trouble. Here was one of the spiritual giants of our generation, sitting, crying, and wailing for the *gaon hador* who had passed away. Between waves



A miracle creation: “The Brisker Rav,” Vol. III

“**On *motzaei Yom Kippur*, I entered his home. There I saw the *rosh yeshivah*, crying bitterly. Hot tears streamed from his eyes, and his sobs were growing stronger and stronger**”

of sobbing, he wailed, ‘The Rav has passed away! ... We are left orphans!’”

In the yeshivos of Hevron, Knesses Yisrael, and Slabodka, during the customary break between Kol Nidrei and Maariv, the bitter news hit like a thunderbolt and spread like a brushfire. Shock and sorrow marked the faces of the hundreds of congregants; many sat and cried. Rabbi Shalom Schwadron, *ztz”l*, the *baal tefillah*, recited the *piyutim* quickly, without his usual singing.

Streams of Mourners Rabbi Mendel Czeczuk, who was very close to the Griz, recounts:

“We knew that his condition had greatly worsened on *erev Yom Kippur*, so as soon as the davening of the holy night concluded, I walked toward the home of the Griz to find out how he was faring.

“I didn’t have to enter to learn the bitter truth. Even from a distance, I saw the wide-open door and my heart plummeted. It was then that the realization hit like a thunderbolt: ‘The holy Ark had been taken captive,’ and the Griz had been summoned to the Yeshivah on High.

“When I entered the house, I saw the terrible sight. The pure body of the Griz had been laid out on the ground; in the adjoining room, his sons and the rest of

the minyan were davening Yom Kippur Maariv. The large crowd that streamed to the house at the time, after they’d finished davening in their shuls, at once began reciting Tehillim alongside the *mitah*, with great emotion. I hurried to the home of my brother, Rabbi Velvel, *ztz”l* ... He burst into bitter weeping, and let out a great, bitter wail ...

“We returned to the Rav’s home and recited Tehillim the entire night. When dawn broke, we went to daven Shacharis at *vasikin*, so that we would be available to recite Tehillim next to the *mitah* later, when his family would be busy davening.

“After the close of the holy day, as the bitter news spread throughout the country, masses of Jews began making their way to the Rav’s home. The Steipler, *ztz”l*, arrived along with his son from Bnei Brak, and entered the house with fear and trembling, entirely overwrought. For a long time he stood near the *mitah*, broken and shattered, lips moving silently, hot tears coursing down his cheeks and beard, mourning the passing of the *tzaddik*.

“In the *beis medrash* of Yeshivas Hevron, Maariv of *motzei Yom Kippur* ended. After Kiddush Levanah, when the *bochurim* started as always to sing ‘Tovim Meoros,’ the *roshei yeshivah* stopped them, saying that it wasn’t a time for singing, especially not that song [which describes the luminaries of the heavens], since the great luminary had just been extinguished.”

Thousands of Miles Back Jerusalem saw a *levayah* such as it had not witnessed in years. Before the *mitah* reached Har HaMenuchos, Rabbi Ben Tzion Yadler addressed a huge crowd that had gathered there. “Though Chazal say, ‘One who dies on *erev Yom Kippur*, it’s a bad sign,’” he said, “still, ‘witnesses are preferable to signs.’ And aren’t we all faithful witnesses to the greatness and piety of the Brisker Rav?!”

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, *ztz”l*, closed with the words: “He was the last general. Ribono shel Olam, allow us to ask You: ‘Is this what you do to the remnant of Yisrael?’” and burst out crying.

While he followed the *mitah* to the cemetery, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, *ztz”l*, called out, “Who knows how many thousands of miles we have regressed, with the passing of the Brisker Rav?!” ■