

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Yehuda Stern

The Ultimate Rebbe

Let me share with you what, in my reflection, epitomizes a rebbe whose impact and imprint on a student will last for a lifetime.

Before Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l even opened Ohr Naava in 2004, he had been a rebbe for thirty years at the Crown Heights Yeshiva in Mill Basin. The version of Rabbi Wallerstein during those years is something to particularly appreciate. He was not in the lime-light, he was not known, and he was doing many things in a quiet way. His closest friends knew that he was a rebbe and what he was about, but for the most part, people in his neighborhood and community associated him with just being a very successful businessman and philanthropist. But before he started his workday, he drove into Mill Basin and taught eighth grade boys.

I had the zechus of having him as my eighth grade rebbe in 1988-1989, and to this day, I think about several anecdotes which truly personify who he was at his core.

Imagine a school which did not have any students who were Shomer Shabbos or kept Kosher. As our Rebbe, Rabbi Wallerstein's job was, in any which way, to inspire the students and turn them on to Yiddishkeit. He had very unique and creative ways of doing so. Every day, he was in the gym with us playing basketball. And every Friday, he would take us to the park to play

tackle football. He put a bounty on his own head that if anyone was successful at tackling him—he played as the quarterback for both teams—the boy would get \$100. Just picture a bunch of eighth grade boys coming after him. Rabbi Wallerstein invited that kind of interaction, and in fact taunted us to come and get him. "You don't want the hundred dollars?" he would say. "How come nobody's touched me yet?" After every Friday, we'd come back with mud and bruises, but that was a highlight.

Every day, Rabbi came in with bags of food. "We don't learn until our stomachs are full," he'd say. As students, we'd run and open bags of cookies and potato chips, though we all knew we needed to save him the burnt potato chips. There were all these creative rules of association, which were aimed at pampering us and drawing us in to an engaging, personal and exciting relationship with him and what he represented as a rebbe.

One day—though this 'day' really happened more than once—we were very hungry, and we knew that if we begged him enough and pushed his buttons, he'd take us out to eat. He'd pile ten boys into his car and we'd just take off. I don't know how we fit in, though I do remember having a twenty-minute ride with someone's knee to my cheek. But we knew it was worth it. Rabbi Wallerstein had no rules as to where we sat, and all he said was, "Guys, figure it out.

TheTorahAnyTimes is a publication of



Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik

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Let's go. Let me know when I can put the car into drive."

When we arrived, we all began scanning the menu overhead and then asked, "Rebbe, what can we get?" "What do you mean?" he said. "You don't see up there, the whole menu is listed. You can get whatever you want." The guys lost their minds. "I'll take three of those, four of those," they'd say. We thought that he would stop us, but instead he said, "Only three, only four? Maybe you want to take more?" It was a party. Every single day it was a party.

None of this was because he was looking to get some positive social media tweets or anything. This was just him and us, his eighth-grade boys, every day.

Once, somebody got really hurt playing tackle football, and word got back to the executive director of Crown Heights Yeshiva as to what happened. Due to the incident, Rabbi Wallerstein was being made to feel that we couldn't go to the park and play football anymore because it was an insurance liability.

So came that Friday, and we all had our things ready to go. Tackle football on Friday with Rabbi Wallerstein was our highlight of the week. He had a saying, "In the snow we go, and in the rain, we remain." That day, there was no snow or rain, so we knew that we'd be going. Until he broke the news that we wouldn't be able to go that week because word had gotten back to the school. But among us students, there were a couple of loud, outspoken boys who were not having this. And they started trash talking Rabbi Wallerstein.

"Rebbe, I thought you told us, 'In the snow we go, and in the rain, we remain.' We thought you own this school. Don't you own this school? People are bossing you around? C'mon Rebbe!" They were pushing him. Believe it or not, you could see

that Rabbi Wallerstein was actually enjoying this back-and-forth. For him, he was not necessarily into playing by the rules. It was about finding different ways to get things done, because if you are very passionate about something, you push and find a way to get it done. So essentially, albeit not in the most respectful way, these boys were pushing Rabbi Wallerstein to get it done. And Rabbi Wallerstein's essence was all about finding ways to go beyond nature.

I couldn't believe he was actually being affected by what the boys were saying. He then left the room, and came back about five minutes later. His eyes were popping out of their sockets as he looked at us all. "Okay guys, huddle in." We all looked at one another, wondering what was going on. "This is the plan..." he said. He devised a plan that he'd stand by the end of the hallway, and wave one of us at a time to run from the eighth-grade classroom to the top of the stairs. "But you have to listen," he cautioned us. You could see that he was standing near the steps, just hanging out, secretly motioning to us one by one to make a dash to the stairs. Then, each eighth-grade boy would make a run for it down the hallway until they made it down the stairs. It was like a bank robbery.

Now, Rabbi Wallerstein was standing on East 63rd Street, and staring up at the window of the executive director. He was watching to see if she was watching. And every time she turned away, he'd wave another one of us onto the street. I kid you not, I was face-planted on the pavement behind a parked car until he told me I was permitted to get back up and run onto Avenue U. This happened for each and every single one of us.

We played football that day.

That was Rabbi Wallerstein at his core. He was such a fun, loving, passionate personality.

All of us had our parents meet with Rabbi Wallerstein during eighth grade, something which he insisted on. One time, Rabbi called each and every parent into an emergency meeting and said to them, "I'm going to prevent you from having an excuse after one hundred and twenty years that you couldn't afford yeshiva tuition. I'm committing to pay for four years for yeshiva tuition for all of you. I want your kids to be in yeshiva for high school." A lot of us were not frum, and were excited to go the public school route after eighth grade. But because of him, a large majority of us—myself included—ended up in yeshiva. And he funded the tuition for all the parents who couldn't afford it.

I ended up spending those four years of high school at a yeshiva. When I had finished, I met with Rabbi Wallerstein. This was a full four years after he had been my rebbe, which says something about the kind of relationship he built with his students. We all wanted to meet with him. Imagine non-frum guys wanting to meet a rabbi. Why? Because he was a larger-than-life celebrity. You just wanted to be in his presence. You just wanted to say, "Hey, Rebbe." We'd see him on the court, and we'd want to shoot around, and he'd want to know how we were doing. I was playing on the basketball team at the time, and he wanted to know how the team was doing. There was a lot of great camaraderie between us all.

In June 1993, I had planned on going to a university in upstate New York, but then Rabbi Wallerstein caught wind of it. He begged me to reconsider and said, "Yehuda, if you say the word 'Yes,' I will pay for your yeshiva tuition, I will pay for your flight, and I will get you a year of college credit. I'm talking to you like a father talks to a son. I'm

begging you, please, reconsider." I couldn't sleep that night, and I called him the following day. I had already paid my tuition for the university, already had my roommate, and already went to the orientation. "Okay, Rebbe," I said. "Yes."

The rest is history. I spent a year-and-a-half in Israel, and I'm frum today because of that. I got back, went to law school, and after my first year of school, Rabbi Wallerstein had a quick meeting with me where he told me that he thinks I should become a rebbe. This was in 1999, and I had just recently become frum. "You're a young guy, you weren't frum, you're now frum, and that's what these teenage boys need." I didn't want to become a rebbe, but Rabbi Wallerstein pulled me into an interview at ZDR Academy of Yeshiva Rambam, kicking and screaming. I had no resume, no experience and I tried to sabotage the interview. I really did. They asked the typical questions, "What makes you want to be a rebbe?" "I don't want to," I replied. "What's your experience?" "I don't have any experience. This is not for me. Please tell the man outside." All the while, Rabbi Wallerstein was craning his neck, peeking through the window in the door.

They hired me, because Rabbi Wallerstein did whatever salesman job he needed to do. That was twenty-four years ago, and I've been a rebbe ever since.

All the things I have in my life that are good are all attributable to Rabbi Wallerstein. And none of them made sense; they all defied the rules of nature. But Rabbi Wallerstein truly lived with Hashem in his life, and Hashem is above nature, so Rabbi Wallerstein acted in sync.

The Torah tells us, "V'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha Ani Hashem—You shall love your fellow as yourself; I am Hashem." If Rabbi Wallerstein looked at me and really loved me, and believed that G-d is in charge of everything, then he believed that he needed to do whatever possible to not play by the rules of nature and to get me to become what he saw in me.

In one lecture he gave, Rabbi Wallerstein mentioned that the biggest obstacle to V'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha is that many people are not capable of loving themselves properly. Rabbi Wallerstein had that unique ability and keen sense to see what another person's potential was and bring that out, and he was willing to break all the rules of nature to do so. In his eyes, I had a potential to be a rebbe which I was not seeing, he loved me perhaps even more than I loved myself, and he also knew that Hashem could go above and beyond nature. When you put that together, anything was possible.

In 1999, when the New York Knicks were in the NBA Finals, me and another close friend of me, Howie Hershkovich, came to Rabbi Wallerstein at his office and tried some old, eighth grade antics. "Rebbe, we know you have connections with NBA tickets. Tonight, there's a Knicks Finals game. Rebbe, hook it up." He looked back. "No, I don't have any of those connections anymore. I'm sorry, I used to be able to get tickets back then, but not now." Howie and I remembered what buttons to push to get things done, so we started saying, "Rebbe, wait, maybe there are bad acoustics in the room, but I think we heard you say the words 'You can't do something.' Are we hearing properly, because we don't know that Rebbe. Is this a wa-

tered-down version of the Rebbe that we know, because our Rebbe can get anything done..."

You saw Rabbi Wallerstein's insides completely spinning. Obviously, we softened the blow a little bit after. "We're just messing with you, Rebbe... The game is tonight, and it's anyway a sold-out arena for the Finals. It's fine." And then we left.

My cell phone buzzed about an hour later. It was Rabbi Wallerstein. "Yehuda, come back to my office." "What's going on?" I asked, uncertain. "Come back, don't worry. I want to speak to you for a minute." Maybe I pushed a little too much, I began thinking to myself. I showed up at the office, feeling a little nervous.

There, Rabbi Wallerstein handed me an envelope. "What's this?" I asked. "Open it up," he said, looking straight at me.

It was two tickets to the Knicks Finals.

I called up Howie. "Where are you?" I said, trying to reel in my shock and excitement. "I'm on the Prospect Expressway." "Make a U-turn right now, and get back to Brooklyn!" We showed up to the game, and Donald Trump sat behind us. That's how close we were to the court.

That was Rabbi Wallerstein. Rabbi Wallerstein didn't understand the words, "I can't." Rabbi Wallerstein didn't understand the words, "I don't know how." His essence—who he was for thirty years as a rebbe and who he was to so many others—was about loving every single person with his whole heart and going above and beyond the realms of nature to help them.

May his neshama have an aliyah.

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Rabbi YY Jacobson

The Right Words

A number of years ago, I was invited to a kumtitz for teenagers one Motzei Shabbos in Pomona, a neighborhood near Monsey. These were boys who'd generally be categorized as struggling teenagers and were studying in a particular yeshiva which provided the kind of warm environment and camaraderie they sought.

There they were, about forty of them, sitting around a fire pit. Guitars, drums, some other instruments, roasted marshmallows, hot dogs and hamburgers abounded, as the boys sang several uplifting melodies. There was a majestic and magical energy between us all. I had been invited to join them and spend the evening together, sharing some words, and I was taking it all in.

In the middle of one song, a boy came over to me. He put his chair right near me and put his hand on my shoulder, as you can picture friends sitting around a campfire. He then said these words: "Rabbi YY, why did my mother die?" I didn't expect such a question. I

looked back at him, caught off guard, and said, "I'm sorry, when did she die?" "When I was eleven years old, nine years ago. We had a family of eleven children. I was one of the older kids, with many siblings under me. We were living in London when she got cancer and passed away. She was a young woman in her forties. Tell me, why did my mother die? I was so close to her. I loved her and she loved me. She was such a good mother."

I looked at him, as my hand went on his shoulder. "I don't know why your mother died," I said. "I'm so sorry." But the boy wouldn't have it that easy. "C'mon, tell me why! Why did she have to die?" I looked back at him. "I really don't know. But I would love to be here with you. It must be so painful. Nine years later you talk about it, and yet I can't give you an answer. But you know what? I can sing with you, I can cry with you, and I can listen to you." He started to cry, I started to cry, and we sang together. He didn't say another word after that.

About twenty minutes later, he turned to me with tears in his eyes, again. "You know, you're the first one

out of dozens of people who said that they don't know. And this was the answer that I've been waiting a decade for." I wasn't sure I understood. "What do you mean 'this is the answer'?" "I went to so many people," he continued, "and everybody, and with good intentions, tried to explain to me some reason why my mother had died—whether it be relating to a gilgul, neshama, gan eden, kapparah (atonement), tikkun—and it drove me mad. To me, it felt insensitive to my experience, even if they meant well. You were the first one to say, 'I don't know, but I can cry with you.'"

I realized at that moment how transformative those words had been for that boy. And indeed, this boy not only turned his life around, but became a powerhouse of inspiration and love for so many others.

Indeed, sometimes the right words, the right answer is, "I don't know, but I can cry with you." Those words say it all. They really do.

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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 3 Iyar)

שלומי בן רוזיטה אירה (זיו)	נדב בן חנה (פופלוול)	גד משה בן שרה (מוזס)	אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור)
שלמה בן מרסיל (מנצור)	נועה בת ליאורה (ארגמני)	גי'א בן מירב (גלבוע דלאל)	אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)	נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן)	גלי בן טליה (ברמן)	אברהם גלעד בן אמונה (מונדר)
	נעמה בת איילת (לוי)	דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)	אגם בת מירב (ברגר)
	עדן בת שרית (ירושלמי)	דולב בן יעל (יהוד)	אוהד בן אסתר (בן עמי)
	עודד בן בלהה (ליפשיץ)	שרה (שטיינברכר)	אוהד בן אסתר (יהלומי)
	עומר בן ניבה (ונקרט)	דניאלה בת אורלי (גלבוע)	אור בן גאולה (לוי)
	עומר בן שלי (שם טוב)	הירש בן רחל (גולדברג פולין)	אורי בן עינב אפרת (דנינו)
	עומר מקסים בן אורנה אסתר (נאוטרה)	זיו בן טליה (ברמן)	איתן בן רות אדית (הורן)
	עופר בן כוכבה (קלדרון)	חיים בן נחמה (פרי)	איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור)
	עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר)	חן חנן בן ורד (יבלונקה)	אלון בן עידיית (אהל)
	עידן בן דלית (שתיו)	טל בן ניצה (שוהם)	אליה בן סיגלית (כהן)
	עמירם בן שרה (קופר)	קורנגולד (הורן)	אליהו בן חנה (שרעבי)
	עמית אסתר חיה בת אילנה אלין (בוסקילה)	יגב בן אסתר (בוכשטב)	אלכסנדר בן אוקסנה (לובנוב)
	עמרי בן אסתר ורוניקה (מירן)	יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)	אלכסנדר ששה בן ילנה לאה (טרופנוב)
	צחי בן דבורה (עידן)	יורם בן בלה (מצגר)	אלכסנדר בן נינה (דנציג)
	קית' שמואל בן גלדיס חוה (סיגל)	יצחק בן אנטה חנה (אלגרט)	אלמוג בן אורית (מאיר ג'אן)
	קרינה בת אירנה (ארייב)	יצחק בן גילה (גלרנטר)	אלמוג בן נירה (סרוסי)
	רום בן תמר נועה (ברסלבסקי)	ירדן בן פנינה (ביבס)	אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)
	רומי בת מירב (גונן)	כפיר בן שירי (ביבס)	אמילי תהילה בת אמנדה פרנסיס (דמארי)
	רון בן חנה (בנימין)	כרמל בת כנרת (גת)	אנדריי בן יבגניה (קוזלוב)
	שגב בן גלית (כלפון)	לירי בת שירה (אלבג)	ארבל בת יעל (יהוד)
	שגי'א בן נעמית (חן דקל)	מישל בן סולמירה (ניסנבאום)	אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
	שירי בת מרגיט (ביבס)	מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)	אריאל בן שירי (ביבס)
		מתן בן ענת (אנגרסט)	בר אברהם בן ג'וליה (קופרשטיין)
		מתן בן ירדנה (צנגאוקר)	

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 3 Iyar)

Amit Esther	Yitzchak ben	Arbel bat Yael	Avinatan ben
Chaya bat Ilana	Gila	(Yehud)	Ditza Tirtza
Alin (Buskila)	(Gelerenter)	Ariel ben Sylvia	(Ohr)
Omri ben	Yarden ben	Monika (Konyo)	Evyatar ben
Esther Veronica	Penina (Bibas)	Ariel ben Shiri	Galya (David)
(Miran)	Kfir ben Shiri	(Bibas)	Avraham Gilad
Tzachi ben	(Bibas)	Bar Avraham	ben Emunah
Devorah (Idan)	Carmel bat	ben Julia	(Mondar)
Kieth Shmuel	Kineret (Gat)	(Cooperstein)	Agam bat
ben Gladis	Liri bat Shira	Gad Moshe	Meirav (Berger)
Chava (Segal)	(Elbag)	ben Sarah	Ohad ben
Karina bat	Mishel ben	(Mozes)	Esther (Ben-
Irena (Ariav)	Solamira	Guy ben Meirav	Ami)
Rom ben	(Nissenbaum)	(Gilboa Dalal)	Ohad ben
Tamar Noa	Maxim ben	Gali ben Talya	Esther
(Brasalevsky)	Talleh (Herkin)	(Berman)	(Yahalomi)
Romi bat	Matan ben Anat	David ben	Ohr ben Geula
Meirav (Gonen)	(Angrest)	Sylvia Monika	(Levi)
Ron ben Chana	Matan ben	(Konyo)	Ori ben Einav
(Binyamin)	Yardena	Dolev ben Yael	Efrat (Danino)
Segev ben	(Tzangauker)	(Yehud)	Eitan ben Ruth
Galit (Chalfon)	Nadav ben	Doron bat	Idit (Horen)
Sagi ben	Chana	Simona Sarah	Eitan Avraham
Naamit (Chen-	(Popplewell)	(Steinbrecher)	ben Efrat (Mor)
Dekel)	Noa bat Liora	Daniella bat	Alon ben Idit
Shiri bat Margit	(Argamani)	Orli (Gilboa)	(Ohel)
(Bibas)	Nimrod ben Viki	Hirsch ben	Eliya ben
Shlomi ben	(Cohen)	Perel Chana	Sigalit (Cohen)
Rosita Ira (Ziv)	Naama bat	(Goldberg-Polin)	Eliyahu ben
Shlomo ben	Ayelet (Levi)	Ziv ben Talya	Chana (Sharabi)
Marcelle	Eden bat Shirit	(Berman)	Alexander ben
(Mansour)	(Yerushalmi)	Chaim ben	Oksana
Tamir ben	Oded ben	Nechama	(Lubanov)
Cheirut	Bilhah (Lifschitz)	(Perry)	Alexander
(Nimrodi)	Omer ben Niva	Chen Chanan	Sasha ben
	(Venkrat)	ben Vered	Yelena Leah
	Omer ben	(Yablonka)	(Tropanov)
	Shelly	Tal ben Nitza	Alexander ben
	(Shemtov)	(Shoham-	Nina (Dantzig)
	Omer Maxim	Corngold)	Almog ben Orit
	ben Orna Esther	Yair ben Ruth	(Meir-Jan)
	(Neutra)	Idit (Horen)	Almog ben Nira
	Ofer ben	Yagev ben	(Sarusi)
	Cochava	Esther	Elkana ben
	(Kalderon)	(Buchashtev)	Ruchama
	Idan ben Yael	Yosef Chaim	(Buchbut)
	(Alexander)	ben Miriam	Emily Tehilla
	Idan ben Dalit	(Ochana)	bat Amanda
	(Shtivi)	Yoram ben	Francis
	Amiram ben	Bella (Metzger)	(Damari)
	Sarah (Cooper)	Yitzchak ben	Andrei ben
		Aneta Chana	Yevgenia
		(Elgarat)	(Kozalov)