

In Appreciation of the Unforgettable Rabbi Calman Fishman zt"l

BY RABBI AKIVA MALES

On *Motzoei Shabbos Parshas Ki Savo*, I called my parents in Cleveland, OH, and learned the sad news of the passing of Rabbi Calman Fishman zt"l. Rabbi Fishman was an unforgettable *rebbe* who taught generations of boys at the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland for close to 53 years.

In speaking to Rabbi Fishman's daughter, Mrs. Esther Nathan in Yerushalayim, the following day, I learned the following biographical details of Rabbi Fishman's life.

He grew up in the small town of West-erly, Rhode Island. His parents had immi-grated to the United States from a small Lithuanian town near Brisk, and they were the only *shomer Shabbos* family in the area.

At the young age of ten, Calman was sent to Brooklyn, NY to live with relatives, so he could attend Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin for his remaining years of elementary school, and then Mesivta Torah Vodaas for high school.

After graduating high school in 1952, Rabbi Fishman ventured to Cleveland, OH to learn at the famed Telshe Yeshiva. The *roshei yeshiva*, Rav Eliyahu Meir Bloch and Rav Chaim Mordechai Katz, made a profound impact on him. Rabbi Fishman remained in close contact with the *yeshiva*, and was a loyal *talmid* of his great *rabbeim* until the very end of his extremely produc-tive life.

Rabbi Fishman married his devoted wife, Mrs. Yospa Fishman a"h, in 1958. After remaining in the *yeshiva's kollel* for a few years, he embarked on the path that would endear him to generations of boys who received their formative Torah educa-tion at the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland.

I cannot do justice to Rabbi Fishman's more than five decades as a Torah educa-tor. However, I can share several memories that I have of him, both in and out of the classroom.

Rabbi Fishman had an incredible stash of candies in his briefcase. He kept elabo-rate charts on which his students earned stars. At some point, we'd earn some of those mouth-watering candies as a reward for our achievements.

As my second grade *rebbe*, he taught us the *nusach* for *Yom Tov Kiddush* to be recited at the *Pesach Seder*. This accom-panied many *divrei Torah* on the *Hagga-dah*, which we recorded in our light blue *machberes* notebooks. We also learned to say the *Mah Nishtanah* in Yiddish. I still remember the *Chumash* he taught us. (His vivid reenactment of Yaakov escaping his parents' house before Eisav arrived, hoping to receive the firstborn's *brachos*, is seared into my memory).

My three brothers and I were each privi-leged to have him as our *rebbe* in fifth grade, when he introduced us to learning *Gemara*, teaching us *Perek Eilu Metzios* in *Maseches Bava Metziah*.

Rabbi Fishman was somehow able to get me (and many others) to volunteer to stay after school a few nights a week to learn extra *Mishnayos* with him (more on that below).

I'll never forget how excited I was to

dance on his shoulders at my sister Chan-nah's wedding in the summer of 1981.

Rabbi Fishman had a way of being so *leibedik*, and making engaging in *mitzvos* such a thrill. I recall how exciting it was to join other kids from school to help him build and decorate his elaborate *sukkah*.

My brother, Micha, remembers Rabbi Fishman challenging him to commit *Par-shas Kedoshim* to memory. Although he came really close, after much effort, Mi-cha was not able to fully recite it by heart. Nonetheless, Rabbi Fishman took him across the street from school and gladly treated him to pizza at the famous Kinneret Pizzeria (which every Hebrew Academy of Cleveland student fondly remembers).

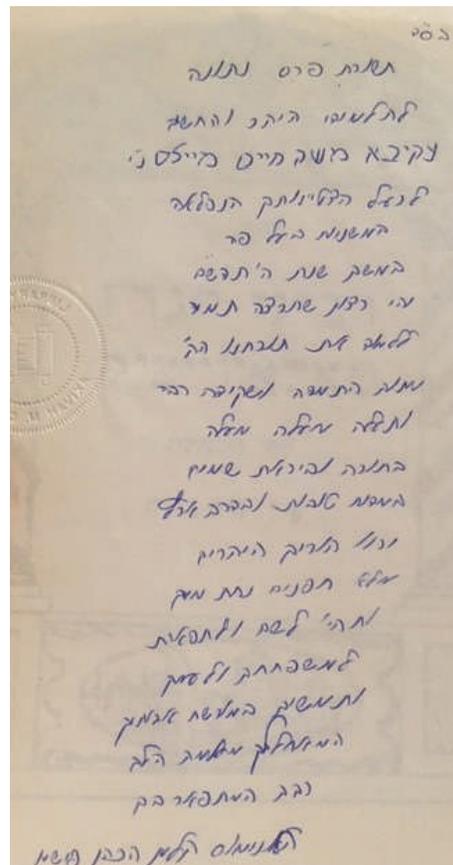
My brother, Josh, shared the follow-ing two great memories of when he was in Rabbi Fishman's fifth grade class in 1975. Rabbi Fishman eagerly led the He-brew Academy students in preparing for a school-wide Brachos Bee that had been coordinated through Torah Umesorah. Josh was the winner (after many early-morning study sessions with my father) and was thrilled to fly to New York along with Rabbi Fishman to compete in the national Brachos Bee. (Josh still grumbles that he was knocked out of the competition in New York with "Pearled Barley." It simply wasn't in the edition of the Brachos Bee book the HAC had given its students, and as a fifth grader, he had not heard of the item before.)

The second memory Josh shared with me from 1975 is epic. At the end of the school year, Rabbi Fishman rewarded his class by taking them to a Cleveland Indi-ans baseball game (my father was one of the chaperones). At that point in history, the student population in the school came from quite diverse backgrounds. Some of the students were not coming from homes that were *shomer Shabbos*. At some point during the game, the hot dog salesman was making his rounds up and down the stadi-um, and in an act of defiance, a boy in the class from a home where *kashrus* was not strictly observed placed an order for one of the foot-longs being sold. The hot dog ven-dor wrapped it up, and being passed from fan to fan, it gradually made its way to the boy who had made the purchase. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Rabbi Fishman came leap-ing over several stadium rows and inter-cepted the non-kosher hotdog right before the student could put his hands on it. Like a superhero, Rabbi Fishman swooped in and swatted the foot-long away just before the student could bite into it. Not on his watch would one of his charges consume *treif*!

(Years later, Josh ran into that former classmate. Josh was amazed to discover that he was now studying in a famous post-high school *yeshiva*. He went on to marry an observant young woman and raise a fine family who are fully *shomer Torah umitzvos*. Might his choices have had something to do with Rabbi Fishman's refusal to let him eat that non-kosher hot dog at Cleve-land's Municipal Stadium in 1975?)

I'll conclude with this amazing tale of *Hashgocha Protis*. Why did Rabbi Fishman come up in my conversation with my par-

ents this past *Motzoei Shabbos*? That *Shab-bos* afternoon, I was preparing for a *parsha* class I give each Wednesday, and I saw a *sefer* reference a really nice thought from the Brisker Rov, Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveit-chik, on *Parshas Nitzavim*. It hit me that I owned that *sefer*, and I went through my shelves so I could look up his comments in the original. I soon found the *sefer*. It truly is a beautiful *devar Torah* and I hope to use it in my upcoming *parsha* class.



Approximate translation of Rabbi Fishman's inscription:

This prize is given to my dear and val-ued student, Akiva Moshe Chaim Males, in recognition of your great accomplishments in learning *Mishnayos*, and remembering them by heart during the year 5744 (1984-85). May it be His will that you should al-ways desire to learn our holy Torah with persistence and great diligence, and keep growing in Torah, your awe of heaven, good character traits, and good conduct. May your precious parents be filled with *nachas* from you. May you bring a good name and much pride to your family and your people, and may you continue the leg-acy of your ancestors. These are my wishes from the depths of my heart.

Your teacher who takes pride in you,
Klonymos Kalman Hakohein Fishman

The handwritten inscription from Rabbi Fishman to the author.

But even nicer than the *devar Torah* was the beautiful inscription I discovered on the *sefer's* cover page. Rabbi Fishman had given me this *sefer* as a gift in 1984 or 1985 - that's roughly 36 years ago, when I was just about 10 years old. It was a prize for something I accomplished in the extra *Mishnayos* club that he ran after school. There was no way I could appreciate this

Sefer as a ten-year-old - or even understand his inscription at that point in my life. But Rabbi Fishman was investing in my future and sharing one of his *brachos* from a *ko-hein* (which he would always tell us carried special value).

I did my best to decipher his beautiful *brocha*, and I told my wife, Layala, that it felt wonderful. I imagined receiving a warm loving hug from Rabbi Fishman that *Shabbos* afternoon. With the *Yomim Tovim* rapidly approaching, and all the coronavi-rus-related stress I'm feeling, I cannot ade-quately explain just how nice that hug from



Rabbi Fishman with the author's brother, Josh Males, in 1975, after winning the Brachos Bee.



Rabbi Fishman's high school graduation picture from Mesivta Torah Vodaas, 1952.

my beloved elementary school *rebbe* felt on *Shabbos*.

I called my parents after *Shabbos* to tell them what I had experienced, and my father sadly informed me that Rabbi Fishman had passed away just days earlier, and that his family was in the midst of sitting *shivah* for him. I wish I could let my *rebbe* know how much I appreciated his hug. The best I can do is share the *devar Torah* and the inscription he so warmly wrote in the *sefer* he gifted me with.

May Rabbi Fishman's *brocha* come to fruition for me, my entire family, and for each of the appreciative 53 years of *talmi-dim* he taught with unparalleled devotion at the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland.

Rabbi Akiva Males serves as the rabbi of the Young Israel of Memphis, Tennessee.