



by Dr. Raphael Polyakov

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RABBI HERMAN NEUBERGER, ZT"l

by Laurence M. Katz

The range, diversity, and volume of Rabbi Herman Neuberger's good works defy description. Indeed, as Rabbi Yissocher Frand pointed out, no one knows it all. We each have a piece of the picture. Collectively, it is truly impressive.

I had the privilege of interacting with Rabbi Neuberger for over 40 years. And I was one of those who sought and received advice from him at crucial points in my life.

On the international stage, Rabbi Neuberger's role in rescuing the Iranians is well known. When they arrived in America, he also arranged for Ner Israel to enroll them as students, even though they had little money and less educational background. He raised the money and established special classes. In his usual quiet way, he made many trips to the Middle East and Vienna to assist the rescue process. It is less well known that he was instrumental in assisting Syrian and Russian Jews as well.

At the other end of the spectrum, countless individuals would seek his advice for their personal problems and challenges. I remember one evening a number of years ago at Rabbi Neuberger's apartment, when he received a telephone call from a woman at the Baltimore-Washington airport on a pay phone. She knew Rabbi Neuberger, and he knew her. She was homeless (and troubled) and the authorities would not let her sleep on one of the chairs at the airport. Rabbi Neuberger took out his personal credit card and instructed me to make arrangements for her to stay at a hotel.

Individuals would seek his advice on issues ranging from family disputes to decisions on education and careers to business matters, to name just a few. He arbitrated business disputes and helped people make business decisions. He had the knack of analyzing problems clearly and seeing viable solutions.

Politicians sought his support before elections and his advice after election on diverse issues. He was extremely well read. (For many years he kept up with a number of leading national newspapers, opinion journals, and even the *Congressional Record*.) Rabbi Neuberger is probably the only person in America to get calls regularly from both Phyllis Schlafly, a strongly conservative Republican, and Senator Barbara Mikulski, a liberal Democrat.

One day, while sitting in his office, I heard him take a call from an individual. The conversation went on for 10 minutes or so, and as it was winding down, Rabbi Neuberger reminded the caller that Rosh Hashana was coming the next week and Yom Kippur shortly after that. He then exchanged pleasantries and the call ended. Somewhat in amazement, I asked Rabbi Neuberger if he really had the time to take calls from Jews who don't even know that Rosh Hashana was coming the next week? His answer was yes. Although the caller did not know the date of Rosh Hashana, said Rabbi Neuberger, "he gives a generous contribution to the Yeshiva annually." Rabbi Neuberger was a practical man.

He took an interest in countless community issues. The various yeshivas counseled with him regularly. As I look back on my years as president of the Talmudical Academy, I don't know how I could have managed without Rabbi Neuberger's advice. The same can be said by many lay and professional leaders of local yeshivas and day schools.

He was a major force in the creation of the Association of Advanced Rabbinic and Talmudic Schools (AARTS), a federally approved accreditation association. Today AARTS-accredited schools receive significant federal financial aid each year.

Rabbi Neuberger did not believe in "term limits." Even after I had served on the accreditation committee of AARTS for over 30 years, he never let me even consider resigning. From the beginning, in 1973, until his *petira*, he was intimately involved in the work of AARTS, always stressing the need for yeshivas to be straightforward and transparent when dealing with the federal government.

He took an active role in the broader Jewish community. For over 40 years, he was a regular participant in the Baltimore Jewish Council, in particular, and the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, in general. His advice was so valued by the Council that it made him a Life Member. In the Associated, he took an interest in the work of a number of agencies, particularly JFS, and he encouraged others to do the same. He understood that to have an influence, it was important to participate.

He could be tough minded. He took calculated risks at times. When the BJC was on the brink of supporting proposed legislation which he considered contrary to Torah and dangerous, he not only was against it, but also made it clear he could not continue to participate on the Council if it acted in support. The membership concluded that Rabbi Neuberger's continued involvement was more important than the legislation.

He had strength of character. Twice he led the fight to assure that the community not publicly violate the Shabbos by opening the Jewish Community Center on Shabbos. Against what many thought impossible odds, he was successful, and to this day our JCC respects the Shabbos.

He was a principled pragmatist. He stayed out of communal disputes which he judged could not be won, when the consequence was not life threatening to the Torah community. When he deemed it necessary, he had "selective hearing." In connection with one communal

issue, he seemed not to hear the reasons why he should try to exert his influence. I prepared a paper arguing why he should get involved and gave it to him to review. A few days later, I asked him whether he was convinced or not. He told me the paper was “lost on my desk.” Of course, I understood what he meant, but I couldn’t resist saying to him, “Rabbi Neuberger, I know you are very neat. After all you come from a German background.” With a twinkle in his eye, he said, “Don’t bring up my ethnic history.” Of course, we dropped the topic.

I am not the first to mention that his “job” was to look after Ner Israel. As we all know, he did this with great devotion and success. How could he perform all of the other activities at the same time? He was tireless and devoted. Ner Israel is the beneficiary of his full-time effort. So, too, is the community in general. He had at least two full-time jobs.

One could continue reporting events in Rabbi Neuberger’s remarkable life. In these recent weeks, many people have come forward to tell their experiences. Here, I too have tried to recount some of my experiences with him. The total picture will continue to grow, yet, it will never be complete.

In addition to all the rest, over the years, two aspects of Rabbi Neuberger’s personality and *middos* have struck me as remarkable. First, he had a unique ability to concentrate his thinking and focus on the issue at hand. When he was dealing with individuals or an organization on a particular issue, they received his undivided attention, as if that issue were the only issue on his mind. The people with whom he dealt received 100 percent of his attention. And then he would turn to the next problem with equal focus.

Secondly, if he was busy with another issue when a telephone call came in, he would tell the caller when to call back or say that he would call back. He always did, and did so promptly — perhaps a small but distinguishing characteristic of this great man.

For many of us, when a personal or communal issue arose, we would call Rabbi Neuberger for advice, and he was always there for us. We can’t do that now. He is no longer with us. As individuals, as a community, our loss is immeasurable.



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REFLECTIONS ON RABBI NAFTOLI NEUBERGER, ZT”L

by Rabbi Hillel Tendler

“Good afternoon, Ner Israel.”

“Hello. Rabbi Neuberger, please.”

“Who’s calling?”

“Hillel Tendler.”

“One minute, please.”

After a few seconds, a familiar and distinct voice is saying, “Hello. *Shalom aleichem*, Reb Hillel. What’s doing?”

So began another of countless conversations I and so many others were *zocheh* (merited) to have over the past decades with the giant, but completely accessible, *Menahel* of one of the largest yeshivos in the world.

The reason for the call did not matter. Whatever the need, be it personal or communal, Rabbi Neuberger gave you undivided attention as if nothing else mattered to him. We all know by now that there were precious few minutes in the almost 70 years of Rabbi Neuberger’s *askanus*, his stewardship of Torah Jewry’s needs, when he was not completely busy with a critical need of Ner Yisroel or *klal* Yisrael; yet he always had time for everyone.

Since Rabbi Neuberger’s passing several weeks ago, we have been fortunate to hear from his children and others who were close to him. They shared with us a glimpse of Rabbi Neuberger’s greatness and some of the major accomplishments of his full life. We have heard of his childhood and early development; his relationship with his brother-in-law, *Maran HaRosh Yeshiva, zt”l*; how he physically built Ner Yisroel and worked hand-in-hand with its Roshei Yeshiva and Mashgiach, *zt”l*, and the current Rosh Yeshiva, Mashgiach and *hanhala, shlita* to spiritually build the Yeshiva; how he almost single-handedly preserved 2,500 years of Persian Torah Jewry; how he spearheaded countless initiatives to strengthen Torah observance and be *mekadesh Shem Shamayim*; and how he worked tirelessly to increase *shalom*, peace and harmony, in the overall Jewish community.

Some outside of Baltimore might think that perhaps the stories and accolades include some permissible exaggeration, common when reflecting on beloved individuals after they are no longer with us. However, as numerous people can attest, every word of every story is true in fact and in context. Rabbi Neuberger — every Jew and hundreds of non-Jews in Baltimore knew Rav Naftoli ben Reb Meir HaLevi simply as Rabbi Neuberger — was so great indeed. Since moving back to Baltimore 20 years ago, I have often referred to Rabbi Neuberger when speaking to

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others, only partially tongue-in-cheek, as “king of the Jews.” He surely took care of the needs of *klal* Yisrael as might a *melech* Yisrael. Yet his greatness was seen and felt daily in so many smaller arenas as well.

Without a doubt, nobody who attended a certain urgent meeting in a private home in the summer of 1995 will ever forget Rabbi Neuberger’s speech. He had called various individuals together to discuss the need for the families of our community’s *mechanchim* (educators) to have the safety net of life insurance. For the most part, Rabbi Neuberger had not yet “slowed down,” and he did not often give in to emotion when speaking publicly. Yet

his flowing tears as he imparted to us the responsibility we, as a community, have to our teachers are etched in our memories.

It was always easy to forget that Rabbi Neuberger's first responsibility was to his own Yeshiva. As the great Torah community of Baltimore grew, its institutions and individual families experienced growing pains. We needed a new mikva; a school was out of space; we were falling (further) behind in paying our teachers; a decision of the Bais Din was being attacked in civil court. Often, the problems boiled down to finances, and with its own multimillion dollar budget, Ner Yisroel needed funds as much as any of the other *mosdos* (institutions). Nevertheless, Rabbi Neuberger deeply understood, more than anyone else, how our community's growth and increasing *kavod Shamayim* are dependent on the success and stability of each institution, even if his own yeshiva missed out on a lucrative opportunity.

Without fail, the day before school started each year brought the call from Rabbi Neuberger directing how the tuitions of one or more needy families would be handled so the vital "admission passes" could be released. If an uninsured or under-insured family had weathered a hospitalization, Rabbi Neuberger would be on the phone calling the hospital administration or individuals close to the hospital administration to work out a financially feasible solution. You would think that the man behind the growth of so many Jewish communities throughout the United States had nothing more important to worry about than a particular Baltimore family's tuition or medical bill woes. You know, you would be right.

Other times, the problem could not be solved simply with money; the solution was months or years away and demanded time. After succinctly describing the problem in two or three short sentences — nobody could drill down to the essence of an issue like Rabbi Neuberger — he would say, "I want you to attend a meeting in New York" — or Washington or Annapolis or wherever there was a need. He directed us to work on projects and with other Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and groups for the long-range good of the Torah community. The greatest leaders of our nation always saw far beyond the limitations of present time and space, and Rabbi Neuberger was no exception. We were constantly amazed how he so often planted seeds which paid off only after years of hard work. He saw the big forest while we could only focus on our particular patch of trees.

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Rabbi Neuberger was always available by phone, in his Administration Building office, in the Executive Dining Room, or in his living room — he sat there on the chair in a sweater, surrounded by *sefarim* and the ever-present telephone, and you sat on the couch — to respond to our requests for assistance and advice. But usually he did not wait for us to call him. He called us first to anticipate the need and develop a solution before we even perceived a problem existed.

We learned so much from those meetings — not only about the issue at hand but about what was going on throughout the Torah world, as well. Those privileged to meet with him often saw and heard the calls come in from Atlanta, Buenos Aires, Cincinnati, Columbus, Geneva, Los Angeles, New York, Yerushalayim — wherever. We saw first hand how involved he was with the smallest details of issues faced by these distant communities and individuals. Everyone turned to Rabbi Neuberger, and each received the same warmth, complete attention, and clarity of thought. His advice was always practical; he took account of the unique circumstances of the person seeking his help, and he never suggested solutions that, due to the realities of the community where the person lived, could not be implemented.

A personal *aitza* (advice) never took a back seat to a communal matter, be it for a career choice or for the timing of college courses your child needed to eventually get into graduate school. Rabbi Neuberger was there for everyone, always. Almost all who count among the ranks of the “high and mighty” take some sort of break, when they are simply not reachable; after all, the mind, nerves, and body need to rest sometime. Not Rabbi Neuberger. The phrase 24/7 was created with Rabbi Neuberger in mind (*tzorchei mitzva* can be discussed even on Shabbos). Unless he was out of cell phone range, there was not a moment when he was inaccessible.

He demanded from us that we think outside the box to be responsive to the community’s needs. Just because things are done a certain way in larger communities is no excuse for us. In which other community does the leadership of the various schools get together or communicate almost daily to resolve common issues? It was Rabbi Neuberger’s direction, presence, and personality that created the atmosphere of *achdus* (unity) here in Baltimore, where this is the norm.

What drove Rabbi Neuberger? We have heard several suggestions, all no doubt true. He was an enormous *baal bitachon*; he had complete faith in Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He was a tremendous *ohav* Yisrael; undoubtedly, he loved his fellow Jew, regardless of level of observance, to a degree rarely seen. He had a burning love of Hashem, His Torah, and those who studied the Torah; he dedicated his entire life to building the Yeshiva and allowing its Roshei Yeshiva, rebbeim and *talmidim* to learn in an atmosphere unfettered by physical restraints.

Yet, above all else, he was a *baal achrayus*; he felt to his very core that the needs of Hashem’s children were his personal responsibility. There was no institutional, communal, or personal issue about which he said, “It’s not my job.” Everything was his job, and he dealt with every issue with the utmost integrity, energy, and sense of urgency — as if he were personally affected by the issue. This was not an unrealistic, superhuman approach to dealing with the problems of others. As every great *manhig*, or leader of *klal* Yisrael, Rabbi Neuberger genuinely believed that it indeed *was* his responsibility to share other people’s burdens and thereby lighten their loads.

This sense of responsibility is something he shared with the Roshei Yeshiva of Ner Yisroel, who instilled in their *talmidim* this sense of obligation. There is hardly a community in the United States in which Ner Yisroel alumni do not play leading roles. These were the living lessons taught to us by example from the Roshei Yeshiva and Rabbi Neuberger. Why did our generation and community merit to have Rabbi Neuberger in our midst and accomplish so much for us? We can't say for sure, except that Hashem always plants in each generation what the times demand. America over the past 70 years needed a Rabbi Neuberger to establish our footings and help the *Gedolai Hador* direct the growth of Torah on U.S. soil. Now that he has left us, we are truly orphaned and alone. How we miss him! But we must continue to fly solo, using the *hadracha* (guidance) he gave us to serve *klal Yisrael* in Rabbi Neuberger's way. *Yehi zichro baruch*.



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At the shiva house I mentioned to Rabbi Sheftel Neuberger, that I was thinking of writing something about his father. "Please do so," he said. "We'd like that very much." I said, "I am afraid to do so because what I write may not necessarily be politically correct." To this, Reb Sheftel made two replies: 1) "Nothing you write is politically correct" and 2) "That's exactly what we want."

Well, here goes. After having written this essay, I see it is more about me than about Rabbi Neuberger.

That is due to the fact that I am writing a personal, even emotional, account of how he impacted me and mine, not some detached "objective" (ha!) evaluation of a third party. What I offer here is not a biography but an angle of vision, something out of focus, perhaps, but sometimes very sharply focused indeed. Like the nearsighted person that I am, I cannot know the Rabbi Neuberger who operated far away, beyond what I could see. But the Rabbi Neuberger who interacted with me and my family, close at hand where I could see — about that person I can indeed write something.

THE RABBI NEUBERGER I SAW

by Rabbi Dovid Katz

When people used to ask me, "How long have you known Rabbi Neuberger?" I would answer, "Since before I was born." Although it sounded like a wisecrack, it wasn't. You see, I am the child of a second marriage, a not uncommon phenomenon for children of Holocaust survivors. My father had a wife and child in Lithuania, who perished in Dachau. My mother had a husband and son in Czechoslovakia. The husband hid in one gentile

house, my mother and her newborn son in another. The gentile in the husband's house informed on him; the gentile in my mother's house did not. The Germans put the husband into one of those cars where they hooked the exhaust pipe inside, so he was dead before the car went two blocks. Mother and child survived by hiding in various non-Jewish places, including a kind of Protestant monastery, where they had many close brushes with exposure and death (the Gestapo was located in the next room), and where the Christians who were hiding her tried to convince her to convert to save her soul. (They meant well, *leshitasam*; after all, they did risk their lives to hide her.)

In short, your typical average Holocaust story.

Baltimore was full of such people when I was a kid. Each one had a story that could be turned into a book or movie, but there were so many that they lost value due to "inflation" — a bizarre application of the law of supply and demand. Besides, people, Americans, including *frum* Jews, felt uncomfortable with the entire subject of the Holocaust, and they did not want to hear about it, certainly not from survivors. A lot of it had to do with the unexpressed, and perhaps suppressed, guilt which thinking American Jews felt, a sense of guilt that was entirely justified; after all, when all was said and done, American Jews failed their fellow Jews in Europe miserably. We all know that. And American Jews, including those who lived in Baltimore, did not want to be reminded of that.

Well, in my case, my mother was stuck in communist Czechoslovakia until the end of 1949, when she came to the U.S. and lived for a year or so with a brother in Minneapolis: a nice enough city, but no bastion of Yiddishkeit, certainly not in those years. My mother had another brother in Baltimore, and he nudged her and her child to move in with him and his family until she agreed and did so. That was quite uncommon, but you know how *hashgacha* (divine providence) works.

Anyway, she arrived in Baltimore and was directed by her brother to enroll her son in a school called TA. So within days of her arrival, she found herself in the office of the "Executive Director" (don't you love those titles?), the late Rabbi Heiman. It turned out that Rabbi Heiman had been a shul rabbi in Minneapolis and knew my mother's brother there very well. To my mother's anxious question about tuition and money, Rabbi Heiman responded with his famous words, "Pay what you can, when you can."

I say famous words because this was an era when hundreds of penniless refugees came to Baltimore (among other places), and the people who ran TA entertained certain quaint notions about how a Jewish school is supposed to be run. For one thing, TA defined itself as the "public school" of the Jewish community. In other words, regardless of a family's level of observance, if they wanted their son to receive a day school education, TA took him in. This included many who could not afford to pay. No child, it was felt, should have to go to public school because of lack of money. True, the school was always in financial crisis, but that was considered an unfortunate but perfectly natural state of affairs. So the words "pay what you can when you can" rolled easily and often off Rabbi Heiman's lips in those years.

On the other hand — and this was by no means a secret — people like Rabbi Heiman were able to secure quite a bit of money from Reform, Conservative, and other non-*frum* Jews who understood that they were helping to maintain an institution that served the broad Jewish public. Many a non-*frum*

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Jew has had a *cheilek* (share) in the *limud hatorah* of Jews in the Baltimore *mosdos* — which is food for thought.

Incidentally, another quaint notion of that era was that the *limudei kodesh* — “Hebrew,” as it was called in those days, as opposed to “English,” the term for all secular studies; to this day, the phrase “secular studies” or “Torah studies” jars on my ear — should be conducted in Yiddish. It was not considered learning unless it was in Yiddish. In those years, Rabbi Samson was fighting a vigorous rearguard action to maintain Yiddish instruction in the face of the mounting tide of English-only American boys who constituted the overwhelming number of students. That’s how my father became a rebbe in TA in 1947. Basically, his interview for the job with Rabbi Samson went something like this:

Rabbi Samson: “Do you speak English?”

My father: “Not a word.”

Rabbi Samson: “You’re hired!”

Anyway, after her interview with Rabbi Heiman, my mother went home. As soon as she got in the house, she had a phone call. “It’s Rabbi Neuberger, from the yeshiva!” She was all nervous: a newcomer to the city with no connections or acquaintances. What did Rabbi Neuberger want from her?

“Mrs. Levinger, I want to welcome you and your son to Baltimore.” How did he know? Her brother whispered that Rabbi Heiman was Neuberger’s brother-in-law. Heiman must have said something.

“But so soon?” my mother whispered back, covering the phone with her hand.

The voice on the other line continued. “Mrs. Levinger, I understand you were an executive secretary in a firm in Europe. I want to offer you a job as my secretary here in the yeshiva.”

“But I don’t know English. I was a secretary in German-language firms.”

“Oh, I see... well... well... I need, uh... that’s exactly what I need, a secretary to handle my German correspondence.”

“What German correspondence?”

“I’ll explain tomorrow. Can you come for an interview at ten o’clock?”

“Yes.”

“Good. I’ll see you then. You enrolled your son in the TA, right?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, then.”

As she hung up the phone, she asked her sister-in-law, “The yeshiva needs a German-language secretary?”

Her brother answered, “It’s Neuberger. He wants you to be in a religious Jewish environment, both for your sake, as well as for your son.”

“But I don’t even know him. He does not know me. People don’t do things like that.”

“Well,” said the brother, most people don’t. But Neuberger does. He’s a very unusual person. “You’ll see.”

By the next day, Rabbi Neuberger had his story worked out and explained that the yeshiva had students whose parents lived in Europe — Switzerland, Scandinavia and places like that — and they needed to be corresponded with. “And anyway, soon you’ll pick up English,

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and you can help in the office. Don’t worry.”

Within a short time, Rabbi Neuberger introduced my mother to his wife, Mrs. Neuberger, and to her mother, Rebbetzin Kramer, who lived with them. Mrs. Neuberger was an unusual person, as well, a true aristocrat — not the aristocracy of frippery and vapidity, but of *noblesse oblige*. As my mother was to discover, Mrs. Neuberger was also of the *emor me’at ve’aseh harbei* (speak little, do much) type.

Not long after my mother started working in the yeshiva office, Rabbi Neuberger drove 12 blocks down Garrison Boulevard to Maine Avenue, to the home and *shteibl* of Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Hertzberg, where my mother davened on Shabbos; it was the shul to which her brother belonged. Rabbi Hertzberg was a Belzer *chasid* from Poland whose followers had acquired a house for him in Forest Park. He and his family lived “over the store,” that is, the shul, which was located downstairs.

Rabbi Hertzberg, too, was a most unusual person. In those years he gave himself over completely to the refugees and survivors who streamed into the city, many of whom “came to dinner and stayed, permanently,” or for long periods of time, anyway. He and his wife raised money, organized marriages, housing, and a thousand other things for these people — not for fanfare but like real *chasidim*, *leshem Shamayim*.

It so happened that Rabbi Hertzberg was distantly related to my mother, though there is only one person in California who really knows how... and he’s forgotten! But it did not matter: A *karov* is a *karov*.

Well, Rabbi Neuberger went to see Rabbi Hertzberg to suggest a *shidduch*, that is, he wanted Rabbi Hertzberg to work on a *shidduch* between two refugees: “Mrs. Levinger and Katz.”

That would be my father. Having barely survived Dachau — 80 pounds at the time of the Liberation and at death’s door for another half a year — he had come to America and eventually to Baltimore to teach at the TA and be a *shammas* at a shul in Forest Park. The shul was the original site of Ner Yisroel. When the Rosh Yeshiva Rav Ruderman

arrived in Baltimore, he had trouble finding a building for the yeshiva and finally hooked up with a shul that had purchased a tall former orphanage. The building had a number of floors, much more room than the shul needed. The shul agreed that if Rav Ruderman served as their shul rabbi, he could have the rest of the building for his yeshiva. The Rosh Yeshiva remained the rabbi there for about a decade, by which time the yeshiva built its campus on Garrison Boulevard and the shul got a new Rav, Rabbi Binyamin Bak. When my father came to Baltimore, the shul was still in the old building, so he lived in one of the many empty floors. That's how things were in those days.

Now my father was a Litvak who had learned in Litvishe yeshivos, so it was not surprising that he hung around the yeshiva in his spare time and was befriended by Rav Ruderman, who was very kind to him, one of the

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few Lithuanian Jews to survive the war. (Did you know that not a single Jewish child in Latvia survived the war?!) Through the Rosh Yeshiva, my father got to know Rabbi and Mrs. Neuberger, who immediately began looking to fix him up.

This was not so simple. Like many, my father was emotionally scarred by the war and the camps. After all the horrors they witnessed and endured! Even after the war was over, the nightmares and the depressions weren't. Like Noach after the Flood, they struggled to adjust to life after *churban* (utter destruction). My father came to Baltimore hating every gentile (except Blacks). He knew it was an emotional, not a rational, reaction, but he could not help it. All of his buddies who survived with him became not *frum*. Who could blame them?

A vignette from that era: My father came over on a ship in late 1946, an old boat where half the passengers were Jews, survivors like himself, and the other half were Germans! Yes, ex-Nazi *goyim*. How they were admitted into America I do not know, but there they were. The first night on the ship, dinner was served, and the passengers were horrified to discover each other. Jews immediately huddled on one side of the room, Germans on the other. The Jews sat down on one side of the very long table, the Germans on the other side facing them. Fifty Jews and 50 Germans stared at each other with violent hatred. The Negro stewards were blithely unaware of the potential war in their dining room. Each passenger was served a grapefruit half. In the middle of the table were a series of sugar bowls, one bowl between each pair of passengers; one bowl between each Jew and German.

Who would take first? Who would break the tense silence? After a minute, a German stuck out his hand to grasp the sugar bowl. The Jew opposite him thrust his fork deep into the German's hand. A riot broke out, as the two groups lunged at each other across the table with knives, forks, and chairs, screaming, gouging, and biting.

The Negro stewards were more than shocked; they were clueless. Why the riot? They ran into the kitchen and emerged with dozens of bowls of sugar. The passengers were introduced to the American way of ending a fight: There's plenty for everyone.

By the time order was restored, there were bleeding wounds and broken bones all around — and one dead German. The ship's captain, a former naval officer, declared that he was not going to arrest a Jew for killing a German, not in 1946 he wasn't. So the man was buried at sea, the victim of "an unfortunate accident."

It was in that frame of mind that my father and thousands of other Jews arrived on these shores in the late forties and early fifties. It was a frame of mind that made American Jews uncomfortable and unsociable. The Associated Jewish Charities hired a bunch of full-time psychologists to provide free counseling for the refugees and washed their hands of all other responsibility for their welfare. And so it was that, like so many others, my father was advised to see happy movies, particularly Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals, to help them out of their gloom. Small wonder that he found more ease of mind in the company of people like the Rosh Yeshiva and Rabbi Neuberger.

Anyway, as you can see, all the principals knew each other, and when Rabbi Neuberger brought up the idea of this *shidduch*, Rabbi Hertzberg exclaimed, "*Vi kumt a daitch aza einfal* — Where does a German Jew get such a good idea?!"

Actually, it turned out that it was Rebbetzin Neuberger who had thought it up. Like her husband, she preferred to do her good deeds behind the scenes. When my parents became engaged, she and her mother threw a bridal shower, and they gave my mother all kinds of gifts for a new household. One month after her marriage, my mother wrote the Neuberger a letter thanking them for all they had done. A few days later, Mrs. Neuberger called her up to say, "You know, Lenka, my husband has done all kinds of favors for many people over the years (this was over 50 years ago!). This is the first time anyone took the trouble to say thank you." This was said laughingly, not bitterly. She was much too big for that.

My mother continued to work as Rabbi Neuberger's secretary until I was born. So you see what I mean when I say that I knew Rabbi Neuberger before I was born, and that like many of my peers, he was there at our *brisses*, bar mitzvas, and weddings. As a boy growing up in Forest Park, Rabbi Neuberger was the only adult at Ner Yisroel who would always come up to me, shake my hand, ask about my parents and about what grade I was in, things like that. Mrs. Neuberger was one of the only adults who would talk to me as if I were an adult, especially about world politics. I remember discussing the Vietnam War, which was raging at that time, and the Middle East situation, and I was 11 years old!

A piquant postscript to these memories: A decade ago, my mother, in her eighties, decided to make *aliya*. She went to the *aliya* office in Rockville to fill out the necessary official forms. The Israeli lady behind the desk was a typical *pekida*, one of those mindless bureaucrats that have driven three generations of Israelis insane. She asked my mother, "What evidence do you have that you are Jewish?" My mother stared at her in amazement. Exactly how many eighty-five-year-old-religiously-observant-Yiddish-speaking-East-European-born-wives-and-mothers-of-Orthodox-rabbis are there who are *not* Jewish?

None of that mattered. "You need documentation." What kind of documentation? A *kesuva*? "No, not sufficient. Documentation."

Welcome to *Medinat Yisrael!* A half-million Russian *goyim* were being brought to Israel at that time, and my mother was being refused *aliya* because of insufficient “documentation”! And all this delivered in an insufferably sneering tone.

I was home at the time, working in my office, when I got a phone call from Rockville. “Hi, Ma, how’s the *aliya* stuff going?” Well, she

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proceeded to tell me in an agitated voice as my mind raced. “Ma, hold on this line for a minute, don’t get off. Let me see something.”

I picked up another phone on a different line and called the Ner Yisroel number. You never know with Rabbi Neuberger, sometimes you can get through right away. Yup, got lucky this time, and the booming voice on the other end said, ‘HELLO?’”

“Rabbi Neuberger, Dovid Katz. I know this sounds crazy, but my mother is at the *aliya* office at Rockville, and they do not believe she is Jewish; she needs something called ‘documentation.’ You know it’s hard for her to travel around. What should she do?”

Within a few seconds there comes the booming voice: “ROSE, take a letter, ‘To Whom It May Concern, Please be advised that Mrs. L. Katz, whom I have known for more than 40 years, is Jewish, and is to be congratulated for emigrating to Eretz Yisrael. (signed) Rabbi Herman Neuberger.’ Fax this letter immediately to the *aliya* office in Rockville.”

“Thanks a lot, Rabbi Neuberger.”

“Give my regards to your mother.” CLICK.

In Rockville, 10 minutes later, the sneering *pekida* gets the fax, stares at it long and hard, gets up, and takes it to the back room to the supervisor. Three minutes pass. Out comes the supervisor, waving the fax. “How do you know this man?”

My mother, in her slow, deliberate speaking voice, begins to explain. After 30 seconds the supervisor barks at the *pekida*, “*Zeh beseder* — it’s okay.” The *pekida*, who, like all bureaucrats, hates being outflanked, angrily stamps the forms, muttering, “Vell, it’s a lucky thing for you that you know this man!”

Indeed.

On rare occasions, I got a glimpse of Rabbi Neuberger the politician, the public man, the insider, the player. Even when I was a boy, I used to hear stories about his involvement with lobbying for certain causes in Washington. Stretching my memory, I recall the lobbying long ago to prevent the prohibition of *shechita*, which was being pushed strongly by the animal-rights groups. It’s funny what sticks in one’s mind; I recall reading in the late sixties a book by Drew Pearson about the inside politics that went on in Washington D.C. Among the many tales of insider lobbying, one involved the “scandal” of how the righteous efforts of religious groups to outlaw cruel slaughtering of animals were blocked. Drew Pearson quoted a Capitol-Hill insider as complaining, “The bill to prohibit cruel slaughter

had been passed by committee and was all set to go the floor of the House of Representatives. All the ducks were in a row; we had more than enough votes to pass it. Suddenly, I see a delegation of black-coated rabbis from Boston and Baltimore troop into the office of the Speaker of the House, John McCormack. They leave after a half-hour. The bill disappeared off the House schedule. It was yanked. Just like that. Scandalous!" John McCormack, an Irish Catholic, was the most powerful congressman of the day. He also represented a Jewish district in Boston.

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Another issue in the sixties was the Vietnam War and the draft deferments for "divinity students." As the war wound on and on, there was increasing sentiment for getting rid of various draft exemptions, including those for students studying for the clergy. My Pirchei leaders at the time, who were *talmidim* in the Yeshiva, told us how they had been "mobilized" by Rabbi Neuberger to go from office to office on Capitol Hill to lobby senators and congressmen to retain the exemption, and how Christian groups interested in the same goal had agreed that Rabbi Neuberger should be the leader of their combined efforts, which were successful. One Pirchei leader worked out of the offices of the minority leader of the House of Representatives, a congressman from Michigan named Gerald Ford, who later became the 38th president of the United States.

By the time I came to the Yeshiva in the seventies, these issues were moot. The draft as well as the war had come to an end, and the animal-rights groups lost all taste for a fight when they realized that America was filling up with millions of Moslems, black and white, who wanted meat from animals slaughtered at the neck. What was outrageous for Jews was politically correct for Moslems.

But new issues were in the air, new problems replaced the old: specifically, Soviet and Iranian Jewry. Here I can contribute some first-hand knowledge. You see, my family history being what it is, I had relatives in the USSR, an uncle and cousins in Moscow, an aunt and cousins in Minsk. Over the decades, my parents had tried to contact them but had been rebuffed because of the relatives' fear of what the KGB might do to them. But by the late seventies and early eighties, a new spirit animated the young, and a number of them became refuseniks, defying the authorities.

Around the time I became engaged, in 1983, I received a phone call from a Rabbi Joey Grunfeld, a relative of Rabbi Moshe Eisemann. Rabbi Grunfeld had been in Moscow giving *shiurim* to Soviet Jews who were rediscovering Yiddishkeit. My cousins, Semyon and Vera Katz, had attended his *shiurim*, though they were not religious. They gave him my name in Baltimore, and he found me, and relayed their greetings and how they wanted to get in touch. My reaction was quite emotional — contact with first cousins I had never met! But how, I asked, had Rabbi Grunfeld gone to Russia? Well, he explained, the Agudah had this program for sending people to teach and do *kiruv* and maintain morale. I thought to myself, how do I get to Russia?

I was thinking these thoughts as I walked around the administration building on Yeshiva lane, when Rabbi Neuberger drove up real fast into the parking circle, slamming the brakes in front of the doors, as was his wont. As he sprung out of the car, he gave me his usual loud “HOWAYA?”

“*Baruch Hashem.*”

“When’s the wedding?”

“Let me ask *you* a question. I just got a phone call yesterday from Rabbi Joey Grunfeld in England bringing me

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greetings from my cousins in Moscow, big scientists, the both of them. How did Joey Grunfeld get there? How do I get there?”

Rabbi Neuberger flashed that trademark sophisticated smile of his and said, “I just got a phone call from the Agudah in New York. They are looking for a young couple to go to Leningrad and Moscow for the Yamim Noraim. When are you getting married?”

“July 25, a month before Rosh Hashana.”

“Okay. So you and your wife will go a week before Rosh Hashana, agreed?”

“Uh, yes, I guess so.”

“You GUESS so?!”

“Yes, we’ll go.”

Then I thought to myself, why did I have to open my mouth to Rabbi Neuberger? He works too fast. I haven’t discussed this with my Karen. How will I break this to her?

But it was too late, for within a half-hour after settling into his office, the phone calls to Rabbis Sherer and Neustadt had been made, and the deal was done. We were to leave for Finland and Leningrad a few days before Rosh Hashana.

Fortunately, Karen did not object to being “mobilized” without her consent. Actually, she blithely assured me that it was not going to happen in the end, so it did not matter.

“No, Karen,” I said. “You don’t know Rabbi Neuberger. If he says it’s happening, it’s happening.”

Fortunately, she did not believe me, so it did not mar our premarital bliss — until we got a summons to report to New York for a preliminary briefing. The reality of the whole thing hit her all at once. “What have you gotten us into?”

“Don’t worry. Somehow or other we’ll pull it off.” I lied; I had no idea what I was talking about. But it was a free trip to Moscow, a free trip to meet with relatives on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

There was a second meeting in New York after our *chasuna*. It dawned on us that most of our time would not be spent with relatives but with helping and teaching *frum* Refuseniks, with only a small amount of time for family. I was getting cold feet, a not surprising emotion. After all, the Soviet Union was then under the rule of Andropov, the former KGB head, and conditions for Jews and political dissidents were worsening — in

short, a general police crackdown. I was assailed by self-doubt. Would we be arrested? Mistreated? Would we be able to accomplish anything? Was I up to it? Maybe I had bitten off more than I could chew? This was the early period of *shlichim*; we were among the first. Some had been beaten up, badly hurt. There were all kinds of rumors. And anyway, was this really the best idea for a honeymoon?

I was immersed in all these thoughts when I ran into Rabbi Neuberger in that *bais vaad lachachamin* that no longer exists, Sam's barber shop. I was to leave in a week or so, was getting a haircut, and in comes Rabbi Neuberger. Sam was his usual self, carrying on about my recent wedding, where, as he enthusiastically explained to Rabbi Neuberger, there was an open *free* bar! Immediately, Rabbi Neuberger

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began asking me all about the upcoming trip. He wanted to know if I was supposed to do anything about the mikva situation in Moscow.

"What mikva situation? Nobody told me anything."

"There's a problem with the mikva there, with the structure, a *zochalin* problem. Nobody told you? Well, here it is." And he launched into a long, learned discourse about *mikvaos*, all of which was news to me. He knew all about the different factions among the *baalei teshuva* in Moscow — how some trusted the mikva and others didn't — the arcane halakhic issues involved, and what a hardship it involved for the few *frum* people there who cared about *taharas mishpacha*. But then he stopped himself, realizing that I would have nothing to do with secret controversy surrounding the Moscow mikva, so I didn't need to know. I thought to myself, I had had no idea how well informed he was about all of the goings on in Moscow, of all places, none of which he had ever indicated to me. But then I reproached myself, of course. I should be surprised that Rabbi Neuberger knows about something?

But he was not finished with me. With his very broad smile, he held my hand in the barber shop and started carrying on about what a big *zechus* we were earning by going to help "*acheinu bnei Yisrael* in Russia." He envied me, he said, the opportunity to do something for the "Yidden behind the Iron Curtain." He went on and on, and it was embarrassing, especially when Sam the barber was standing right next to us having no idea what Rabbi Neuberger was talking about. But I knew, and it was a big *chizuk*. In fact, I got all emotional, because Rabbi Neuberger was speaking very emotionally, as emotional as I had ever seen him. It was nice but uncomfortable at the same time.

I extracted myself from his long, long, handshake and words, paid Sam, and went to my car. As I got in my car, Rabbi Neuberger came out, smiling that emotional smile again, took my hand one more time, and said, "*Tu oif for klal Yisrael!*" I was taken aback by the force of his personality at that moment, made some dumb reply, and drove off. My mind was filled with all kinds of thoughts, but no longer fear or self-doubt.

We went to the Soviet Union, and had our share of adventures. Without going into details, Karen and I were busy 24/7. We thus had no idea what was going on in the outside

world. As it happened, during the two weeks we were in Leningrad and Moscow, Menachem Begin resigned, Scoop Jackson died, and the Soviets shot down a Korean airliner, which almost led to World War Three, since the President at that time was Ronald Reagan, the great cowboy. Karen and I were blithely unaware of the fact that international tensions were rising dangerously, and that all international flights to Russia were about to be terminated due to the world's outrage at the Soviet action. In plain English, Karen and I were in danger of being stuck in Moscow on a pair of expired visas with no flight and no hotel accommodations — assuming, of course, that WW III did not break out in the meantime, rendering all our hotel problems moot.

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In the end, everything worked out, that is, our scheduled flight, on Swissair, turned out to be the very last flight permitted to leave Russia before the boycott kicked in. As we sank into our seats in relief, and the plane climbed into the air above Moscow, the head of our delegation, the totally non-*frum* head of a major Jewish organization, asked us who we really were. You see, officially, we had gone as two book publishers, and he knew it was not true.

“Well,” I replied, we work for a branch of Agudath Israel, and I named the name of the branch. His face betrayed the fact that he had no idea what I was talking about. I thought to myself, “He’s never heard of the Agudath Israel?!” Then I said, “Well, you could say that we work for Rabbi Herman Neuberger from Baltimore.”

“Oh! Rabbi Neuberger! I know who he is. He sent you? Oh, I see! Rabbi Neuberger!”

Doesn’t that story speak volumes?

As it happened, the entire time the crisis was developing (again, we in Moscow were unaware), Rabbi Neuberger was calling the State Department, the senators and congressmen, to move heaven and earth to make sure Karen and I would not get stuck in Russia. In addition, he and Mrs. Neuberger called my mother repeatedly to assure her that all would turn out well. How do I know? Not from Rabbi Neuberger. He never mentioned a thing; there was no need, all had worked out well.

One thing he did share with me, though. We arrived in Baltimore just before Yom Kippur and went to Yeshiva Lane to daven, though I was so exhausted, I slept through a good part of the *tefilos* — that’s my memory from my first Yom Kippur as a married man! Of course, Rabbi Neuberger gave me a big kiss and a hug: “We were all so worried about you!” But it was Yom Kippur, and he said he wanted to tell me something after the fast. It turned out that he had just come from a meeting in New York involving Soviet Jewry, where all kinds of Jewish groups participated, and they had delivered a report about the book convention which had just concluded in Moscow, the book convention Karen and I had attended as “publishers.”

Once again, I was amazed, thinking to myself, “So soon? We had barely gotten off the plane! I was going to tell Rabbi Neuberger all about it, and here he already knows!”

He continued, "And do you know what they said at the meeting? 'There was this young couple that outshined all the others and kept everyone's spirits up and did all kinds of things with the Refuseniks. And do you know who sent them? Rabbi Neuberger here.' And they all applauded right there and then."

He went on, wearing the facial expression of an excited teenager, "Do you know what this means? You made a *kiddush* Hashem."

That was the highest compliment in his vocabulary.

A postscript: About seven months afterwards, I got a phone call in the Beis Midrash from Rabbi Neuberger's staff. In two days, at 4:30, there would be dinner in the executive dining room with Congresswoman Barbara Mikulsky. "Rabbi Neuberger wants you there."

So there we were, Rabbi Neuberger, his staff people, Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, and Barbara M. Rabbi Eisemann had gone to Russia after us, in part, I like to think, because I had told him what a tremendous impact his ArtScroll *Yechezkel* had made on the small community of *frum* Refuseniks. When I told them that I knew Rav Eisemann and that he, too, lived in the obscure place called Baltimore, they all said that I must, *must* tell him what an impact his writings had made on them, and that he must, *must* come to Russia. He did, and the rest is history, as we all know, a story that continues to this day.

At first the conversation was all local politics, as Rabbi Neuberger grilled Barbara about her political future: Was she going to run for the Senate? What were her poll numbers? Who did the polling? Who was she fundraising from? What did she think of this politician? That opponent? What were their strengths? Weaknesses? In short, the kind of conversation about nuts-and-bolts politics that is generally associated with political bosses and the phrase "a smoke-filled room." Rabbi Neuberger was clearly at home in this subject, and Barbara was obviously aware of this and a little in awe. I do remember her asserting, "Rabbi Neuberger, I have not definitely decided to make the race for Senator, but if I do, let me assure you," she said while loudly thumping her chest, "if I do, then come next January, this daughter of a Polish baker from East Baltimore will be there in Washington, raising her hand to take the oath of a member of the United States Senate!"

To which Rabbi Neuberger replied, "So how much money have you collected for you campaign so far?"

As this went on, Rabbi Neuberger changed the subject to talk about Iranian Jewry. A number of boys and girls were stuck in Turkey, and Congressman Solarz was organizing something to help them through the red tape with the Turkish authorities, and Solarz needed help, and such-and-such is what Rabbi Neuberger wanted Barbara to do. Whereupon, she pulled out a notebook from her handbag and scribbled like a schoolgirl as Rabbi Neuberger explained what was needed.

Then he moved on to the next item on his mental agenda. This is where Rabbi Eisemann was called upon to speak about Eliyahu Essas and other *frum* Refuseniks who desperately needed help and public recognition from the U.S. government, for only publicity and official inquiry could protect Refuseniks from "accidents." Here Barbara's

secretary did the scribbling, as Rabbi Neuberger explained that he *personally* was very interested in this case. Barbara nodded, “I understand. I understand.”

Then I was called upon, not having been prepared in the slightest. So I babbled about certain Refuseniks and gave her the names of my relatives. More scribbling. Congresswoman Mikulsky kept repeating what an honor it was for Rabbi Neuberger to take off from his busy schedule to meet with her, how much she valued his counsel, etc. So I was not surprised, years later, when

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she famously remarked at the Yeshiva banquet that she had passed up the opportunity to have dinner with the Clintons in the White House to attend Rabbi Neuberger’s banquet.

That was the only glimpse I had of Rabbi Neuberger behind the scenes, politically speaking. Of course, Senator Mikulsky was by no means the only politician who was part of his “stable.” Anyone my age or older will remember how the powerful congressman Clarence Long used to get up and all but declare himself to be Rabbi Neuberger’s *eved kna’ani*, even after he was redistricted and, as he famously put it at a Yeshiva banquet, “There aren’t enough Jews in my new district to form a *minyan*!”

And of course, there was William Donald Schaefer, whom I saw on a number of occasions being squired around the campus by Rabbi Neuberger. I’ll never forget how I was walking out of the Bais Midrash one morning and bumped right into then-Governor Schaefer. Rabbi Neuberger immediately introduces me, “This is Rabbi Katz, etc.” The Governor does a curt politician’s nod. I tell the Governor that I am the son-in-law of an old friend of his, Eugene Hettleman. “Gene! He and I go back a long way!” And Schaefer starts carrying on about what a great attorney Karen’s father is, on and on, until Rabbi Neuberger takes him by the arm. Whereupon Schaefer says, “Yes right, I’m coming.” And he looks to me and says sheepishly, “I’d love to talk, but I’m here this morning to help Rabbi Neuberger!” All I could reply was, “Yes, you do that Governor.”

A by-no-means-untypical morning at Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in the Rabbi Naftoli Neuberger era.

Then there were the Iranians. I was a *bachur* in the Yeshiva when they first started coming, and they have not stopped coming after all these years. I remember very well the snide remarks from outsiders and insiders about how NIRC stood for “Neuberger’s Iranian Refugee Camp.” And I remember how none of this fazed Rabbi Neuberger in the slightest. None of this petty stupidity prevented him from working day and night in front and behind the scenes to bring over as many as possible.

I cannot claim to have played any part other than spectator, but even then I felt — because of my family background and my interest in history — that Rabbi Neuberger was moved by the study of history, not the academic study of history books, but the study of real

live history. Though he may or may not have heard of Professor Santayana, Rabbi Neuberger certainly knew that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

The past was the twentieth century of the thirties and forties, of the Holocaust, of the failure of Jews in America to make a real attempt to do something for *hatzala* (rescue). Rabbi Neuberger lived through those years as a young man frustratingly removed from the levers of power. But he remembered. And when, decades later, he had access to those levers, when his name and influence were respected and could open doors, he knew better than to wait for the rest of American Jewry, *frum* or non-*frum*, to do something when they were good and ready. He remembered that there had been a time when Jews could have gotten out of Europe and away from Hitler, as he himself had — a time before that tyrant had decided to implement a Final Solution, a window of opportunity the Jews had failed to utilize to save hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Jewish lives. He remembered the grand, terrible failure of American Jewry to act when there was time to act, and he remembered how it spent the years after the War working on and polishing its excuses for that failure.

Rabbi Neuberger was determined not to repeat history. When the Iranian Revolution broke out in 1978, Rabbi Neuberger set about doing everything he could to bring as many as possible to America as soon as possible, regardless of the difficulties involved in their absorption into the Yeshiva and the country. I am sure he remembered how the Jews of Europe would have wanted to get out at any cost, regardless of adjustment problems. Compared to the dangers involved, what did little things like language differences or different cultural customs matter? *Hamekayem nefesh achas miyisrael kiyem olam maleh* — one who saves one Jewish soul saves a whole world. Period.

I am sure Rabbi Neuberger had another agenda as well. What is the meaning of *hamekayem nefesh achas*? Physical *hatzala*, certainly — but also spiritual *hatzala*. And this involved a separate set of challenges. To save a life was relatively easy, in the sense that you get someone out of Iran — not that that is so easy. But if you have taken a person out of a dangerous country, you have rescued him. To make someone *frum*, though, really *frum*, to make someone a *ben Torah*, that is a more difficult and more delicate task. And again, I think that Rabbi Neuberger remembered the all-too-many young Jews from *frum* families who survived the Holocaust but lost their Yiddishkeit in the aftermath — simply because they ended up, in those postwar years, whether in Europe, America, or Israel, in all kinds of “Jewish” frameworks that were not Torah friendly. Rabbi Neuberger realized that if yeshivos like Ner Yisroel did not take them in, did not provide a framework, the Iranian Jews would be lost to Yiddishkeit in America, which is indeed what largely happened to those who emigrated to America but did not go to yeshiva. No, he did not want to repeat history. He learned its lessons the first time.

The results, of course, speak for themselves. Nowadays, people are ashamed to admit how they made fun of Rabbi Neuberger’s “Iranian scheme.” As we all know, defeat is

an orphan but victory has a thousand fathers. And I am sure that in the *olam ha'emes*, the phrase “Neuberger’s Iranian Refugee Camp” is uttered in admiration, not scorn. He learned the lesson of history and did not repeat the mistakes of others.

* * *

Another memorable feature of the man was how he worked his network. How many times was I teaching a class in TA high school when the familiar voice of Mrs. Gold would come over the loudspeaker, “Rabbi Katz, come immediately to the office. There is an urgent phone call for you.” In the early years, I would be seized by

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a deep fright, and all sorts of unthinkable possibilities would run through my mind as I raced to the office. *Baruch* Hashem, it was always Rabbi Neuberger, who expected everyone to be as available to him 24 hours a day, as he was available to them 24 hours a day. So there I would be, scared out of my mind, picking up the phone to hear the familiar Germanic voice come straight to its odd point: “What’s the name of that fellow in such-and-such a place? I need him to stop an autopsy.” Or, “What’s the name of that man from Charlottesville? There’s a *frum* Yid who was arrested nearby in Virginia and needs a pair of *tefilin*.” Or, “What’s the name of your brother’s friend in Korea, that Syrian Jew? He knows that army surgeon in Korea, right?”

Or it might be a history question. Summoned to the high school office “urgently” to give the name of the Baal Tosafos who is buried in Wurzburg. Or when the Noda BiYehudah died. Or what *really* happened in the conflict between R. Yaakov Emden and R. Yehonasan Eibenschutz, and what do the “*treif-pasul*” books say about it, or about Chanukah, or about a hundred other obscure points. In general, he used to ask so many questions about what the “*treif-pasul* history books” said about this or that topic that I would say, “Rabbi Neuberger, I see I am your ‘*vaad hatarfus, kol neveila utereifa laDovid Katz tashlichu oso*. Although he always laughed, he once explained to me that he wanted the information because he was going to be in a meeting at the Baltimore Jewish Council or some such place, and he wanted to come in “prepared and armed.”

The principal in TA or the rebbes in the high school office would look anxiously at me and all but say, “So what did Rav Neuberger want? Is everything okay?” I would just act dumb, mumble something bland, and get back to my class as quickly as possible. What was I supposed to say? That he called me out of the class in the middle of the afternoon to remind him of the name of that 100-year-old-book we had discussed, *Beitraege zur Geschichte der Juden in den zweiten Tempelszeit*, which contained the information to refute that *kefira* article in the *Baltimore Jewish Times* about Chanukah that had made his blood boil?

In short, although he often used to tell me that he was fascinated with Jewish history, and that the stories of the past “are so interesting,” in reality, he was a hugely practical man whose interests were tied to the here and now. He wanted to know in order to be able to use

it on someone, somewhere. The only thing I could be sure of was that he was going to use it to further the cause of *kavod Shamayim* — and that, one day, history books would be written about him.

* * *

I end with an utterly typical, albeit far from unique, story. A certain person with whom I am friendly had a situation. A relative had gotten into a mix-up with the Department of Social Services and had been arrested and was in jail. In the end, it turned out to be a big misunderstanding on the part

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of “the system,” one of those Kafkaesque things that happen from time to time with bureaucratic structures. But meanwhile, a young man was in jail in Baltimore City and was due in court the next morning. I had been out all evening; this was in my pre-cellphone days. It was well after eleven when I came home and my wife said that so-and-so had been calling all evening, “It must be a *shaila*.” I wanted to respond, “So, let him ask his own rabbi,” but just then the phone rang, and it was the man, with the sound of death in his voice as he explained his relative’s situation.

Recovering from the shock, I wanted to help but had no idea what to do. Before I could say this, the man said in desperation, “I need help desperately. You have to help me.” The only thing I could think of was, “Rabbi Neuberger. Call 410-484-2833. Tell him I told you to call him. No, forget that, it doesn’t matter. Just tell him your situation. He knows the lawyers and the system and all that.”

“Is it too late to call him? I have been trying to reach you all night, you know.”

I wanted to scream, “Why are you trying to reach me? What do I know?!” But I didn’t. I considered for a moment that it really was too late to call. But then I realized, Rabbi Neuberger? Too late?

“No, you can call him. It’s not too late.”

“What if he doesn’t answer?”

“Call me back. But he’ll answer. You’ll see.”

“Okay.”

I related the conversation to my wife. We both commiserated with the unfortunate fellow for a few minutes. And then we went to sleep. It was late, after all, and it had been a long day. And it wasn’t my problem any more.

About 1:30 at night the phone rings. Rabbi Neuberger. “I spoke to the man.”

“Yes?” I was more asleep than awake.

“So-and-so (a well-known Baltimore attorney) is taking the case. The hearing is in seven hours at the court on Wabash. You have to be there. The lawyer wants a rabbi there for the judge to see.”

“Oh?”

Rabbi Neuberger's tone of voice indicated surprise that I had gone to sleep and more than a little disappointment at the bland tone in my voice. "You know, a Yid is in jail. This is an unacceptable situation."

"Yes, of course," I mumbled. "Eight-thirty at Wabash. *Yasher koach*." I could not think of anything intelligent to say.

CLICK.

I sat there for a few minutes. When did he get the lawyer? At midnight? And a good lawyer, too. I fell back asleep.

Next morning: happy ending. The lawyer did his thing. I stood up when directed by the lawyer. The Yid got out, temporarily. The whole thing was subsequently cleared up. It was a case of *nisht geshtoigen und nisht gefloigen* — the whole thing never happened in the first place.

As I write these lines, the words of Rabbi Frand at the hesped ring in my ears: "Who are we going to call now?"

Indeed.

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