

# from HERE & THERE

BY CHAIM GOLD

## RAV YISROEL YECHEZKEL PLUTCHOCK ZT"l

The Torah community, and especially *talmidim* and alumni of Yeshiva Derech Chaim of Brooklyn, are mourning the passing of Rav Yisroel Yechezkel Plutchok zt"l, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Derech Chaim, who succumbed to complications from the coronavirus.



Rav Plutchok was a beloved *rosh yeshiva* and Torah builder, as well as a pioneer in ensuring that *bochurim* in our times receive individualized tailor-made *chinuch* that will enable them to grow into *talmidei chachomim* and *ehrlische Yidden*.

Rav Plutchok established Yeshiva Derech Chaim together with his brother-in-law, Rav Mordechai Rennert zt"l, some forty-five years ago and continued to be *marbitz Torah* at the *yeshiva* until his passing.

Rav Plutchok was a close *talmid* of Rav Chaim Pinchos Scheinberg and learned at Yeshiva Torah Ore in Yerushalayim under Rav Scheinberg, absorbing the tremendous *ahavas haTorah* of his *rebbe* and his unique *chinuch* model.

More than 50 years ago, Rav Plutchok married a daughter of Reb Dovid Yarmush. Reb Dovid was a businessman who was a tremendous *mokir rabbonon*. His sons and sons-in-law became great *talmidei chachomim* and *marbitzei Torah*.

Reb Dovid himself, after retiring, made Yeshiva Derech Chaim his second home.

After learning in Eretz Yisroel, Rav Plutchok decided to return to America to spread Torah. He and Rav Rennert had a very specific idea of the kind of *yeshiva* that they wished to build and the kind of *chinuch* that they wanted to inculcate into their *talmidim*. Rav Scheinberg gave them his enthusiastic *brocha* and encouraged their efforts. He also reassured them that the fact that they had virtually no financial resources should not be a deterrent. He encouraged them to embark on *harbotzas haTorah l'sheim Shomayim* and assured them that Hashem would crown their efforts with tremendous *siyata diShmaya*.

Rav Plutchok and Rav Rennert moved to Boro Park and established Yeshiva Derech Chaim in rented quarters on 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 49<sup>th</sup> Street in Boro Park. Later, they bought and renovated a property at 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 39<sup>th</sup> Street, where the *yeshiva* continues to serve its *talmidim* until today.

Nothing was beneath the dignity of the *roshei yeshiva*. Whether it was cleaning the floors or fixing the building, they were wholly dedicated to their mission of reaching every *talmid*.

Derech Chaim was established as a *yeshiva* with the philosophy that every *bochur* must be treated as an individual and be given guidance as a *yochid*. Rav Plutchok felt very strongly that there should be a low *rebbe* to *talmid* ratio, with numerous

*shiurim* and levels, so that every *bochur* would have the individual attention and guidance needed to succeed *al pi darko*. In the forty-five years since its inception, Derech Chaim has had phenomenal success in its mission, and Rav Plutchok managed to create father-son like bonds with generations of *talmidim*.

Rav Plutchok delivered regular *Gemara shiurim*, *halacha shiurim* and *musar shmuessen* at the *yeshiva*. Although

in recent years some of the duties of the *hanhalah* were passed down to the next generation, Rav Plutchok's presence in the *yeshiva* and his *hashpa'ah* were felt strongly until his passing.

He was also a powerful presence during the summers at Camp Ohr Shraga, where he had a tremendous impact on *talmidim*.

Rav Plutchok leaves behind an outstanding family of *marbitzei Torah* and *talmidei chachomim*. He is survived by his wife,

## FOOD for THOUGHT

### A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS

BY R' YITZCHOK HISIGER

My dear friend and colleague, R' Yisroel (Roy) Neuberger, has just released a new book, *Hold On*, in which he shares the following fascinating story from *sefer Miluui Shlomo* by Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz zt"l.

When Rabbi Lorincz visited the United States, he met former President Harry Truman, in his hometown of Kansas City, with Rav Solomon, one of the rabbis of the city. President Truman said to Rabbi Lorincz, "I am happy to have the opportunity to explain to the rabbi why I recognized the country of Israel, something that was [apparently] against the interest of the United States, to favor 650,000 Jews who wanted their own country, where around that country you have tens of millions of Arabs who are against it. As is known, in the city where I grew up, one of the newspapers came out with a headline: *Truman the Traitor*."

Truman continued: "In my youth, I grew up in a neighborhood of Jewish families who I looked up to. On the Sabbath, I would turn on and off the lights for one of the Jewish families and, as a reward, I got a slice of bread.

"My father's custom was to read the Bible to me every Sunday. When we read about Koresh, the king of Persia who gave the Jews permission to return to Judah and to build the Temple in Jerusalem, I thought to myself that a day will come when I will be the president of the United States – the dream of every child in America was to be the president – and I am going to do what King Koresh did in his time.

"The dream came to fruition, and when your president, Chaim Weitzman, came to me – and in his hand was a gift, a Torah scroll – and he asked that I give the United Nations

representative instructions to support your country, I remembered everything that was in my heart in my youth.

"It was clear [however] that these feelings from the memory of my youth could not weigh against the responsibilities and interests of the United States, so why, with all this, did I come out for your side, on your behalf, and recognize the State of Israel?"

"The reason for this is that only Stalin and I knew the true dangers that faced the world. (This was just after the Hiroshima bombing.) The possibility of an atomic war would continue to threaten to destroy the world, and, even more, leave the residents of the world in a situation worse than death. And if I still had the will to continue to live, it was only because I believed that, just like in the past, three thousand years ago, you Jews saved humanity, wild mankind, via your Torah, and I believe and hope that, even nowadays, you, the Jewish nation, will be successful again,

to enlighten and to heal the beasts of cruelty in our midst and save the world from total destruction."

Rabbi Lorincz continued: "When I returned to Israel from that interesting meeting, I shared the words of President Truman from the podium of the Knesset, so that they would

know what the leaders of the world expect of the Jewish nation. These words are copied in the archives of the speeches of the Knesset.

"The wise among the nations know that the job of the Jewish nation is to be a light unto the nations, and through the Torah that is in our hands to save the world from destruction and to cause goodness to come to the world. If we don't actualize this mission, our friends will turn their backs on us and they will conduct themselves solely focused on their own interests, and then they will favor the hundred million Arabs and the billion Muslims over the handful of Jews. Our obligation is to ensure that Hashem's Name is great and sanctified, and then we will merit that Hashem will fulfill His promise and our problems will find the best solution with the arrival of the *geulah sheleimah*."

*President Truman was correct. We, Klal Yisroel, have the power to save the world from destruction.*



## FOOD for THOUGHT

### I WANT TO CALL YOU "REB"

BY R' YITZCHOK HISIGER

I first saw the following inspiring story written by my colleague, *Yated* columnist Rabbi Binyomin Schonblum, to whom I am grateful, for this anecdote contains an important and powerful message.

Dr. Samuel Schmidt, a nonobservant reporter for a Jewish newspaper in Cincinnati, once traveled from the United States on behalf of the Joint Distribution to assist the refugees in Europe. Dr. Schmidt wrote a weekly column about the goings-on and assisted with the distribution.

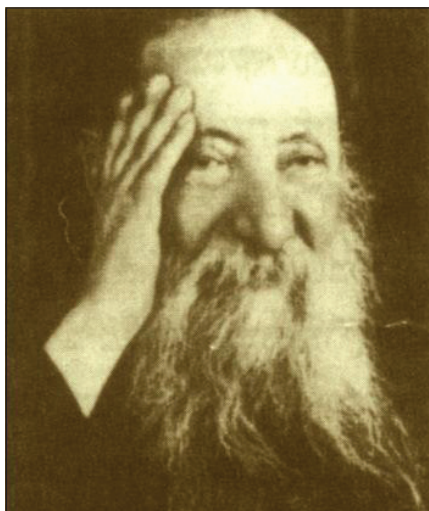
Dr. Schmidt went to visit the *gadol hador*, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky zt"l, as Rav Chaim Ozer was one of those in charge of distrib-

uting funds. Rav Chaim Ozer engaged Dr. Schmidt in lengthy conversation and showed tremendous interest in his past. After a while, Rav Chaim Ozer placed his hand upon Dr. Schmidt's hand and said, "Do you mind if I call you 'Reb Shmuel'?"

Dr. Schmidt was shaken and began to cry. He said to Rav Chaim Ozer, "*Rebbe*, how can you call me 'Reb' when I don't keep *Shabbos* or kosher or put on *tefillin*?"

Rav Chaim Ozer responded, "How can you say that you are not a good Jew? You travelled from a comfortable place to a war-torn region in order to help Jews. You are certainly one who deserves honor and respect. I want to call you 'Reb.'"

The very next morning, Dr. Schmidt put on *tallis* and *tefillin* for the first time, and due to this encounter, he became a complete *shomer Torah umitzvos*.



*It can be something as simple as a gesture of honor and respect that can turn a life around.*