

Reflections

By: Rabbi Shlomo Simon

Financial Director of Ohr Somayach and a close Talmid

I well remember the first time I met Rabbi Schiller, z'l. I had recently come to the yeshiva from Cleveland, Ohio, after an early retirement from my law firm. As a board member who was very close to the Telshe Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Mordechai Gifter, z'l, I sought his advice about making *aliyah*, and where to learn in Eretz Yisroel. Without hesitation, he recommended Ohr Somayach.

Ohr Somayach is the only *baal teshuvah* yeshiva that's a real yeshiva," he said. I was lacking a background in learning, so it was the place for me.

I came to Ohr Somayach with a letter of reference from Rav Gifter, z'l. I met first with Rav Mendel Weinbach, z'l. After a few months of learning with the great Rav Dov Schwartzman, z'l, I was called in to meet with Rav Nota, z'l. Our first conversation was wide-ranging. It eventually came around to a mutual love of English literature.

"What do you think about the 'search for the great American novel?'" he asked; a subject of much discussion in the precincts of literary criticism. My answer was that I thought it had been written over 100 years earlier, by Herman Melville: "*Moby Dick*".

My answer hit a chord. He enthusiastically agreed with me, and from then on, throughout the almost forty years we spent building the yeshiva together with other members of the *hanhala* and staff, we shared a special bond - a bond that was further cemented with his sharing of his incredible *chiddushim* in Torah and *halacha*.

In speaking with other *talmidim* of the Rosh Yeshiva, I know that my feelings were not unique to me. All of us felt that we had a special bond with him. His warmth and concern for our welfare, and for that of our families, were like that of an older brother or father – someone with whom we could share our innermost problems and concerns, and could trust for his sage advice. This was his superpower, so to speak. He made everyone in his presence feel cared for and loved.

I once had the good fortune to spend three full days with Rav Schiller on a fundraising trip to Ohio. I learned a lot on that trip. That same quality of bonding with *talmidim* enabled him to be the consummate fundraiser. At one meeting with a very wealthy secular Jew in Cleveland, I was reduced to tears as the two of them reminisced over their history together. The love between them was palpable - and so very moving.

In spite of the rich man's well-known disdain for the Torah and its *chachamim*, he gave the yeshiva a very generous gift. I learned that Rav Nota's love for each and

every Jew was real, and came from the depths of his being. I knew that if I ever wanted to be a very successful fundraiser, I would have to work on myself to develop that love. I never did, but it was something to admire and aspire to.

From the time that Rav Schiller and Rav Weinbach, z'l, invited me to become a member of the yeshiva's *hanhala*, they made me feel like a partner in every decision they made. After Reb Mendel passed away, Reb Nota continued to treat me like an equal partner.

Although he made the yeshiva's decisions, he made me feel as if my opinions were essential. It's as the Torah says when Hashem created man: "*Naaseh adam*" - let us make man. Did Hashem need to consult with the angels in making man? No. But it teaches how a leader should make decisions.

Reb Nota's life's teaching was "*Imitatio Dei*" – learn from Hashem's behavior towards us, and make it your own. Rav Schiller, z'l will be sorely missed.