

every  
soul  
A WORLD



# no pretenses

In tribute to Rav Label Katz a”h

**H**e surely would have recoiled from hearing the term “*tzaddik nistar*” being applied to himself, but Rav Label Katz, a Yid who fled all traces of *kavod*, was not only a Torah giant and master *posek*, but had limitless *ahavas Yisrael*. It was hard to reach him on the telephone, since he was constantly *paskening sh’eilos* for the widest circle of Yidden, always with consummate patience, taking every *sh’eilah* seriously, and, with total mastery of *Shulchan Aruch* and *poskim*, tailoring his *psak* to the nature of the *shoel* and “where he was coming from.” As is said of first-class *poskim*, he had “*breite pleitzos*” (broad shoulders), meaning that he was fearless and sure enough of the rectitude of his *psak* to recognize where there was room for leniency and where there wasn’t. Every *shoel* left the discussion confident and assured of the right thing to do.

**His passing just after Pesach** was a shock and heartbreak for his thousands of *talmidim* and followers. I had the *zechus* to be one of them, although I never really gave him the appreciation he was due. Perhaps these few lines of love and respect will in some small way serve as compensation.

**In his shiurim, Rav Katz** often mentioned matters he discussed with renowned *poskim*, such as the Debrecener Rav ztz”l and *kabbalos* and *maasei tzaddikim* he treasured from Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky ztz”l and others. His volumes of *Sh’eilos*

*uTeshuvos Ohel Aryeh* are his legacy in the realm of practical halachah.

**Rav Label left a special mark** in the realm of *taharas hamishpachah* and *shalom bayis*. He authored the sefer *Ohel Aryeh*, a go-to sefer for chassanim, and was a trailblazer in conducting *shiurim* for small groups of *chassanim* and newly-married men, when the prevailing practice was to discuss such delicate matters solely in private one-on-one *chavrusos*. In the case of one of my own sons, given our chassidische background, I suggested that he attend Rav Label’s *shiurim* for “basic training,” in addition to learning with the dayan of our *chassidus*. That’s because Rav Label was a master at combining a sound basic grounding in halachah with very practical, real-world guidance as these young men were preparing to embark on a new chapter in their lives.

**Rav Label was a fountain** of real-world *eitzos tovos* and sagacious counsel, while being firmly rooted in solid, authentic Torah *hashkafah* and halachah in all its aspects. One day in a *shiur*, Rav Label blurted out a statement that caught everyone’s attention: “Boys, I want you to know, there’s not one chassan in this room who knows what his kallah really looks like.” This to a crowd who was used to courtships extending over several meetings. “You’ve been going out on dates, however many, and your young lady has always been perfectly turned out, makeup and wardrobe perfectly fine-tuned — in a word, ‘all *gepitzt*.’ Be prepared for a shock at home. There stands your *bashert*, only now, she’s wearing glasses, a *tichel*, no makeup, no perfume, a bit disheveled, presenting an altogether different image from what you might have been expecting. I’m just telling you what to be prepared for. It’s normal, and now you know.”

**Rav Label advised his chassanim** how to behave at the *kabbalas panim* of their upcoming wedding. “You see a lot of

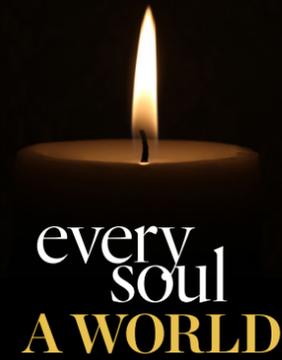
chassanim who sit with their Tehillim, deep in devotion and somber concentration, *shuckeling* back and forth, oblivious to the world. Up comes someone who has never met him before, maybe an uncle or *mechutan* from the kallah’s side, wanting to wish mazel tov. And yet he barely glances at him, not a hint of a smile, offering a lame handshake, barely looking away from the Tehillim. Boys, don’t do it! For that encounter, which might take all of three seconds, be *mafsik* in your own mind. Look the person straight in the eye, give a happy smile and full handshake, and a warm response. Then back to the Tehillim until the next well-wisher is standing in front of you. If there ever was a time to apply “*hevei mekabel es kol ha’adam besever panim yafos*,” this is it. You only get one chance to make a good first impression. The well-wisher is guaranteed to walk away thinking, ‘Oh, wonderful, such a warm, friendly chassan!’”

**He always gave another piece** of advice as well: “Now after you’re married, you’ll be going to simchos together. If you jointly decide to be ready to leave home at a given time, just add on a half hour in your mind to the time. Do something useful when you’re waiting -- learn, daven, take a walk, whatever. Just don’t nag her with, “What’s taking so long? Where are you holding?” Just understand that it takes women much longer to get ready for a simchah than it does us men — and never have a fight over it. Your *shalom bayis* far outweighs any target time. Be smart instead of right.”

## NO POSTURING

Rav Label wasn’t above learning important lessons from all those around him. I once heard the following from Rav Label at a *shiur*: “I saw something amazing this morning,” he told us. “I was putting on my tallis when I noticed a man jumping and dancing, overflowing with simchah. This was not typical morning behavior, so I asked him why he was so happy. He told me

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he's overjoyed, because his tallis is *posul!* I begged him to explain. 'Very simple,' he said. 'Chazal tell us that we have to check the tzitzis on all four corners of a tallis to make sure they are halachically kosher. I always thought this was a needless bother, since I never, ever found a problem. And yet here, today, I see that one of the requisite strands is severed. I don't know how it happened. But the tallis is invalid and I can't make a brachah on it. So I see firsthand the eternal truth in the words of Chazal. I'm so thrilled to see the power of their teaching that I'm dancing for joy, for they prevented me from making a *brachah l'vatalah*. Isn't that a good reason to be happy, to be grateful for the heightened awareness I gained by following the halachah?'"

**Rav Label touched thousands** of Yidden over the years through his unforgettable Shabbos Hagadol and Shabbos Shuvah *drashos*. The men's *shiurim* followed that of the women, so he was on his feet for most of those Shabbos afternoons. And those popular *shiurim* always had a major *shalom bayis* component – people felt the Rav

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was speaking straight to them. Many first-time listeners returned year after year for the inspiration and carried it forward into their lives.

**Rav Label had not a shred** of pretense or posturing. He was *anav mikol adam*, always fleeing *kavod* and honor, whether tactfully advising on a critical issue involving someone in his Khal Zichron Yosef (Torah Vodaath Minyan) kehillah, or teaching his beloved summer *talmidim* at Camp Ohr Shraga. When in his presence, you knew -- even as he warmly received you, giving his one-hundred-percent devoted attention to you, as if you were his only visitor – that along with his authentic Torah guidance, you were in the presence of greatness. His tragic passing is a *hefsed merubah ad me'od* for all of Klal Yisrael.

*Yehi zichro baruch.*

– David Pinchas Rose 

*I served Rav Label “snack” in Camp Ohr Shraga. I would bring the snack up to his bedroom. His hakaras hatov for that was incredible. He even sent me a sefer doing the year, with a note taped to it. What hit me about his room was that he had four alarm clocks. I guess if you want to get up very badly, that's what you do. I used to wonder what he did all day in camp, because he wasn't always in the beis medrash, but I found out when I started serving him. He had a table set up in his bedroom, and when I came in, he would have many seforim open, and he'd be writing. I also noticed that an extra, unused bed in his room was made with sheets, even though nobody was using it.*

*He would often ask us to sing after his shiurim. We would sometimes dance to Toras Hashem Temimah and Achas Shoalti. On Tishah B'av, he asked us to sing Racheim Bechasdecho, saying that all of us singing the tefillah together would make a big impact in shomayim. On the last day of shiur this past summer, he asked us after shiur to sing Avinu Av Harachaman. There was a microphone set up to enable everyone there to hear shiur, as his shiur was packed, and through the microphone we heard him crying as he sang it. After that, we sang Achas Shoalti. A bochur then started Ki Orech Yomim. Rav Label switched it, starting Achas Shoalti instead. We then danced with him to the dining room, not knowing that really, we were saying goodbye.*

*I think the strongest I ever heard protest something was about kavod for rabbeim and not getting involved in politics about gedolim. He told us he has a new gematria for us: politic in Hebrew is gematria amalek. He said that if you are involved in these things, you are m'zera amalek. He said, sometimes people get involved in politics about Israeli gedolim, and they should get on a plane and go ask the gedolim in Eretz Yisroel for mechilah. While you are in Eretz Yisroel, he said, you should go to Kever Rochel, because Rochel Mevako Al Baneha, she's crying about you!*

*He would also say a dvar halacha by meals, and bochurim would crowd around to hear him.*

*A man from a bungalow colony down the block from Ohr Shraga once told me that we see Rav Label, such a talmid chacham, but he remembers how Rav Label would sit and work to become who he became.*

– A Talmid