

THE SHELBY FAMILY EDITION

SUNSET



Rav Miller's Final Days

Special publication by *Toras Avigdor*
in honor of the 20th Yahrtzeit
27 Nissan 5781

THE SHELBY FAMILY EDITION

SUNSET

RAV MILLER'S FINAL DAYS

Special publication by
Toras Avigdor
in honor of the 20th Yahrtzeit
27 Nissan 5781



IN MEMORIAM

טוב שם משפּחָה טוב וְיוֹם הַמּוֹת מִיּוֹם הַנּוֹלָד
לזכר עולם יחקק בספר נשמת רבי פינחס בן גרז שלבי ז"ל

“Tonight I'm going to make this one remark before we hear questions. Tonight is the 300th tape on this list and actually there are a lot of more tapes than that. And we should remember that **this entire institution was started by one man - Pinchas Shelby**. He was the one who thought this up, from the very beginning. Not only that, he came every Thursday night with his car to pick me up and he took me home after the lecture. And it cost him a lot of money, week after week, because there were expenses involved here.

And then it was his initiative to spread the tapes to the world. **The tapes spread across the world because of him**. It was his vision from the beginning; he thought about it before anyone else did.

And therefore I invited him to come tonight to join us, but he said if he'll come and get glory, it will be deducted from his Olam Haboh. And so we'll let him keep his Olam Haboh intact but we'll give him this honor anyhow. **Our thanks, our gratitude and our blessings go out to Reb Pinchas Shelby; we wish him and his family hatzlocha and brocha le'orech yomim tovim.**”

—Rav Avigdor Miller: Tape 300 (February 1980)

There is no doubt that the influence of Rav Miller's words today can be traced back to that vision of Reb Pinchas Shelby so many years ago. He introduced Rav Miller to the Flatbush community and played a pivotal role in establishing the Rav in the shul on Ocean Parkway from where he taught Torah to the world until his last days.

Reb Pinchas is surely sitting in Olam Haboh today continually reaping the benefits of dedicating himself to bringing Rav Miller's words to the world at large. For that we are eternally grateful to him.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD | 5

SUNSET | 11

TZAVAS | 40



FOREWORD

As we approach the third decade since the passing of our rebbi, Rav Avigdor Miller zatzal, the heartache we feel because of our great loss is tempered only by the knowledge that the Rav's eternal legacy continues to spread among the mivakshei Hashem who are thirsty for authentic Torah hashkafa. Baruch Hashem, many who had never even heard his name when he was alive – some of them not even having been born yet – are now being exposed to his timeless words and the Rav continues to acquire new talmidim even twenty years after his petirah.

Nobody could formulate this idea like the Rav did and so we quote from his own words:

The gemara in Brachos tells us that whenever Rabbi Yochanan would finish the sefer Iyov, he would say as follows: **וסוף בהמה**, The end of a man is that he must die, **סוף אדם למוות** – and the end of a cow is the slaughterhouse, **והכל אשרי מי שגדל בתורה** – nobody will escape death, **למיתה הם עומדים** – and so, happy is the man who grew up in Torah; it means he grew up in an atmosphere of Torah, **ועמלו בתורה** – and he labors in studying Torah, **ועושה נחת רוח ליוצרו** – and he does things that are pleasing to his Creator, **וגדל בשם טוב** – and as he grew up he develops a good name for himself, **ונפטר בשם טוב** – and he passes away with a good name. **ועליו אמר שלמה**. And Rabbi Yochanan concluded with the following: About such a person Shlomo Hamelech said, **טוב שם משמן טוב ויום המות מיום הולדו** – A

good name is better than good oil and the day of death is better than the day of birth.

Now, if we're going to understand this statement of Rabbi Yochanan, we must first ask, why does he have to speak about dead animals? He says there that "the end of cattle is to be slaughtered." What does that have to do with our subject? The end of the man is death and therefore we understand he should be interested in creating a good name for himself that should continue on after he passes away. But why mention *וְסוּף בְּהֵמָה לִשְׁחִיטָה*, that the end of cattle is for slaughtering?

So we understand that Rabbi Yochanan is teaching us a lesson here; he's comparing the end of man to the end of a beheima. You know, a beheima when it was alive, it did a lot of good things. It gave milk. Milk is wonderful! It worked too – it pulled a wagon and it fertilized the fields; maybe it gave rides to children too. A cow is very useful when it's alive.

And so, when we finally slaughter that cow, we think it's finished; we imagine that it's the end of the cow benefiting us in this world.

But Rabbi Yochanan is telling us that it's not over – no. The cow continues to exist in the world for a very long time.

First of all, because of the cow we have meat for the cholent; that's already something! Many pounds of meat we get from a cow; all different types of cuts. We appreciate the cow for that.

And there's more. A cow lives for maybe twenty years but from the cow's hide you make shoes that last a long time; a good pair of shoes could be worn sometimes for thirty years. It means that the cow is still living on your feet for even more years than it lived on the farm.

You can also make from the cow's hide many leather belts. A lot of people in this world are able to keep their pants from falling down because of this dead cow. And there are

better things too! From the skin you can make retzuos and batim for tefillin. You can make a sefer Torah that will last sometimes a hundred years.

So the beheima, when it dies sometimes it's more useful than when it was alive. That's what it means סוף בהמה לשחיטה – The end purpose of the beheima is when it's shechted; sometimes that's when its career begins – it's doing more after its death than it would have been if it had remained alive.

And so Rabbi Yochanan brings that as a parallel for us to understand that just like cattle were created by Hakodosh Baruch Hu to be useful – nothing in their career is wasted; in their lifetime and even after their death – also humans can use that analogy and realize that no matter how beneficial their life can be for this world, no matter how many benefits their activities can be for this world while they are still alive, but it is possible to be of great use to the world even when your time comes to leave the world; **and in many cases when people die they achieve more than they did in their lifetime.**

It is a fact – of course you wouldn't remember it – but when the Chofetz Chaim zatzal was alive he was a very active man. He was constantly travelling and speaking everywhere and issuing proclamations, kol koreis to observe this and observe that. He was writing seforim and calling meetings to raise money for yeshivos. He was very active! But the fact is that when the Chofetz Chaim passed away, *that's* when his activity increased.

When he was alive, he was just one more talmid chacham. There were great men in those days and some were considered greater than him. In the eyes of the generation there were bigger men than the Chofetz Chaim.

But when the Chofetz Chaim passed away, that's when the world began to understand what he had been; there became a new ideal in the world to study the Chofetz Chaim's ways and to emulate them. **And the truth is that his influence**

has increased since his death from year to year. Today the world is under the influence of the Chofetz Chaim. We're learning his Mishna Berurah. Everybody's keeping shmiras haloshon. The whole world is talking about obeying the Chafetz Chaim. So the Chafetz Chaim accomplished more after he died than when he was alive.

Like it states, גדולים צדיקים במיתתם יותר מבחייהם – The righteous are greater when they die than when they are alive. Now, it's meant there in a different sense but it is true in this sense too. It's like the world says, "You cannot measure a tree until it is down." When it is lying in the street and you walk its length you're surprised: "I didn't imagine it was *that* tall," you say.

And therefore Rabbi Yochanan offers us this analogy to remind us that a man should attempt to live in such a way that when his time comes he will be remembered for his good deeds and **his influence will continue to exercise a beneficial effect on people.**

And that is what he says, טוב שם – A good name is better, משמן טוב – than good oil, perfumed oil. Let's say, if you would douse your hair in sweet oil, perfumed oil, and you would walk through a room and then depart, but the fragrance would still remain for a long time. Anyone entering that room would enjoy the fragrance of the person that passed through.

But even though good oil is something pleasurable and it leaves a pleasant fragrance after you leave, a good name is even more so. Because when a man passes through this world and he leaves over a good name, that good name is much more important than a sweet smell. And the fragrance of the good name continues to linger on in the world forever. Not like we think, that sooner or later it will be forgotten; no, it's never forgotten. It becomes part of the heritage of our people and for generations and generations **until the end of time, someone is going to be influenced – maybe many people,**

maybe everyone — by the example that he created in his lifetime.

You don't realize how effective good behavior is. If you'd study the subject you would see that one good man in a group has an influence on the others; **and this influence is not limited to the world of his group – it extends on and on in the world and it pervades all society and passes through all generations.**

(Tape 266 – June 1979)

Any more words that we would try to add to describe the phenomenon of seeing the Rav's influence spread across the Jewish world twenty years after his petirah would be superfluous.



We conclude our preface to this booklet with the words of Reb Dovid Miller, a long time talmid of the Rav, that were written shortly after the Rav's petirah.

He was a remarkable man. He knew how to relate to every person based on that individual's perspective and ability to comprehend, be he a yeshiva man, a baal teshuva, a balabos, a nonobservant Jew, a non-Jew; everyone.

The essential message, though, was always the same. He did not descend to each person's station to make the hashkafa of Torah acceptable to him. Rather, he knew how to reach and elevate each person in order to teach and inspire him to attain the greatness he wanted to elicit from him.

As a result, each individual discerned a different Rabbi Miller, according to his understanding. One saw the Rebbe par excellence, who presented simple pshat in the Gemara and made it accessible to even those without yeshiva backgrounds. A more advanced talmid appreciated how he had already pre-

digested the rishonim in his presentation, and had smoothed out all the difficulties.

A person educated in the sciences understood how he utilized the vast complexities of the world's phenomena to convince the student of the greatness of Hashem. Another simply saw a man who savored Hashem's creation and used the awareness of its sweetness to fill his life with happiness.

Many viewed him as a father whose individual difficulties were his personal concerns. Yet, another noticed his reddened eyes when he entered the shul after the reports of scud missiles striking Eretz Yisroel, and recognized him as a father of the entire klal.

Talmidim would see a towering figure, and quake as he walked by. The thousands who knew only his voice and written word recognized the rabbi to whom all the events of history and the marvels of life were an open book. Women who would notice him on his walks knew the kindly rav who would bless their entire families. Their children only knew the nice rabbi who gave them lollipops and toys.

And so, there would be really no way to present a unified biography of this odom godol. We would rather need a thousand biographies to properly assess all the aspects of his greatness.

In all his deeds, the Rov strove to achieve the greatness which Hashem desires of us. By considering and trying to emulate the deeds of this servant of Hashem, perhaps we can each grow a bit also, and earn the same sublime reward which he is now enjoying.

SUNSET

RAV MILLER'S FINAL DAYS

We have received the gracious consent of Judaica Press to reproduce the final chapter of “Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and His Revolution”. As we mark 20 years since the day that our sun set, we relive those final days with wistfulness, wishing that we could see the Rav just one more time.

At the age of 93 the Rav was so vibrant and happy, so alive, that we can truly say that the sun set for us at midday. There is so much more we could have gained from his carefully measured words, so much more we could have gained from seeing him live a life saturated with avodas Hashem. And yet even as he lived his final days he was still teaching us – just like he taught us how to live in this world, the way he left this world was no less of a lesson. From the sunset, we see how the sun shined.

PRODUCTIVE AND VIBRANT IN HIS OLD AGE

Until the very end of his long career, Rabbi Miller was fresh and robust, even retaining his youthful appearance. He maintained his full schedule — a full week of shiurim, writing, answering countless questions and walking — until the last week of his life.

Shimon,* who learned in kollel, was trying to help Yoram,* an irreligious Israeli, tackle his questions about Judaism. After many months, Yoram was convinced intellectually that Judaism was the true religion but was still hesitant to make the commitment to become fully observant. Finally, he asked, “Are religious Jews really happy?”

Thinking how best to respond, Shimon’s eye fell on a picture he had in his drawer. He took it out and asked the man, “How old do you think the man in the picture is?”

Yoram looked at the picture and guessed that the man was about 55.

“And what if I told you he was 85?” Shimon said.

Yoram couldn’t believe it. Shimon explained to him that happiness kept the man in the picture fresh and young-looking.

“Who is that?” Yoram asked.

“Rabbi Avigdor Miller.”

* A pseudonym.

This incident made a deep impression on Yoram, and he decided to become observant — and even sent his children to yeshivah.

Not only did Rabbi Miller's happy attitude to life keep him looking young, it actually helped keep his body healthy and strong.

Rabbi Miller was once in the hospital, and the nurse handed him a little dish. He asked what it was for.

"You don't know what it is?" the nurse responded incredulously. "It's for your teeth."

"Well, I don't have any false teeth."

The nurse could not believe a man his age could have all his teeth. "I took care of my teeth," he said, "and Hashem [pointing with his finger heavenward] gave me a free gift."



Preparing for the Great Bechinah

When Rabbi Miller turned seventy, he changed his schedule. He began to cut back on the hours he slept at night and instead took a few short naps during the day. When his grandson asked him why he was doing this, he answered, "Now, I need to prepare for the great bechinah. I don't sleep because I like to sleep, but rather in order to get strength to serve Hashem. Now, this is what I have to do."

It was time to prepare for the great "test" that he would be given upon arriving in Olam Haba, and during the last years of his life Rabbi Miller fully immersed himself in preparations. Whenever he needed to excuse himself for not attending a simchah or function, he said that he was preparing for the "great bechinah," which was in addition to his constant preparation for his shiurim. He participated less and less in simchos, and stayed only for a short time at those he did attend, such as

family simchos. While at simchos, he often carried his coat in his hand. “It reminds me to leave as soon as I can,” he once explained.

He had been meticulous with his time his entire life, but now he became even stricter. A grandson asked him to officiate as kohen at the pidyon haben for his great-grandson. When Rabbi Miller asked him where it was to take place, he answered, “Boro Park.”

“Well, let’s see,” Rabbi Miller mused. “Factoring in traffic, we have to reckon twenty minutes to get there and twenty minutes back, and I will have to spend at least twenty minutes there, so we are talking about an hour. Well, I will have to think about that. Come back tomorrow.”

He would go to a bris only if it was early enough not to disrupt his schedule of shiurim. A talmid once made a bris in Flatbush and asked Rabbi Miller to attend. Since this talmid was also very close to Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, he scheduled the bris to accommodate Reb Yaakov, and Rabbi Miller did not come. During his talk in shul the next Shabbos, he said that Reb Yaakov had called him and rebuked him for not making an exception in this situation, and so he was asking the baal simchah for forgiveness. Nonetheless, he did not change his policy and trusted that people making simchos would understand.

In his last years, Rabbi Miller kept five gemaras next to his seat in shul: Bava Metzia, Sanhedrin, Chullin, Kiddushin and Pesachim. He told his grandson that he wanted to review these masechtos several times until he knew them by heart, because he was afraid that he would not get to learn them again with his shul. When he sat down to eat during the week, he always had a gemara open in front of him. He referred to his meal-learning as learning “for himself” (in contrast to the hours he spent preparing for the many daily gemara shiurim he gave in the shul) and he explained that he was learning for his “great bechinah.” His son-in-law often saw him learning Bava Kama and Bava Metzia.

When Rabbi Shmuel Elchonon Brog recovered from a difficult surgery shortly after he turned seventy, his family made a seudas hodaah. His father-in-law Rabbi Miller spoke at the event and said, “I made a mistake. When I turned seventy, I contemplated the meaning of ‘Y’mei sh’noseinu bahem shivim shanah,’ the average person lives to seventy

[Tehillim 90:10]. I saw no reason that I should be any different, so I began to invest energy to prepare myself. Now, it is more than twenty years later and I realize that I should have made many plans to accomplish new projects. All of you should be making many plans to accomplish. Now, indeed I have many more plans for new undertakings”

In Hashem’s Hands

About ten years before Rabbi Miller passed away, he came down with a potentially serious medical issue but refused to undergo surgery because of halachic concerns. The Rebbetzin was very worried, but the Rav completely ignored the situation and carried on as if nothing was wrong. Six months later, his doctors said that he was completely healed and noted on his medical record “miracle”! Once when someone else was stricken with the same illness, Rabbi Miller encouraged him, saying, “I willed it away.”

Three-and-a-half years before he passed away, Rabbi Miller began to faint sporadically. The doctors attributed this to a faulty valve in his heart and wanted to operate. Rabbi Miller was very unsure if he should undergo the surgery, since someone he knew had actually died a short time before from that very procedure. Rabbi Miller pushed off the surgery for a few months, leaning toward not having it at all. During that time, he once passed out in the middle of saying Shema by Maariv. Some people were very concerned, but he just sat back up and continued davening from where he had been up to. When a doctor came over, he brushed him off, saying, “It’s nothing serious.”

His doctor tried to convince him to go through with the surgery, arguing that it did not pose such a risk since he was in good health. The Rebbetzin also wanted him to have the surgery. At one point the doctor told Rabbi Miller that he should do the surgery “for the sake of his very loyal wife.” Rabbi Miller agreed to have it done, and he told his grandson that he did it for shalom bayis. The grandson asked, “Do you have to do so much [for shalom bayis]?” He replied, “Even more.”

Once he resolved to have the surgery he never looked back and did not worry about the risks. He had made his decision — and the results were in Hashem’s hands.

The Shabbos before the operation fell out on parashas Vayeira 5758 (1997). Every week by seudah shlishis, the participants would sing two or three zemiros, and then start Shir Hamaalos when Rabbi Miller signaled to them. That week, he motioned to them to continue singing. They sang approximately ten zemiros and niggunim, including his favorites (such as “V’sen banu yetzer tov” and “Ana avda d’Kudsha Brich Hu”).

On the day of the surgery, Rabbi Miller went about his routine like any other day. At nine in the morning he took his daily fifteen-minute nap. A family member asked him why he needed to take a nap if in a few hours he would be undergoing surgery and sleeping. Rabbi Miller answered that he never slept because he loved to sleep, but to acquire yishuv hadaas, and on this day as well he needed yishuv hadaas.

The rest of the morning Rabbi Miller spent writing his commentary on Bamidbar. The doctors were awed by his composure and ability to concentrate at such a time. They had to exert effort to pull him out of his deep concentration.

When the time for the surgery arrived, Rabbi Miller sat calmly. It seemed to those with him as if the imminent surgery had nothing to do with him. He didn’t understand why his family was so nervous.

“I’m in Hashem’s hands,” he said.

The surgery was successful, and the doctor even mentioned that his arteries were remarkably healthy at age eighty-nine. However, the surgery did not completely resolve his issues and he needed a pacemaker inserted a few months later.

During recovery, he told his grandson Reb Simcha Bunim Cohen that he shteiged in three areas from his hospital stay.

First was the merit he gained through suffering. Pointing to the George Washington Bridge out of his window, Rabbi Miller asked him, “Do you see that bridge? Do you have any idea how it was built? I was there. Just as you have no idea how that bridge was built, so you have no idea how the world was when I grew up. When I was growing up, it was my hope that at least one of my children would grow up to be shomer Shabbos. On the way into the operation, I saw my three daughters sitting

and saying Tehillim. I recognize the great kindness that Hashem has done for me through my entire life. I merited sons, sons-in-law and grandchildren, all of whom are b'nei Torah! Until now I was always nervous, lest the nachas I derive from my family minimize my zechusim. But now that I'm going through some suffering, perhaps I will merit saving some for Olam Haba."

"Second," he said, "I developed a greater love for my children when I saw them sitting and saying Tehillim. Third, from the service I received I came to recognize the tzelem Elokim in gentiles, which in the past I was never able to perceive."

A few short weeks after the surgery, Rabbi Miller began slowly returning to his regular schedule. In all of his drashos, he never once made any mention of the surgery.

Everyone was expecting the master of gratitude to express his heartfelt feelings publicly, but no such expressive thanks was forthcoming. Yeshiva Beis Yisroel made its annual dinner in the winter and dedicated it to his recovery. At the dinner they recited a chapter in Tehillim (30) and said some words about Rabbi Miller's recovery. He participated in the program without the slightest show of emotion as if it were someone else they were discussing.

On Purim of that year he was asked about it but he did not respond. Since it was Purim the questioner allowed himself the liberty to speak more bluntly and said, "The Rav is always demanding expressions of gratitude. How come the Rav didn't say anything publicly?"

Rabbi Miller finally turned to the questioner and answered seriously, "Everything I speak is only what the public has to hear. What is between me and the Eibishter remains between me and the Eibishter."

An Eved Hashem to the End

Rabbi Miller purchased a burial plot on Har Hazeisim a number of years before his passing. When asked about the advantage of buying a plot in Eretz Yisrael he replied, "I can give you many of the answers that are mentioned in the sefarim, but is it not sufficient that in Eretz Yisrael a person's bones are closer to the Shechinah?"

He began preparing for the “opportunity” of death years before, just as he prepared for the opportunities of living. He prepared a “program of life” in his younger years, in which he wrote a number of detailed lists for every conceivable situation and the proper thoughts and opportunities that should accompany each one. On the list pertaining to the periods of a person’s life, under the entry for “old age,” he wrote: the responsibility to do teshuvah and say viduy, and the mitzvah of loving Hashem even when being taken from the world.

Q:

Which mitzvah could someone take upon himself nowadays to do with mesiras nefesh?

A:

Well, it’s a good idea to accept all of them; but if you’re looking for one then look in the chumash: **וָאָהַבְתָּ אֶת הָשֵׁם אֱלֹקֶיךָ** – The mitzvah of loving Hashem. That mitzvah is one of the most neglected of all mitzvos – to love Hashem!

And if you want to start on it right away without any delay, so get busy right now thinking of all the things that happened to other people. There are so many things that happened to other people that didn’t happen to you.

Love Hashem that you never had an eye operation. That’s enough of a reason to love Him. You never had an eye operation?! An eye operation – you have to go with a bandage on your eyes for weeks and weeks. You can say, “Boruch Hashem! I love You Hashem that I never had an eye operation.”

Some people never had a bone broken – you have to love Hashem for that. **שׁוּמֵר כָּל עַצְמוֹתָיו** – He guarded all of your bones, **אֶחָת מֵהֵנָּה לֹא נִשְׁבְּרָה** – not one was never broken (Tehillim 34:21). Did you ever think about that? You never had a broken bone in your life?! Yes, there are some people who never broke a bone. And they have to love Hashem for that.

Get busy now; don't waste any more time. This mitzvah actually requires everything you have – you have to love Hashem **בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאורך**. But if you're not going to do that, at least a little bit you should love Him. And it's not too difficult. On a small scale, it's certainly possible. And of course, if you keep on practicing you'll become more and more of an expert.

If you're interested in mesiras nefesh, if you wish to accept one mitzvah to do **בכל נפשך**, with mesiras nefesh, that's it. And make up your mind that when you're 119 years and 11 months and 29 days old – you have one more day left to live, so you'll think, "My time is up already? Is this fair? I planned on living another thousand years! I have to go away from this world already?! I never promised to go away from this world. I never signed up in the chevrah shtarbers. So why should I have to leave the world?" At that moment think, "Hashem, I love you anyhow. Even though You're taking me now, I love You anyhow!"

Now keep this in mind, rabbosai. At your last moment think this thought. "You're taking my life away, Hashem – I love You anyhow." The gemara says that **בכל נפשך** means **אפילו בשעה שנוטל את נפשך** – Even when He's taking away your life you have to love Him anyhow. Say, "I love You anyhow!" Oh, it's a very great zchus if you'll think that way. You're lucky you came tonight just to hear that – to get ready for your last moment.

Pray to Hashem that you shouldn't be in a coma in the last moment; that you should have full awareness. And in your last moments. just before you breathe your last breath, you should say, "I love You, Hashem."

Of course, you shouldn't wait. Don't wait; don't wait! Practice it beforehand. It's not so easy when a man's about to die, to love Hashem. So while you're healthy – you're walking in the street and breathing the air and you're full of food and your blood is coursing through your veins, that's when you

can learn to love Hashem. When you practice up that way, so in your last minute it's easier.

And in that last minute, you'll acquire a zchus gedolah ad l'Shamayim – a tremendous merit! And that's called dying with mesiras nefesh, with a love of Hashem.

TAPE # E-5

Rabbi Miller often spoke of the need to be prepared for death and of the necessity to be prepared to greet death properly. He would relate with great satisfaction about the merit he had in helping someone leave the world properly. He once heard that an irreligious neighbor was on his deathbed. Since Rabbi Miller was a kohen and thus forbidden to be in the house of a deceased person, he immediately called Rabbi Brog to go in and say viduy with him. Right after the man finished saying viduy, he passed away.

Rabbi Miller taught that one of the gifts of “getting old” was that it allowed a person to prepare for death. He gave the following examples of how one should prepare:

Check your sefarim shelf and see if you have someone else's sefer in your possession that you borrowed and forgot to return.

Pay off all of your debts.

Ask forgiveness from anyone you may have slighted.

Prepare a spiritual last will, because things you tell your family at that time will likely be accepted.

Thank Hashem for all of His kindness and make sure that you leave this world with love of Hashem in your heart.

Review the things that you learned, over and over.

Several years before he passed away, Rabbi Miller underwent a procedure during which he was required to lie totally still for many hours. His son came into his hospital room and found the Rav in good spirits, deeply engrossed in

thought. He asked, “How did you occupy yourself during this seven-hour ordeal?”

There was no reply. Finally, after persistent questioning, he looked up at his son and answered, “In the last seven hours I reviewed twenty-five chiddushim I have on parashas Bereishis.”

On another occasion, when again he had to lie still for long hours, Rabbi Miller could be heard mumbling under his breath. After his son pressed him to reveal what he was saying, Rabbi Miller said that he was reviewing masechtas Bechoros from beginning to end.

On the last Sukkos of his life, Rabbi Miller fainted. Tests showed that this time his fainting was due to a blood disease that made him very weak. He was given medication, but the side effects were disturbing his regular schedule. He therefore opted not to take the prescribed medicine and instead took a milder form. He felt somewhat stronger most of that winter and continued with his shiurim as usual. He also merited to finish the work on his commentary to Devarim and to publish it, completing his five volume set on Chumash.

He was undecided which project to undertake next. He wanted to review Shas a few more times, but he also wanted to work on his commentary on Perek Chelek (the last chapter of Sanhedrin), which is full of aggadata on the fundamentals of Jewish belief. Years before, he had delivered a special shiur on Perek Chelek, and someone had taken notes and given him a copy. For years, Rabbi Miller very much wanted to work on editing and publishing them.

He refused to give up his daily walks, although he walked a bit slower than usual and needed to rest sometimes in the middle. Otherwise, he exhibited his normal good health and strength.

One day, he felt unwell and the Rebbetzin sent for one of the doctors in shul to come up to their apartment. The Rav’s family came as well, and he told everyone to stop “fussing” over him. He turned to someone and

said, "When both Mr. Richards from the old shul and I turned seventy, we congratulated each other. At eighty, I was thrilled, while the doctors weren't hopeful. Now at ninety-two and two months, I am nothing but very thankful."

There were many hints that last year that he knew his end was near.

People who regularly heard his Shabbos talks pointed out to each other how he was speaking with an unusual passion about Hashem and Olam Haba, more so than they had ever heard throughout the years. A grandson noted that in every Thursday night lecture toward the end of his life, no matter what the topic was, he mentioned Olam Haba.

On Shabbos Shuvah of that year Rabbi Miller spoke about dreams and emphatically exclaimed, "Most dreams are nothing and don't mean anything." Discerning listeners feared he had had an ominous dream about himself. On Shemini Atzeres he spoke very strongly about how no one lives forever and everyone has to utilize opportunities while they are available. He mentioned explicitly that he would not always be here. After leaving the Chanukah mesibah that year, he blessed one of his grandchildren that he live a long life. When his grandchild responded, "V'chein I'mar [You, too]," Rabbi Miller replied, "I have already lived a long life."

The last Thursday before Pesach, Rabbi Miller asked Reb Gershon Kreuser to come over. He discussed many things that were uncharacteristic of him, and in hindsight Reb Gershon felt that he had had some premonition of his upcoming passing.

At the last Shabbos aggadata shiur of his life, after he had finished the shiur, he uncharacteristically started to speak again. He added, "I want you to know something very important. Don't think you are ever coming back to this world again. This life is the best opportunity you will ever have. Make something of yourself!"

At the end of his life, before going upstairs to his home he would stop at the back of the shul after Shacharis and gaze out the window at the sky and sunshine. He was utilizing a teaching of Rabbeinu Yonah that he repeated often. Rabbeinu Yonah (2:9) explains that everyone needs joy to perform avodas Hashem, and that elderly people who are about to

leave the world and do not have much physical enjoyment need a push. What should they do? They should draw happiness from the sun and its light, as the passuk (Koheles 11:7) says, “The light is sweet and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.” Rabbi Miller always said that one must practice experiencing this enjoyment, because it was difficult to start when one was old. Now he was reaping the benefits of his years of practice.

Exactly thirty days before he passed away, he went to see a dentist. The dentist wanted to do some work on his mouth but recommended he first check into a hospital as a precaution. Rabbi Miller told him that the previous time he was in the hospital the nurses forgot to discharge him, and he ended up staying there an entire extra day. This was “a groisa upkumenish” (a great ordeal), and he did not want to return to the hospital again.

Two weeks before Pesach, his condition deteriorated and he became a lot weaker. Due to his advanced age, the doctors could only treat him with a blood transfusion, but they were confident he would regain his strength. However, Rabbi Miller only wanted outpatient treatment; he was unwilling to check into the hospital. He wanted to utilize every moment to the fullest and could not do so while confined to a hospital bed. In addition, he felt that the best cure-all was sleep, and in the hospital he was not able to sleep properly.

His doctor gave him medication but said solemnly, “There is really nothing more we can do.”

When Rabbi Miller heard that, he responded with a smile, “This is what I was preparing for my whole life.”

On erev Pesach, which fell out on Shabbos, he announced that he was going to his apartment immediately after davening and that everyone should go straight home. He didn’t want anyone to come and wish him a “Gut Shabbos.” He said several times with conviction, “We have no time, and there is a lot to do”

On Chol Hamoed Pesach he had difficulty walking even from room to room. The Rebbetzin did not allow anyone to visit him to wish him “Gut Yom Tov” as they usually did. Nevertheless, he continued giving his shiurim as usual!

On Wednesday night, the second day of Chol Hamoed, he was feeling so weak that he announced he was canceling that week's Thursday night lecture. Even then, between Minchah and Maariv that Thursday night, he delivered his nightly mussar shiur on Orchos Tzaddikim. He was in the middle of "Shaar Hasimchah," the chapter that discusses how to attain happiness, and spoke more forcefully than usual, berating those who were succumbing to the surrounding culture. He specifically mentioned wasting money on luxuries and the bitul Torah this caused, declaring that such excesses were the scourge of the surrounding culture.

After delivering the shiur, he stayed and davened with the first minyan for Maariv (he usually davened Maariv after his Thursday night lecture). People had already started trickling in for the Thursday night lecture, unaware that it had been canceled. Some of them had traveled from far away, and someone even pressed him to at least share a small thought. Rabbi Miller said that he had no strength even for that.

The next morning, on erev Shabbos, he delivered his daily Gemara shiur as usual. His voice was initially weak and strained, but after a few minutes it grew stronger. On his way out after the shiur he walked slowly, clearly very weak, although his face shone as usual.

Although the Rebbetzin had not allowed visitors all week, that morning she told a few people who had called that since Rabbi Miller had felt healthy enough to deliver the shiur in the morning, they could come right after for a berachah. Two families arrived that morning and Rabbi Miller gave them very warm berachos, as usual.

The next day, Shabbos, was the seventh day of Pesach, and he again delivered his shiur before davening and then davened with the shul as usual. He was even able to go down to the basement to wash his hands in order to duchen. This was his last tefillah b'tzibbur. Although he was obviously weak, his congregants did not realize how serious his condition was. They assumed he was simply under the weather.

The next day, the last day of Pesach, he did not come down to daven with the minyan. After davening, many of his grandchildren who were in the area for Yom Tov went upstairs to see their grandfather. With them was one of Rabbi Miller's talmidim, Rabbi Zelig Friedman, who was a

physician. The Rebbetzin asked him to assess the situation, to see if they could wait until after Yom Tov to go to the hospital. Reb Zelig stood guard over the Rav to make sure he was not strained.

An article that had been published that year in an Orthodox journal had presented a theory concerning the six days of Creation that Rabbi Miller maintained was against the Torah. He vigorously fought this idea during the last year of his life and arranged for some people to write scientific articles against it in the strongest terms. That Chanukah, one of his grandchildren had asked him about the author of the article and his beliefs, and Rabbi Miller had answered him very strongly. Now, on acharon shel Pesach, Rabbi Miller thought that one of the grandsons who was present had been the one who had asked him about this heretical idea. Rabbi Miller began to bang on the table and shout, “It is apikorsus! It is apikorsus!” until he was red in the face. Reb Zelig motioned to the grandson that he should just nod his head in agreement and move aside, so as not to cause Rabbi Miller any more distress.

Rabbi Miller began giving out berachos in a highly unusual emotional manner. He then requested that everyone sing a niggun, and they began to sing a song that so strongly resonated with him — “Ana avda d’Kudsha Brich Hu.”

Last Days

Rabbi Miller often quoted what was written in the sefer Toldos Adam about the way Rabbi Zelmala Volozhin left the world. In his last few hours, he did not stop learning. When he was encouraged by those around him to rest for a few minutes, he told them that it says explicitly in the Gemara that even as one is dying he must not let up in his learning.

Reb Zelmala — who was very careful to fulfill everything the Gemara said, even if it was not technically a mitzvah — then told those around him that he very much wanted to fulfill the Gemara that advises a person to spend a portion of his day walking, but he felt too weak. There was a walking stick nearby and someone handed it to Reb Zelmala, but he pushed it aside, saying that it was forbidden to borrow without the owner’s permission. Someone finally got permission to use the walking

stick and he walked four amos with it. Then he returned to his bed, all the while learning, and his soul departed almost immediately.

Rabbi Miller recounted with amazement how Reb Zelmala merited departing from this world doing what had driven him his entire life: fulfilling all the words of Chazal to the last detail. Rabbi Miller once said, “He managed to squeeze every drop of honey out of life.”

Indeed, this was the way Rabbi Miller left this world. Until the very end, he was immersed in Torah and avodas Hashem. And until his last breath he was doing what drove him his entire life: thanking Hashem for His kindness and expressing his deep love for Him. Even when he was incredibly weak and practically unable to move, he was serene and at peace, without displaying any worry.

On motzaei Yom Tov, Rabbi Miller wrote a tzavaah in the form of a letter to his family. It was the second such letter that he wrote. He also wrote six headings on a piece of scrap paper, representing six topics of the Ketzos Hachoshen. On Sunday he told his son that he had prepared these specific topics in order to review them in the days ahead.

On Monday, Isru Chag, his family saw that he was growing much weaker, and they decided to bring him to the hospital. Rabbi Miller would not agree unless a private room was arranged, and even then only if the room was in a quiet area of the hospital, so that he would be able to both rest and accomplish what he had in mind to do. The room was arranged. When he left his home, a relative heard him predict that he would not be returning.

When he got to the hospital he was put on a stretcher, but he refused to lie down on it. Instead, he sat up on the stretcher, lowered his hat so that it covered his eyes, and began talking to himself. Someone who was nearby heard him saying over and over the word “Torah.”

He became weaker and weaker, and it was difficult for him to sleep. This caused him great distress; without sleep he could not regain his strength. He asked the doctors to give him medication to help him sleep.

He did not want to be disturbed, and other than family members he did not allow anyone to visit him in the hospital. A family member was present at all times.

During this time, Rabbi Miller was preoccupied with his learning. He wanted to review Bava Metzia until he knew it by heart, but when he arrived at the hospital and realized that he had not brought a Bava Metzia with him he was upset. His son told him that he should instead learn Bava Kama, which he had previously reviewed while eating breakfast. Rabbi Miller told him, “Now I’m learning Bava Metzia and I want to finish it.” His family quickly went to get a Bava Metzia.

He also made time to review the six topics of the Ketzos that he had chosen. Each time a grandson walked into his room he reviewed a different section, and then he asked the grandson to repeat it to him.

To each family member who came to take a shift throughout the week, Rabbi Miller spoke about the many kindnesses that Hashem had bestowed upon him. He had done this throughout his life, but that week he spoke with particular enthusiasm and emotion. Even when he woke up in the middle of the night, he immediately began to talk about the great gifts that Hashem gave him.

To each grandchild who came to stay with him he effusively praised that grandchild’s parents, thanking Hashem for them and excitedly related the kindness of Hashem in arranging their parents’ shidduchim, which he never dreamed he would merit. He specifically praised the magnificent family that surrounded him at all times.

On Tuesday morning, a new great-grandson, a son of Rabbi Shmuel Fishof, had a bris milah. When they told this to Rabbi Miller he exclaimed, “Baruch Hashem, they did not have to name the baby after me.”

That afternoon, a grandson was in attendance while Rabbi Miller was trying to fall asleep. The Rav was speaking animatedly but in a very low voice, while making hand motions as if he was delivering an *iyun shiur*. After a few minutes, he asked his grandson if he understood what he was saying. The grandson nodded, in order to help him relax. Rabbi Miller then told the grandson “*Zug iber*,” to repeat it to him, which he

could not, for he had not been able to make out the words. Rabbi Miller was disappointed and began to repeat himself again.

This happened a few times. Rabbi Miller kept repeating himself, but his grandson still could not comprehend what he was saying. Finally, another grandson, Reb Meir Yechiel Miller, came, and he was able to make out the words “Rivash” and “Pasul l’eidus.” He realized that his Zeide was repeating a Ketzos in Siman 34. This time, when he asked him to repeat what he had said, this grandson was able to comply. Rabbi Miller relaxed and at last fell asleep.

His condition worsened and he said he had never felt so weak. However, everyone was hopeful that a blood transfusion would help. Early Wednesday morning, Rabbi Miller’s daughter, Rebbetzin Brog, who had been with him all night, set out to leave the hospital; her granddaughter, the daughter of Reb Yisroel Brog, was getting married that night. A grandson came to replace her, but Rabbi Miller did not want him to stay.

“Why are you wasting your time here?” he said.

“I brought sefarim with me,” the grandson responded.

Rabbi Miller was not convinced and seemed disappointed. He lay there without saying a word, until a hospital attendant came in and asked him how he was feeling. He then answered in a loud voice, “Baruch Hashem, for all of His kindness to me.”

When food was brought to him he made a berachah — out loud, slowly and with emphasis on every word. When he finished eating, he once again began telling his grandson a chiddush from the Ketzos, this time in his regular voice. He continued like this for some time — and asked his grandson to repeat it to him afterward.

On Wednesday afternoon, Rabbi Miller became very tired. He davened in his bed, at his usual relaxed pace. A grandson heard as he said the berachah of “Refa’einu.” He said it the same way as he always did, with extreme emphasis, but he did not become overly emotional. The grandson also heard him say the berachah of “V’lamalshinim” the same way he always did, with a very strong emphasis.

On Wednesday night, his grandson Reb Yehuda Brog observed how Rabbi Miller davened Maariv with special kavanah. At times, he motioned to Reb Yehuda to listen to his davening so that he would be able to correct him in case he faltered. After davening, Rabbi Miller told him that he was doubly grateful to him for what he had just done: one, that he was the “mashgiach” for his davening, and two, that since someone was listening to his davening he had davened better.

On Thursday, 26 Nissan, a grandson, Reb Uri Meir Kanarek, came after Shacharis and found Rabbi Miller speaking excitedly to his son, Reb Shmuel, about all the kindness Hashem had done for him, as he had been doing for the past few days. Rabbi Miller said, “Who would have dreamed that a pauper and a batlan like me would merit such a family?!”

Uri Meir then mentioned to his grandfather that he often said he gave special thanks to Hashem during Hallel as he sang each of the four “Hodu laHashems” for giving him each of his three sons-in-law. Uri Meir then asked him what he had in mind when he said the fourth “Hodu,” to which Rabbi Miller answered that he had so much to thank Hashem for he could say Hodu all day. Then he reminisced about his youth, thanking Hashem for things that had happened in his childhood, such as the opportunities he had had to learn. He was so full of joy, as if he was reliving those times.

Rabbi Miller told Reb Shmuel that surely he was very busy and he did not need to stay in the hospital with him. In fact, he had already had the transfusion and his condition had stabilized. Reb Shmuel did need to prepare for a new zman in his yeshivah, so he heeded his father’s words and left.

A few minutes later, Reb Eliezer, Rabbi Miller’s older son, came in and the Rav again began praising Hashem. He was ecstatic about having merited a very long life of healthy years with a clear mind.

“However,” he added, “now I feel so weak I don’t think I’ll ever deliver shiurim again.” When his son asked him why not, he said, “What can I do? I’m so weak that I’m dragging my feet. I don’t even have the strength to go from room to room.”

He then went on to discuss the arrangements for some last-minute details. He told his son that he had a box in his room at home, and in it were the documents regarding his burial plot and an envelope with a thank you letter he had written for his family. He also told Reb Eliezer verbally what he had written in his tzava'ah, that the family should not mourn him too much because he had enjoyed such a good life.

Rabbi Miller repeated something he had often said that week, that Rabbeinu Yonah counts as a mitzvas aseil that a person should constantly mention all of the acts of kindness that Hashem had done for him.

He then began recounting his years in Slabodka. He reminisced about the impossibility of a boy from Baltimore finding his way to Slabodka. He spoke about his years in Baltimore and in New York, and about the special individuals who helped him along the way. When he mentioned his rebbeim in Slabodka, Reb Isaac and Reb Avraham, he became very excited and, infused with new vigor, spoke about how much he loved his rebbeim there and how every word they uttered was so important to him. He spoke about how much he grew while he was there.

Then he started talking about the great importance and benefits of learning mussar. People think that learning mussar was only for Olam Haba, he said, when in fact it was for Olam Hazei as well. He recalled that Reb Isaac had told him about a certain Rav in Baltimore of whom it was said, "Mussar gave him his parnassah" — i.e., it made him a happy and successful person. Most people, he said, did not truly understand what mussar was and how happy it could make a person. He told his son that if he wanted to be happy he should learn the Mesilas Yesheiim, and if he wanted to be even happier he should also learn Chovos Halevavos. This sefer imparts great pleasure and joy, since it teaches one how to notice all the good that Hashem has done in the world. He added, "The sefer Chovos Halevavos changed my life."

He thanked Hashem that he was able to give shiurim in his shul on many mussar sefarim and that there were tapes of them. As he mentioned these sefarim he praised them lovingly. He mentioned that he was in the middle of Orchos Tzaddikim and proceeded to speak about the greatness of this sefer.

He then went on and thanked Hashem for the success he had had with his sefarim. He expressed his wish that the sefarim continue to be made accessible to the public, acknowledging that it was a challenging job.

He thanked Hashem that his sefarim were accepted by the public and that so many people read them. He mentioned that someone once told him that all of his sefarim “were chashuv, but the sefer Torah Nation was l’eila ul’eila (above the rest).” He recalled that someone told him excitedly how his Rejoice, O Youth! was full of “yesodei yesodos [all-encompassing fundamentals], and here I thought it was all basic and simple ideas.”

Rabbi Miller mentioned his commentary to the siddur, how he had worked particularly hard on it and how he thought it was his best sefer, as he had studied the siddur very thoroughly and delved deeply into every word. When his grandson asked him, “But didn’t you just say that your sefer on Bereishis was the best?” Rabbi Miller responded that his sefer on Bereishis contained his own chiddushim and was “from the best.” At one point he said, “Baruch Hashem, ich gei mit epes – Thank G-d, I’m leaving with something.”

He thanked Hashem that he was able to put out so many tapes and influence so many people. He said that his shiurim were full of tochen, and that many sefarim could be written from their contents. In fact, he said, you could write a sefer from every three tapes, and some tapes, such as “The Artificial Man” (E-230), could be made into an entire book on their own.

Rabbi Miller mentioned that the “R Series” of his tapes, which were his first lectures, were better than the later series because that was the first time he delivered those shiurim and they came out the best. He felt that he had expressed many of the more fundamental principles in greater detail; the only problem was that the recording quality of those shiurim was not as good.

He mentioned a man who had called him after he listened to the first ninety shiurim, claiming, “I know your trick.” This man said that he already picked up on Rabbi Miller’s approach, as many shiurim repeated similar

ideas in different contexts. Rabbi Miller admitted that there was truth to that but added that he did not tell this man that a genuine seeker could nevertheless pick up novel points and ideas in every shiur.

Rabbi Miller reminisced about the many people who called him and wrote to him, expressing their appreciation for his books and shiurim. He had recently received a letter from a man in Venezuela who wrote, “Rabbi Miller, I love you so so so much.” He repeated this anecdote twice and laughingly recalled that a South African man named his child “Avigdor” in his honor, following the Sephardic custom to name after living people.

Rabbi Miller mentioned many individuals who did great kindnesses to him in his life. He mentioned Reb Gershon Kreuser, who “did more than one could imagine any friend would do” and recalled his efforts in distributing his sefarim and tapes, and collecting payments from the vendors — all without even a car. “His mesiras nefesh on my behalf was meshuga!” he exclaimed.

He also mentioned Mr. Shelby, who besides his role in recording and disseminating the tapes also lent him money to publish his sefarim. He recalled some other people from the old shul, including Mr. Shmuel Rothman, who originally arranged for a loan in order to print his sefer.

His son tried to get him to speak about the shul’s future and who should take over, but the only answer he gave was that when he was no longer around, such a decision was not in his hands but in Hashem’s hands. His son persisted and asked him what he thought about Rabbi Eliyahu Brog as a possible replacement. Reb Eliyahu had spent years and years listening to all of his grandfather’s lectures. He had often substituted for Rabbi Miller when the Rav was not well and delivered his Gemara shiurim. He was a talmid muvhak of the Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah Rabbi Shmuel Berenbaum, and the author of his shiurim on a number of masechtos. Rabbi Miller answered that he thought Reb Eliyahu was very qualified for the job but reiterated that it was not up to him; it was up to the vaad.

Reb Eliezer asked him if he had any money to distribute to the poor of Eretz Yisrael, something Rabbi Miller did regularly and sometimes needed help in arranging. He replied that he had just given \$6,000 — \$100

each to sixty families — in addition to what he gave to people who came to his house to collect daily.

During the conversation, a doctor entered and asked Rabbi Miller how he felt. With a tremendous smile he answered joyfully, “I’m so busy being happy for all the kindness that Hashem has done for me that I have no time to consider how I am feeling.” He then continued reiterating some of the kindnesses Hashem had done for him, now with the doctor in attendance.

A woman from the Sephardic Bikur Cholim came by and asked if he needed anything. Rabbi Miller praised her, saying, “You are doing wonderful work. You should keep it up.” He then heartily wished her, “Berachah v’hatzlachah.”

Throughout the conversation he kept urging his son to go to work, and finally, Reb Eliezer left the hospital.

Seeing the jovial mood he was in, someone asked him, “Wouldn’t a person [about to pass on] be scared about the next world?”

Rabbi Miller answered, “Al zeh ani yarei! — I am indeed concerned about this!” He then spoke about teshuvah and said that part of teshuvah was recognizing all the goodness of Hashem and having hakaras hatov to Him.

Uri Meir mentioned that since Rabbi Miller had worked his entire life to concretize his belief in Olam Haba, “It is mixed into Zeide’s blood and marrow, and that’s why you’re not scared.”

“The main thing is Olam Hazeh, because here is the place where a man can accomplish,” Rabbi Miller replied.

He mentioned the question that is discussed in the Rishonim — why Olam Haba is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah — and answered that Olam Hazeh is more important, as Chazal say (Avos 4:17), “One moment of Torah and maasim tovim in this world is better than all of Olam Haba.” For this reason, great tzaddikim wanted to hold onto this world, Rabbi Miller explained. He mentioned the famous story about the Vilna Gaon, who grabbed his tzitzis in his hand on his deathbed and groaned, “Only in this world can a man, for a mere few cents, gain eternity.”

He then chanted the Mesilas Yescharim to the tune that was used in Slabodka: “Ha’adam lo nivra ela l’hisnag — A person was only created to experience pleasure,” which refers to this world. Only after understanding that does one go on to finish the sentence with the words, “al Hashem — of Hashem.” Olam Hazeh is the place where one should learn to experience enjoyment. Hashem is a benefactor Who wants only to give pleasure, and the whole of creation is for that purpose. Of course, the ultimate pleasure that Hashem could possibly devise — being with Hashem — is awaiting us in Olam Haba, but one first has to develop the ability to enjoy Hashem and to derive pleasure from all His creations, starting in this world. This world was created so that we could develop our ability to derive pleasure from Hashem.

Uri Meir then helped Rabbi Miller fill out a form to arrange his meals for the next day and for Shabbos. A while later, the Rebbetzin came with an egg and tomato. Rabbi Miller joyfully said, “Look at what I have! I’m so full of joy, and baruch Hashem I’m able to eat.” He then made a particularly heartfelt berachah, pronouncing each word slowly.

After taking a bite, he immediately stopped and said to Uri Meir, “How can I sit here eating while you are not?” His daughter-in-law, who had also arrived, told him that Uri Meir had already eaten. Nevertheless, she told Uri Meir to eat a fruit to help Rabbi Miller relax.

It was after one in the afternoon and Rabbi Miller said he needed to rest.

At 7:30 that evening, one of his grandsons, Rabbi Yehuda Brog, arrived. Rabbi Miller greeted him but remained prone, completely exhausted. Another grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Fishof, came in with Rabbi Miller’s daughter, and Rabbi Miller exclaimed, “Ay vus far a sheiner kinder — What beautiful children.”

He then fell asleep and awoke suddenly at exactly sixty minutes after shkiyah. He was very nervous that he had missed the time to say the Shema. When he realized he had not, he began to say it out loud with great emotion. His grandson was alarmed, thinking that Rabbi Miller was preparing himself for his passing. But Rabbi Miller motioned to him that everything was okay and continued with all three sections of Shema,

enunciating each word slowly and carefully. When he finished, he was even more exhausted.

Another grandson, Rabbi Simcha Bunim Cohen, began to discuss davening Maariv. Rabbi Miller said that he had said Shema and was too weak to daven the entire Maariv, but that he wanted to count the Omer.

His family brought him a banana and he made a berachah on it with great kavanah. When he finished, he made the berachah, “Borei Nefashos ...” Those were his last words.

He went to the restroom after that and suffered a blood clot as a result of the transfusion. As he came out, he fell into his grandson’s arms. The doctors tried to revive him for an hour and a half. His family was called, and surrounded by his entire family, Rabbi Miller’s neshamah returned to its Maker.

His final illness was brief and without suffering. As he always emphasized, “Yissurin are a cheap substitute for simchah.” One who serves Hashem with simchah does not need much suffering. Rabbi Miller was joyful until the very end. His entire life was a preparation for that final moment when he departed from this world in complete bliss. He epitomized the words, “Zakein us’va yamim” (aged and his days fulfilled).

The Levayah

Rabbi Miller’s levayah was a huge kiddush Hashem, the fitting climax to a life devoted to inspiring others and being mekadesh Shem Shamayim.

Since he desired burial in Eretz Yisrael and he passed away close to Shabbos, the levayah in Brooklyn was held on Sunday morning. Outside the shul, an overflow crowd of more than 30,000 people — a conservative estimate — gathered. There were people from all walks of life, even many who had never met him personally. People traveled from great distances to attend, including a contingent from England.

The levayah was conducted in his shul, which could not hold more than 200 people. People who had never seen the shul before were amazed that such a powerful force had emanated from such a tiny edifice. Both

floors of the Mirrer Yeshivah were jammed as well, as the mourners gathered there to listen to broadcasts of the hespedim.

The sheer outpouring of the crowd and the heartfelt words of hesped created an unprecedented hisorerus of teshuvah, which was immediately put into practice. One group of mesivta rebbeim came back to their yeshivah right after the levayah, and after a brief discussion came to the conclusion that they would spend a few minutes every day by lunch learning from the Chovos Halevavos. Right then and there, they started a seder, which has continued for many years.

Hespedim were delivered by family members and gedolim, as Chazal say, “Torah machrezes alav — The Torah itself announced his stature.” Rabbi Yosef Rosenblum, Rosh Yeshivah of Shaarei Yosher, delivered the first hesped. He told of the tremendous kiddush Hashem that the niftar had made, how his learning Torah lishmah had made the creation of the whole world worthwhile, and that he will continue to accrue merits forever. He said that Rabbi Miller was like “a tzinor for hashraas haShechinah [a conduit to transmit a palpable experience of the Divine Presence],” and that the Shechinah spoke through him.

The next maspid was Rabbi Shmuel Berenbaum, Rosh Yeshivah of the Mirrer Yeshivah, who cried over the great loss at the height of the niftar’s influence, while he was still fully engaged in all his manifold activities. Rabbi Miller had impacted every segment of Klal Yisrael, from b’nei Torah to those still distant from Yiddishkeit. He also announced that his talmid Rav Eliyahu Brog would be the new Rav of the shul.

Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Ohr in Yerushalayim, was in America at the time and underscored Rabbi Miller’s “unique status as a tzaddik b’soch ha’ir [a righteous person who has an influence on his environment] and his special role as someone who represented the entire generation, for he interacted with the people and understood all their needs and feelings. Not only [did Rabbi Miller have influence] on Americans, but he was also an international representative for the entire Klal Yisrael. He took action to relieve their problems and help them in all their needs.”

Rabbi Scheinberg cried about the honor due to b'nei Torah and the role Rabbi Miller played in raising their honor in the eyes of the world.

The Novominsker Rebbe, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, confessed that during the time that Rav Miller was his Mashgiach in Chaim Berlin, he was not aware of his greatness as a baal mussar. He knew him to be a tremendous talmid chacham and masmid whose “pointed comments of raw emes set them straight,” but was not aware that he was a veritable fireball of mussar.

Chacham Yosef Harrari-Raful, Rosh Yeshivah of Ateret Torah, was maspid in lashon hakodesh, crying over the tremendous personal loss for the local community.

Rabbi Miller’s son-in-law, Rabbi Shmuel Elchonon Brog, related that the Mashgiach of the Mir, Reb Yeruchem, said that the American boys who came to Europe to learn in yeshivos were like the Rabbi Akiva Eigers of their generation. He described the difficulties his father-in-law encountered and the great influence he had on others, even from his youngest years. He also spoke about the tremendous influence he had on the large family he merited to raise and how such diversified people all “sang his song of praise to Hashem,” including Sephardim, yeshivah people and Chassidim.

His son, Rabbi Shmuel Miller, stressed that above and beyond his influence on others was the great self-control he exhibited. He testified that his father never spoke about anything at home besides Torah and yiras Shamayim, and all they ever saw him doing was sitting and learning Gemara with tremendous joy. He maintained many private stringencies and yet was the happiest man around, for his cup of appreciation was always overflowing.

He highlighted the extremes his father took to distance himself from anything that smelled of the general culture, and for that reason he insisted on never speaking a word of English at home. The last Chanukah of his life he spoke to his family about how everyone is influenced by his surroundings, so he created for himself a “surrounding atmosphere of Abaya and Rava.” Reb Shmuel also read from the tzavaah that he left and highlighted the ahavas Hashem that he lived with.

Other family members who were maspid were Rabbi Yeruchem Leshinsky, Rabbi Simcha Bunim Cohen and Rabbi Eliyahu Brog.

After the levayah in New York, Rabbi Miller's body was flown to Eretz Yisrael, where a levayah at Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim was also attended by tens of thousands. The great Torah leaders who were maspid him there included Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, Rosh Yeshivas Mir, Yerushalayim; Rav Moshe Shternbuch, Ravad of the Eidah Hachareidis; Rav Baruch Rosenberg, Rosh Yeshivas Slabodka; Rav Shmuel Miller; Rav Hershel Kanarek, a son-in-law and Menahel of Yeshiva Ohr Hameir in Peekskill; Rav Shmuel Yaakov Bornstein, Rosh Yeshivas Chevron Geulah; Rav Meir Tzvi Bergman, Rosh Yeshivas Rashbi; and Rav Matisyahu Salomon, Mashgiach Beth Medrash Govoha, Lakewood, who was in Eretz Yisrael at the time.

Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon called Rabbi Miller the "Avraham Avinu of the generation." He acted just like Avraham, who was described as someone to whom "the whole world was on one side while he was on the other." Both lived in times when the majority of people lived in a vast and deep spiritual darkness. Just as Avraham taught the world about the kindness of the one G-d, so too Rabbi Miller spent his career spreading a profound awareness of Hashem among the masses.

Rabbi Baruch Rosenberg eulogized Rabbi Miller as "the greatest m'zakeh es harabim [benefactor of the public] in our generation." Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch said he merited having true daas Torah and was a "living Chovos Halevavos." Rabbi Miller was all this and more, and his passing left a gaping void in the generation he left behind.

Rabbi Miller was buried on Har Hazeisim.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe was once speaking about the remaining gedolim in the United States, and he referred to Rabbi Miller as a king. Indeed, the stories related herein are but the tip of the iceberg, a brief glimpse into the life of a gadol, a unique individual who not only achieved personal greatness during an incredibly challenging era but whose greatness helped shape generations of Klal Yisrael.

Rabbi Yitzchak Scheiner, Rosh Yeshivah of Kaminetz, said in the name of one of the gedolei hador that Rabbi Miller was the pillar of emunah in our generation. At each juncture, he invested all his energies in living fully, according to his idealistic convictions, utilizing each opportunity to its maximum potential.

His story is a revelation of the special guidance Hashem gives to sincere individuals, and a testimony to the eternal nature of unadulterated Torah. That a young American boy could rise up from the ruins of a spiritual devastation and become Rabbi Avigdor Miller is truly one of the greatest miracles of our time.

אֶל תִּבְכּוּ הַרְבֵּה בְּעָדַי, כִּי
 הָרַב"ה הֵיטִיב עִמִּי מֵאֲד בְּכָל
 יָמַי. הַצְלִיחַנִי הֵ"ת וְלֹא הָיִיתִי חוֹלָה,
 וְהָאֲרָכְנִי יָמַי בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה מֵאֲד.
 אֲשֶׁר שִׁמְחָה הֵטִיבָה תַּאֲחִיד עִמִּי, וְגַם
 שְׁבַעֲנִי שׁוֹבֵעַ שְׂמֵחוֹת מֵכָל בְּנֵי
 וּבְנוֹתֵי רַחֲמֵי הַצְדִּיקִים וּמִכָּל צִאצְאֵיהֶם
 וְצִאצְאֵי צִאצְאֵיהֶם שִׁלְכִיתִי לְהַכִּירָם, כּוֹלֵם
 שְׁלֹמִי אֲמוּנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל. מֵאֲד מֵאֲד שְׂמֵחָתִי
 בְּכוֹלֵכֶם. רַק אֲנִי מִבְּךָ מִחִילָה מִכָּל מִי
 שֶׁהִיא אֲכִירָה לָהֶם לַפְּעָמִים גַּם שְׁבַעֲנִי
 שְׂמֵחָה מֵאֲנָשֵׁי קְהִילָתִי, וְאֲנִי מִכִּיר מוֹדֵה
 לַהֲרֵב גְּרֵשׁוֹן קְרוֹיזֶר שֶׁפָּעַל כָּל כֵּךְ בְּעָדַי
 (וְגַם לַפְּנִחָס שְׁלֵבִי). כָּל יָמַי הָסָר שְׁלֵשֶׁלֶךְ
 שֶׁל הַצְלָחָה וְהַעֲנוּגָה, הוֹדוּ לָהּ עַל טוֹבוֹ
 הַגָּדוֹל עִמִּי. וְזֹאת לְהוֹדִיעַ שֶׁאֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן
 הַקִּנְיָתִי לָהּ כִּבְרָה מֵתָצֶה בְּכָל רִכּוּשִׁי.
 הַחֲזִיקֶנָּה כּוֹלֵכֶם בַּמִּוֶּרֶת הֵ"ת וְגַדְלוֹ
 בְּנִיכֶם לַעֲבֹד אֶת ה' בְּלֵב שָׁלֵם
 וּמִגְבִּירָם כּוֹלֵכֶם לְאֲרִיכוֹת יָמִים בְּטוֹבָה
 וְהַצְלָחָה הַשְּׂמִיחָה וְרוֹחֲמִית.
 וְאֵת אֲבִיכֶם אֹהֲבֵכֶם, אֲבִיגַדּוֹר בִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּהֶן מִי לְלַעַר

Do not cry exceedingly over me because Hashem was very kind to me all of my days. Hashem brought me success and I was not sick; I lived a long and happy life. My wife was very kind to me, and I also got much joy

from *all* of my sons, daughters and sons/daughters-in-law, who are *tzaddikim*, and from all of their descendants that I was privileged to know, all of them *shlomei emunas Yisrael*. I was very, very happy with all of you.

I ask *mechilah* from anyone I mistreated at times.

I also saw much joy from my *kehillah*. And I have *hakaras hatov* to Rabbi Gershon Kreuser who did so much for me (and also Mr. Pinchas Shelby).

My entire life was a long chain of success and joy. *Hodu LaHashem* on His great good that He has done for me.

This is also to inform that I have given half of all of my possessions to my wife.

All of you should strengthen yourselves in the Torah and raise your children to serve Hashem *b'lev shalem*. All of you should be blessed with a long good life with success in both *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus*.

From: your father, who loves you, Avigdor ben Rabbi Yisrael HaKohen Miller

May the name of Hashem be blessed from now until forever for the thousands upon thousands of kindnesses that He has done for me, and all of you should go in this path of recognizing all of Hashem's kindness to you and also the kindness He has done for me. You should always thank Hashem, and your mouths should always be filled with the praise of Hashem for all He has done for me and for you ...

I am asking all of you to forgive me explicitly if I sinned against you, whether you know about it or not. Please, please, forgive me.

Rabbi Gershon Kreuser was my righthand man in many things that I have done, and he should be praised and honored very much. For more than forty years he has been so kind to me.

Speak (words of appreciation) to Rabbi Shapiro and Mr. Beck from my shul, and also all those precious people who have come to *daven* and learn in my *beis medrash*. All of them have been very kind to me, each in his own way.

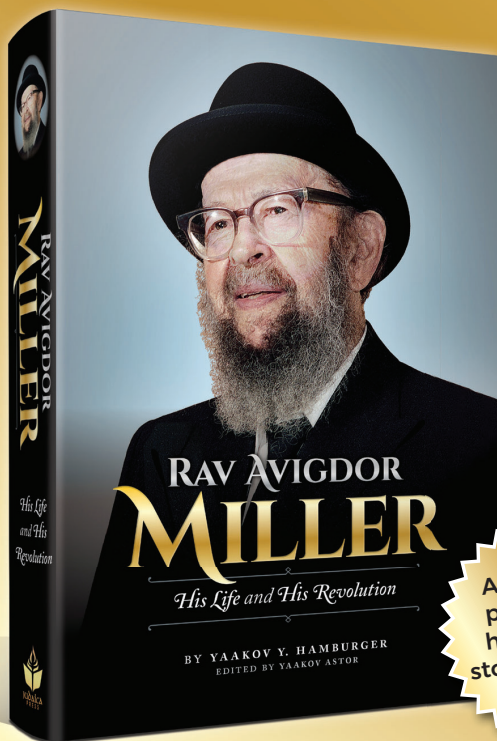
It is not my way to impose any obligation or *derech* on you, but according to my humble opinion you should combine the approach of *mussar* with the attitudes of the *chassidim* — Anshei Sephard (Satmar and the like) and stay far removed from gentiles.

Please tell the Sephardic *kehillah* how I loved them. They always encouraged me. Mr. Chamoula, Mr. Pinchas Shelby, Mr. Eliyahu Marcus, Mr. Safdeye and the rest of them. They are beloved to me for their pure spirit in *ahavas Hashem*.

Hashem should bless all of you as well as all *shlomei emunas Yisrael* among Klal Yisrael. You should multiply in the world with great success in both *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus* forever.

Avigdor ben Rabbi Yisrael Hakohen

— STILL — GOING STRONG!



Almost 600
pages, with
hundreds of
stories and rare
photos!

It's been twenty years since Rav Miller's petirah, yet he's transforming Jews around the world more than ever before! If you love the Toras Avigdor you read every week, read about the life of accomplishment that started it all. This long-awaited biography is a living mussar sefer!



AVAILABLE AT YOUR LOCAL JUDAICA STORE