

A Taste of
THE LIFE AND LEGACY
of RABBI SHLOMO
PORTER ZT"Л

הרב שלמה סנדר
בן ישראל זצ"ל

כ"ו חשוון, תש"ח – כ"ג חשוון, תשפ"ו



**SELECTED TRIBUTES, MEMORIES
AND STORIES FROM FAMILY,
STUDENTS, AND FRIENDS**



Elky (Porter) Brener

From a Daughter's Heart

My father, Rabbi Shlomo Porter ה'ע"ה was a devoted husband and loving father and grandfather. With his glowing smile and his warm hugs, he conveyed his unconditional love and pride in each one of us. My parents were very giving people but were careful not to spoil us.

My siblings and I have such good memories of our childhood. I remember, when we all danced together after lighting the menorah. I also remember enjoying a famous Russian dance in which he sang as he twirled us around in a circle. We used to take a road trip every summer to Minneapolis to visit his sister, our Tanta Bella ה'ע"ה and Uncle Mitchell 'Shlomo' and their children. He would take out his map and drive for hours on end, keeping us busy with many snacks and treats for the way.

My father's מידות were outstanding. He was very soft-hearted and quick to apologize if he may have hurt someone's feelings. I learned from him the tremendous power of saying "I am sorry" or "You are right". He was a true אוהב שלום ורודף שלום and did whatever was needed at that moment for the sake of peace.

When I was about 15 years old, a friend of mine became very upset at something I did and refused to talk to me. I didn't apologize to her because I didn't feel that I had done anything wrong. This went on for a few days until my father sat with me and said "Elky, sometimes you need to say you are sorry even if you didn't do anything wrong." We spoke about it and he inspired me to apologize even though it was hard for me. Things worked out very quickly and peace was restored.

My father was an outstanding husband. Every Friday night when we finished hosting many guests, he would tell my mother to go rest. He knew how tired she was after cooking and cleaning the whole שבוע, so he would stay up to clean up the meal and put away all the leftover food. He always did the food shopping, spending hours in Seven Mile Market on Thursday nights. On Friday afternoon, he would happily go back again for all the last-minute items that were needed for שבת.

He always looked for ways to make my mother happy. This past summer, when he was not well, my mother came back from a trip she had taken with a friend. My father made sure to get a haircut before she came home because he knew she would appreciate if he looked good when she arrived.

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My father loved **תפילה** and **תורה**. His davening, learning, and teaching gave him tremendous pleasure and satisfaction. Whenever I called on **ערב שבת**, he would share with me a beautiful thought on the **פרשה**, or sometimes an inspiring story. For his 70th birthday, my siblings and I presented him with a gift we knew he would treasure- a new set of Shas. His chavrusa, Rabbi Leib Hoffman, learned with him for over 50 years, becoming closer than brothers in many ways.

My father's heartfelt **תפילות** were well known in the community. However, his private **תפילות** also reached the **כבוד**. My daughter spent some time in my parents' home. She was there 1 1/2 years ago on **יום כפור**. She saw my father, his face shining with purity, saying **תהילים** with tears on his cheeks. She also was moved to tears.

I know that my father **ע"ה** is smiling down at all of us from **שמיים**. I know He is with me, as well as with my mother, **שתחיה**, my siblings, and my entire family. And just as his heart was full of love for every Jew, I am sure he is davening for each and every one of you to succeed. He wants us to stay strong, to keep smiling, and keep growing closer to **ה**.



Irving Walker

With the passing of Rabbi Porter, your family and our entire community has lost a great man, who changed and enriched the lives of so many, including my own and the life of my family. Here is my story of the impact Rabbi Porter had on my life. I met Rabbi Porter about 25 years ago at a meal at the home of my sister and brother-in-law.

A year or so after that, my life became very turbulent, as I separated from my then wife for reasons that presented many challenges, especially those relating to my three children. Even though I had met Rabbi Porter only once, while in the midst of this difficult transition, I received a call from Rabbi Porter, who asked me to come see him at Etz Chaim. Out of respect, I did not ask him why, I simply scheduled a meeting.

After greeting Rabbi Porter in his office and sitting down, he told me that my sister had told him of my difficulties and he asked me a simple but powerful question: "What can I do for you?" As I sat there, I realized that the only other people who had asked me that question were my sister and one of my good friends, that none of my other "good friends" had thought to ask that question. In that one moment, I learned the lesson of what it meant to be a true friend. In that moment, I knew that Rabbi Porter, despite only having met me once, was acting out of true friendship and caring.

In response to Rabbi Porter's question, I told him that I would like to learn more about Judaism, perhaps studying Torah, so that I could strengthen my ability to be a good example for my children as we all faced a major transition in our lives as I proceeded with a divorce. Rabbi Porter connected me with Rabbi Shlomo Gottdiener, with whom I started meeting regularly to study Torah. I also participated in classes and services from time to time at Etz Chaim, including some classes with Rabbi Alexander Seinfeld. These experiences enabled me to understand and experience the "magic" of Jewish thought and teachings in a way I never previously had realized.

About two years later, my daughter had just completed her Bat Mitzvah and informed me that she no longer would be attending religious school, despite my direction that she complete the remaining two years required for confirmation within the religious school program of Temple Emanuel, where we then belonged. Facing this defiance, I asked Rabbi Gottdiener for advice, and he informed me about the NCSY program held regularly at the Starbucks at Festival at Woodholme. After negotiations, my daughter agreed to participate in the NCSY program as an alternative to completing Sunday school.

One night, when I went to Festival at Woodholme to pick up my daughter at the end of the program, I was early and walked around the shopping center, to which I previously had no reason to go. I saw in the window of the Renaissance Art Gallery that it was having a Vintage Poster Sale that weekend, and I remembered that after I moved into my own home following divorce, the decorator I worked with suggested that I get a vintage poster for my bedroom. So I went to buy a vintage poster that weekend.

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As soon as I walked in, I noticed one of the women working in the gallery showing customers the vintage posters. I immediately decided that my priority had changed from purchasing a vintage poster to meeting this woman. After managing to get her to help me select two posters and framing for them, I arranged to have her meet me at my home to see where they would best fit. Away from the busyness of the gallery, I asked her for a date, and happily, she said yes. We were married two years later, by Rabbi Seinfeld, and we will be celebrating our 19th wedding anniversary next month. Our marriage has brought me and my family joys beyond anything I had any reason to expect after my prior marriage.

This series of events would not have happened if not for Rabbi Porter, after meeting me just once, cared enough about me to reach out to ask me what he could do for me. What an extraordinary man, who cared about others in a way very few do. I know I am just one of the many, many people whose lives were changed for the better and enriched by Rabbi Porter. I am forever grateful for what he did for me, and to my sister for introducing us.

Surely Rabbi Porter's memory will always be a blessing, and may he continue to be source of strength and inspiration for you, his family, and all those fortunate enough to have crossed his path.

A handwritten signature in white ink on a dark blue background, reading "Aryeh Smith".

Wearing the Tallis Before I Was Ready — Belief That Gave Me Strength

For many years while I was dating, I struggled with being single. Like many people in that stage of life, there were moments of doubt, moments of weakness, and moments when I needed someone to believe in me even when I had trouble believing in myself. One day, Uncle Shlomo did something I'll never forget. He took his tallis... and he wrapped it around me. And he said, "Just imagine for a moment—you're married. You're wearing your own tallis. Feel what that confidence feels like. Live with that strength." It wasn't just imagination. It was empowerment. In that moment, he gave me something priceless: his belief in me. And that belief stayed with me long after the tallis came off. Because that's what Uncle Shlomo always knew how to do— He knew how to lift people up exactly when they needed it most.

Uncle Shlomo didn't just "help" people. He carried people. He lifted them when they fell. He gave them wings when they forgot how to fly. He gave them confidence when they were afraid. And now, the greatest way I can honor him is by trying to live his legacy— By being there for people when they need it most. May every time I lift someone up, it lifts his neshama higher and closer to Hashem.

Yehi zichro baruch

Avi and Ruth Eastman

I can't even begin to adequately express how much Rabbi Porter, zt"l, has meant to our family for the past 35 years of our Jewish journey.

We had just completed our conversion during our duty station in Germany, of all places. (That's its own story, as you can imagine.) We were trying to figure out where to live. I wanted to head straight for Israel. My husband, after twenty years traveling everywhere in the world for the US Army, wanted to spend at least a little time back in the States. I wrote to many places we either loved (Seattle, Missouri) and to places people recommended to us. Among those was Baltimore, Maryland, recommended to us by Rabbi Joe Daina, zt"l. Some communities didn't answer. Most sent form letters. But Baltimore beckoned to us with such clarity that we felt Hashem was pointing a neon arrow at this community as the next stop on our journey. We got a six-page, handwritten letter from one person, along with hand-drawn maps of the eruv. And we received a phone call from Rabbi Porter. "I don't usually answer letters in person, but I'm in Germany to take my mother to see her old homeland." The Berlin Wall had just been brought down, making this visit a possibility. Rabbi Porter patiently answered all my questions in his deep, mellifluous voice -- and we knew that Baltimore would be our next stop after our retirement from the military. Rabbi Porter's classes and special holiday services at Etz Chaim, geared to teaching Jews coming home to the Torah, made a warm and special impact on our time in Baltimore. We were warmly accepted into the community in large part due to his kind efforts.

This was a teacher who taught Ahavat Yisrael not through lectures, but through his actions. I only remember Rabbi Porter giving one controversial talk in all the times I heard him speak -- and he was spot-on. We were struggling with the impossible-to-accept and tragic loss of Gush Katif. I won't try to quote him here. But what I remember is that he said that we didn't merit to keep Gush Katif, because we had the opportunity for 30 years to prove to Hashem how much we wanted it and loved it. And yet, until 2005, only a few thousand -- perhaps 8,000 or so -- people had moved there. In that last year, a couple thousand more joined them in solidarity. But not enough of us chose to make Gush Katif our home. That lecture was one of the reasons we made aliyah in 2007.

We didn't get to see Rabbi Porter much over the years since our aliyah. But I was blessed to see him again in 2023, just before the war that has changed all our lives more than anything since the Shoah.

Like so many people who loved him, I'm crying today. I thank God that we merited to know him, that he knew and helped to educate our four sons in what it means to be a loving, caring Jew. We will miss his approving smile, his warm laughter, and his beautiful, inspiring voice.

May all who knew and loved Rabbi Shlomo Porter, zt"l, be comforted.

Aryeh Smith

"He Was Always There" — My First Memory of Uncle Shlomo

One of my very first memories in life is actually of my Uncle Shlomo. I was a tiny child, and I fell down the steps. I don't remember much from that age—but I remember this: Uncle Shlomo came running downstairs, picked me up in his arms, and held me. Even as a little child, I felt safe. Looking back now, I realize something powerful. That moment became the story of our relationship. From the very beginning of my life, he was always there for me—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Whenever I fell, he was there to lift me up. And that was Uncle Shlomo's way—not just with me, but with everyone.

"Teaching a Child How Jews Fly" — The Birds With Spiritual Wings

When I was around eight or nine years old, something really bothered me. I couldn't understand how there were Jews in the world who didn't keep Shabbos. I was overwhelmed by the thought. I didn't know how to process it emotionally. I was just a child, but it weighed on me deeply. My dear mother, a"h, called my Uncle Shlomo and said, "Can you talk to Aryeh? He's very troubled by this." Uncle Shlomo was an expert in kiruv—Jewish outreach—but more than that, he was an expert in the Jewish heart. He told me something I never forgot. He said: "Sometimes Jewish people are like birds who never learned how to fly. They were born with wings—but no one ever showed them how to use them. Our job isn't to judge them. Our job is to teach them how to fly." Then he said: "The Torah is their wings. Shabbos is their wings. A beautiful Shabbos meal, a smile, warmth—that's what teaches a Jewish soul how to soar."

At eight or nine years old, my fear turned into love instead of frustration. That was Uncle Shlomo. He didn't just answer questions—he transformed how you saw the world.



Moishe Eisenberg

My name is Brad Eisenberg. If you're in Lakewood, my name is Moishe Eisenberg. I grew up in Baltimore, attending Beth Jacob synagogue, with little exposure to the frum community.

In 1992, I traveled Europe and Israel, and I arrived back in Baltimore in November. My friend asked me if I'd like to go to a "Jewish Life Expo" at the Timonium Fairgrounds. I said "Yes" — something I probably never would have done before my trip to Israel. At the entrance to the Expo, Rabbi Gottdiener עתוי"ש asked me if I'd like to leave my number for follow-up. I said "Yes" — something I never would have done before my trip to Israel.

I got a call from Rabbi Porter זצ"ל and met with him, attended a few classes, a Shabbaton, met with him a few more times, and accepted his offer to learn once a week with a Ner Israel yungerman. I later took his advice to attend a Shabbaton/Arachim seminar in Silver Spring. I vaguely remember that phone conversation. I wasn't sure if I should attend. I asked Rabbi Porter, "Do you think it will be good for me?" He said, "Definitely," and I went.

There I met Rabbi Tzvi Teitelbaum עתוי"ש, who invited me to his house for about six or seven Shabbosim over the next few months and recommended I go to "Moodus" (Torah Institute, Rabbi Yaakov Rosenberg זצ"ל's program in Moodus, CT). It was there, in a conversation with Rabbi Rosenberg (who was known as the "closer"), that I was told **מקבל על מלכות שמים**. In one of our early conversations, Rabbi Porter told me something I'm sure he's told many, but that I've never forgotten, about the continuation of the Jewish people: "It takes a program, or a pogrom." Chasdei H' I've joined the program.

After two years at Machon Shlomo in Har Nof, Yerushalayim (Rabbi Rosenberg's yeshiva), I returned to Baltimore and met with Rabbi Porter. In that conversation, he said something, which I won't share, that showed me how proud he was of me and the respect he had for me.

I moved to the New York area for work (at a company owned by the father of the Ner Israel yungerman that Rabbi Porter had set me up with!) and got married a year later. I did not do a good job of keeping in touch over the years. Rabbi Porter and I ran into each other occasionally. I remember seeing Rabbi Porter at the chasuna of his relative in Lakewood.

When my father was niftar 16 years ago, I called Rabbi Porter. He guided me through everything. He advised me to acquiesce to my siblings' preference for a modern Orthodox Rabbi to lead the service. He tore kriya for me. He ran the levaya, behind the scenes. Rabbi Porter was a constant presence at the shiva house, making sure the services went smoothly. At the end of shiva, I asked him how my davening for the amud was. He said, "It's good. You need to shave off about 90 seconds." I later found out (in Lakewood) how kind he was being with that assessment.

On one of my father's yahrzeits, I visited Baltimore. Rabbi Porter made sure I had an amud for Mincha — he gave me his amud — he was in the year for his mother a"h. My הכרת הטוב to Rabbi Porter זצ"ל is boundless. He brought me in, shared his personal warmth, set me on a path, and guided my success. Every time I reached out to him over the years, I felt that personal warmth all over again. In Rabbi Porter, I had someone in Baltimore to answer every request and give me all the support I needed. **יהי זכרו ברוך.**

Gary Rockwood

For several years, prior to making Aliyah four months ago, I had the absolute zechus of sitting directly in front of R' Porter, zt"l, at Bais Nosson, Rabbi Shmuel Friedman's warm and welcoming shtiebel in Baltimore. R' Porter, with his sweet, penetrating voice, his strong, embracing handshake and his palpably powerful yet gentle presence. R' Porter can't be gone. Impossible. Instead, it must be that he is here still, just differently. His essence, his impact, his influence, his smile, his power is now spread throughout the shtiebel, throughout Baltimore, throughout all of Klal Yisroel. Yes, he is still here.

In Yerushalayim, I watched and listened to the Hespedim during his Levaya. I heard the heartfelt words and saw the streaming tears. I felt numb.

Immediately afterwards I started walking, not quite sure where to. My legs, however, brought me directly to the Kosel. I grabbed at the stone wall, saying personal Tefillos, as well as a Tefillah asking that the Porter family be granted Nechama for their great loss.

During these Tefillos, and with tears in my closed eyes, I felt something. Something physical. It was not imagined. I felt the stones shake and vibrate, penetrating my hands and arms, and my feet below. Pounding heartbeats? A minor earth tremor? I don't know — and probably never will.

But following a restless night, I awoke this morning with a strange feeling that the perceptible shaking I experienced at the Kosel must have been the opening of the Sha'arei Shamayim, immediately welcoming R' Porter. A frightening, yet comforting thought.

However, given the sheer power of R' Porter's presence during his earthly journey, his welcoming demeanor, his open arms to all Yidden, his steadfast grasp onto the banner of Torah, his natural calmness and Simcha that endeared him to so many, this feeling, perhaps, is not so strange after all.



Dr. Rivkah Lambert Adler

"Test Your Jewish IQ". Those were the words that brought Rabbi Porter into my life.

Test Your Jewish IQ was a brilliant marketing strategy, posted on the Etz Chaim booth at the Jewish American Festival in downtown Baltimore around 1985. And I was exactly the kind of Jew Rabbi Porter was looking for...

After taking a 16-week Introduction to Judaism course sponsored by the Baltimore Board of Rabbis, I joined a local Reform congregation and had an adult bat mitzvah. Naturally, I assumed I would ace a Jewish IQ test. I got every one of his ten questions wrong!

Rabbi Porter graciously offered me the opportunity to meet with a Jewish learning partner. I readily agreed, partly out of intellectual curiosity and partly because I assumed he would pair me with a Jewish man and, as a single Jewish woman, I thought I might meet someone nice that way.

Rabbi Porter matched me with a woman even younger than I was. She was already married and expecting her second child when we first met. And although I could tell she was wearing a wig, I assumed she was undergoing chemotherapy, because I had no earthly idea why else a young woman would be wearing a wig.

We studied regularly for a few years. She taught me the letters of the alef-bet, gave me my first ever mishloach manot and answered a million questions. I'm saying all this to give you an idea of how little I knew about Torah when Rabbi Porter's sign first caught my attention.

During that time, Rabbi Porter would call me periodically to check in and to offer me opportunities to grow. He invited me to the Porter home for Shabbat, where I sat, mesmerized by Rabbi Porter quizzing their 6-year-old son on parsha and realizing that I, for all my intellectual hubris, knew far less than their 6-year-old. He sent me to an Aish Discovery Seminar Shabbaton – not once, but twice. He later told me that when he saw me weep during havdalah, he knew my neshama was open to teshuva.

Fast forward four decades. I have been married to my husband, a Rabbi himself, for 29 years now, a shidduch that Rabbi Porter helped cement. He even read the ketubah at our wedding, and, as someone he had nurtured for over a decade, he was able to speak personally under our chuppah about my ongoing commitment to Jewish growth.

We made aliyah in 2010. Our grandchildren were born and are being raised in Israel. When our 4-year-old granddaughter makes a bracha or when I sit at the seder table and our 8-year-old grandson easily reads from the Haggadah in Hebrew, I think about how Rabbi Porter's Jewish IQ quiz didn't just impact me, but has already impacted two generations after me.

It is impossible to measure the influence this man had on my life and on the lives of my children and grandchildren.

Bruce & Debbie Markowitz

Debbie and I met R' Shlomo during an Aleinu Discovery Seminar....along with Rav Yaakov Weinberg, R' Moshe Rappaport, R' Itchy Lowenbraun, David Resnik and others in a hotel in or close to Columbia, Maryland during the autumn of 1985. The friendships developed convinced us to move to Park Heights, specifically, to learn in the Jewish Adult Education program under the auspices of R' Shlomo and his organization, Etz Chaim.

Following our graduation from my Chiropractic College and Debbie's Washington University Law School in St Louis in December 1985, we took the leap relocating to Park Heights in Baltimore, knowing only the few people we met at the Aleinu Seminar. Soon after moving in, R' Shlomo came over for a "Welcome to the Community" visit. He made sure we understood the mitzvos of mezuzah and kashrut; and which shuls were in the neighborhood, etc. R' Shlomo came by with a small blowtorch, prepared to kosher our pots and pans. After some discussion, we decided to get rid of our keilim and buy new ones.

R' Shlomo concerned himself with every aspect of our initial absorption, along with re-introducing us to R' Moshe Rappaport, with whom we had met a few months earlier at the Aleinu Discovery Seminar. R' Moshe became our best friend, along with Tova and the family. We stayed with the Rappaport family during that Discovery Seminar, and R' Moshe became not only our teacher and halachic advisor....but our friend. Our kesher with the Rappaport family was deep and meaningful. Along with the Rappaports were the Porters, the Steinharters, and the Lowenbrauns. The outpouring of sincere love and friendship guiding us along our transition into the community and Torah framework remains etched in our hearts and minds.

We came to Baltimore at the end of 1985 already with an Aliyah plan. When Debbie and I married in 1982 we had a 10-year vow of making Aliyah. Despite building a chain of successful Head, Neck and Back Pain Clinics that might have derailed our Aliyah, we were determined to keep to our original Aliyah plan. With the help and support from many friends who were generally sympathetic, we left Baltimore for Aliyah on Rosh Chodesh Elul 1992.

R' Shlomo was instrumental in providing for our adult Jewish educations and acclimation into the warm frum community in Park Heights, and we have beautiful memories that will stay with us the rest of our lives for which we are grateful.



Amatsia Spigler

What can I say about the person who played such an important role in my own personal growth? It would not be an exaggeration to say that if not for Rabbi Porter, who knows where I would be. And I am sure that many, many other people can say the same thing.

His patience, kindness, and soft-spoken mannerism on the one hand, but his firm resolve to help as many Jews get “back on track”, will always be fresh in my mind. Never judgmental and with such caring, he always made me feel like I was special, and that my Jewishness was my essence.

Ronnie Mattz

I first met Rabbi Porter back in 1987, through my friend Masha Riva. She was becoming more observant through religious instruction classes at Etz Chaim and I was about to put my faith aside after the loss of both parents within the previous year. I can tell you that within what seemed like a ten minute meeting, Rabbi Porter knew exactly who I was and what I was going through. There wasn't a lot of communication, but Rabbi Porter was that insightful. After 40 years, I am thankful to have had such a beautiful relationship with Rabbi Porter and his family, and feel for their personal loss and our loss as a community.

May his memory be an inspiration to all of us.

Back in 1992 I came to this amazing outreach place called Etz Chaim in Baltimore, MD. I came with my friend Cindy and we met Rabbi Shlomo Porter, who at the end of a very inspiring class, invited me to his office, inquired about my background, where I live, and ensured I wrote my phone number and address down before I left. From that moment onward, although Cindy didn't end up becoming a regular at Etz Chaim, I did.

Rabbi Shlomo Porter, my dearest Rabbi, changed my life. He ensured that I will show up not just for the weekday classes, but also for Shabbat. He arranged that someone from Columbia, MD, where I lived, would pick me up, and together we'd come every weekend to Baltimore. He introduced us to Rabbi Goldberger and his amazing Shul. The Badians would host me for Shabbat on a regular basis, and Rabbi Porter would invite me for the Shabbat meal. Finally, I decided to move to Baltimore, renting a house near Rabbi Goldberger's shul. It became my synagogue and my place of growth in Judaism.

All thanks to Rabbi Shlomo Porter.

Aqi, Yossef (Jose) & Yair Brito

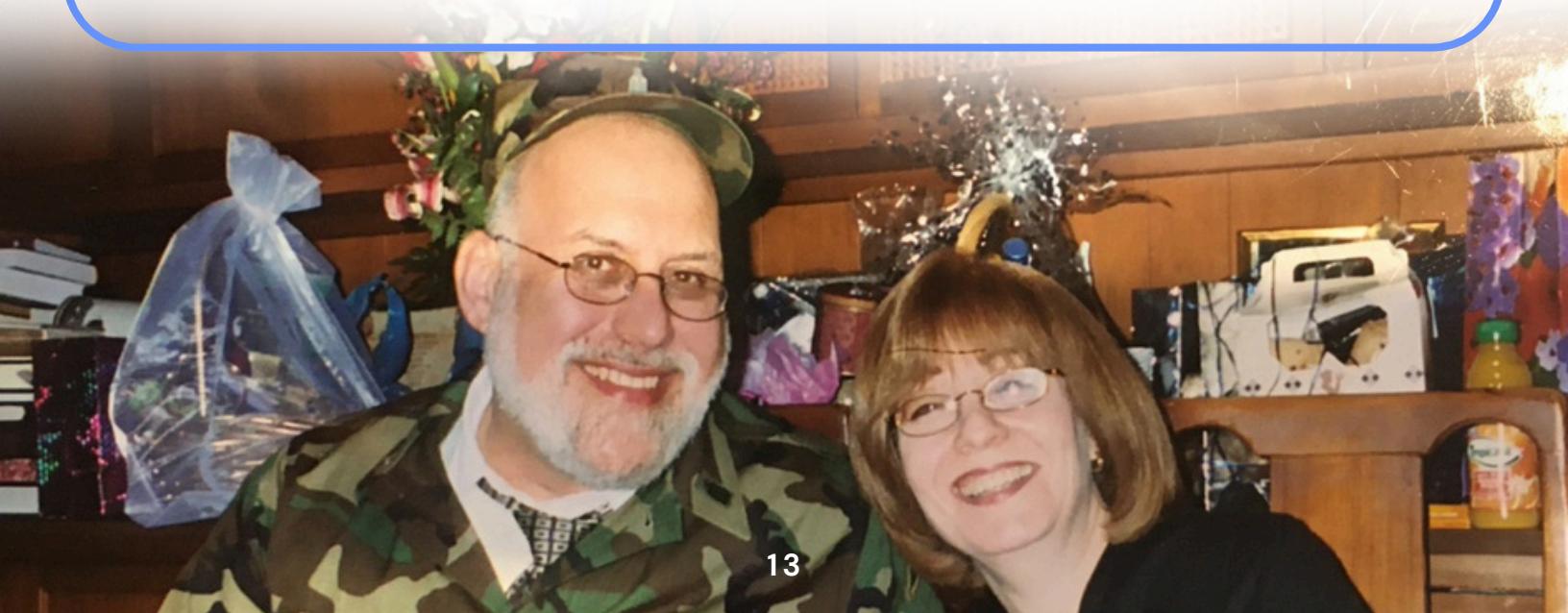
It is very hard and painful to realize you are not with us anymore. Your beautiful powerful voice with all the kedusha of music was always uplifting, as was your heart full of giving and caring for every Jew in need, be it spiritually, financially or emotionally, just to be heard and get guidance.

You have touched so many souls, and us, specifically, on so many levels. You were not only our Rabbi, but also our friend for life and our son's godfather. You were a great listener and an amazing man of action. You went through a lot of medical challenges, each one different from the other, but you never let it defeat you. You kept your prayers, you kept your study and you kept your holiday rituals even in the hospital or King David rehab, and definitely at home, you did not waste a minute from honoring HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Hashem took you in peace on our holy day, Friday night. We know you will go straight to Gan Eden. Bez"H, we will all meet again at Thechiyat Hameyteam (Resurrection of the Dead). We will miss our tradition of gathering on Succot in your Succah, and all the great moments in between – the good ones, the challenging ones, and even the sad ones. We will miss you wishing us "Shabbat Shalom", your call was always uplifting.

Thank you for being supportive, caring; endorsing my charity activities, and for giving us the feeling like we are family. You will be missed dearly, your legacy will carry on, you will never be forgotten. You became part of our life like the many other Jews that you have touched their soul. There is so much to share but it would fill up many pages. Bless your memory and elevation of your soul. We already miss you, we wish we had many more years with you around, but it seems that Hashem has His own plan for you up above. At least up above there are no more limitations of the physical world. You left behind an amazing wife, children and grandchildren. May Hashem give them the strength to get through the huge vacancy you have left by your departure of our present world.

Rabbi Porter you are one of a kind on so many levels, in so many aspects...Farewell.



About 40 years ago (Etz Chaim didn't yet have a building) Rabbi Porter taught me everything I know about Yiddishkeit.

Maybe 32 years ago or so, I was unhappily married, coming home from shul alone on Shabbos, walking and crying, and Rabbi Porter spotted me from across the street. He instantly invited me to his house. I went, of course, even though I was in no condition to sit at the table. He and Shushi showed me to the basement, where there was a bed, where I could pull myself together. It was perfect. I didn't need food, I needed some peace of mind. And I tell you, that's exactly what I got. Warmth, acceptance, and good Jewish context came right through the floorboards from the lively Shabbat seuda upstairs. Apparently their Shabbos table has a force field so strong you can feel it from anywhere in the house. When the guests left, I came up and thanked them, and went back to my house strengthened and calm. It's true.

Note: A remarkable incident which seemed so trivial yet was a lifechanging moment which fortified this woman and remained etched in her memory 32 years later.

Rabbi Porter introduced me to a young fellow who was a deep thinker and who had become intimately involved with "Jews for J".

He came to our house for Rosh Hashanah, and was simply struggling with walking all over town to the various homes that R' Shlomo had arranged for him to visit; he was ready to "chuck it all out" and just forget about the whole thing! We encouraged him to just stay at our house and not fret about the walking, or shul, or anything else; just take it easy and relax and enjoy the holiday.

That started a two-year engagement where he came to us every Shabbos, where we engaged in long discussions about Judaism and Christianity (late into the night) and where my wife made him a vegetarian cholent every week, in addition to the fleishig one we enjoyed having! [After he became observant, he would eat from the fleishig cholent and have a tiny piece of meat and declare: "In honor of Shabbos Kodesh."!].

He eventually married and made aliyah and moved to Jerusalem and raised a family there. And that all started because of R' Shlomo's caring and discerning eye as to where he had the best chance of 'making it.'

And, we helped many others, both inside and outside the classroom, on their road to greater appreciation and observance of their birthright and Jewish traditions; but it all started with R' Shlomo's acceptance of every single yid.

A while back, my wife and I moved to Baltimore. Initially it wasn't easy meeting people but after joining Beth Israel Congregation we began making new friends. As time passed, we connected with the Orthodox community in Park Heights and began reading books about our Jewish heritage. Our exposure to families observing Jewish traditions coupled with the insights we gained from our readings led to our decision to keep a kosher home.

I spoke at length with Rabbis Jay Goldstein and Shlomo Porter who were happy to help us. Rabbi Porter came to our home to kosher it. What an experience that was! Ten minutes before he arrived, a lamp fell over and hit my mouth, breaking two teeth. While holding a towel to my mouth to contain the bleeding with one hand, with the other I helped Rabbi Porter put dish after dish into the large pot of boiling water. My 3-year old son Mark watched us with a curious expression on his face. It seemed to say "What was Daddy doing to his home?" Finally, Rabbi Porter and I were finished.

Now we were ready to eat in our newly koshered kitchen. The first two weeks were the hardest. It was a challenge to remember in which pot to cook the hot dogs and which spoon to use with the bowl of cereal. Now keeping kosher seems like second nature. When we go marketing, Mark yells at the top of his lungs, "Mommy, is this food Kosher?"

Saturday has become a different day; it is now Shabbat. I no longer go to work. Instead, my family and I go to shul, and then come home for a nice Shabbos lunch followed by the important "Shabbos nap." We close Shabbos with the ritual of making Havdalah. Mark likes to hold the Havdalah candle and smell the spices. It really is a letdown when our holy day is over. This holy day makes our family different from those who are not Jewish. We have fifty-two holy days each year.

Overnight, our friendships seemed to multiply. People we didn't even know called to introduce themselves to us. It was really nice. Occasionally we spent Shabbos in our new friends' homes and got to experience a "complete" Shabbos. Now I feel more spiritual, closer to G-d, than I have ever been. Judy feels the same way. This makes us both very happy.

Our family and friends who don't keep a kosher home look at us as if we are from another planet. I tell them that they too are Jewish. We are just being more observant. Our new lifestyle works for our family. I don't preach to others because I don't like it when others pressure me. We see the process we've begun as a lifetime endeavor. We know we still have much to learn.



One Purim, I ran into Rabbi Porter at Seven Mile Market. To my surprise, he was wearing a tutu skirt and wings, and he was carrying a magic wand. "A Freilichen Purim, Michael", Rabbi Porter said, as he pranced across the parking lot. I guess I was a bit taken aback, mostly because I had never seen Rabbi Porter in a skirt before. Rabbi Porter suddenly turned and came back to where I was standing. "I almost forgot," he said, tapping me with his wand.

Rabbi Porter's Yiddishkeit was real, it was heartfelt, and it was characterized by being human and not 'holier than thou.' His fairy costume that Purim proves it

Etz Chaim was running a Shabbaton somewhere in Maryland. There was a great lineup of speakers and great food. Chris, one of the participants was a young man who at the moment was living in the basement of a church. He somehow got invited to this Shabbaton. Friday night, he showed up, ate and listened to the songs and speeches, but didn't seem interested at all. On Shabbos morning Chris didn't show up. We didn't know what happened to him. Shabbos afternoon at Mincha, he walked in. Rabbi Porter told Rabbi Yisroel Fuchs - "Give him an Aliya". Rabbi Fuchs was a little surprised- maybe he's not even Jewish?? As he got called up for his Aliya, Rabbi Porter once again turns to Rabbi Fuchs and whispers- "We are going to make him a Bar Mitzva, he probably never had an Aliya in his life." After his Aliya, everyone was surprised to hear a shout - "Mazel Tov!" They put him in a chair and sung and danced around him "Siman Tov U'mazel Tov!..."

A few weeks later, he gets in touch with Etz Chaim and seems more interested. He explained, "I really wasn't so into that Shabbaton; I decided to give it a try and I said to G-d, "If you want me to get closer to you - show me a sign". I came Friday night and heard the singing and the lectures, but it didn't really talk to me. I slept in Shabbos morning, but decided to give it another try that afternoon. I walked in and before I knew what was happening, I was up on a chair surrounded by people singing and dancing around me! I said, 'G-d! I got the message!'"

Ultimately this special young man went from Chris to Moshe and became closer to Rabbi Porter and eventually changed his whole life around. Rabbi Porter had the knack and siyata dishmaya of knowing what to say and what to do when, to be able to bring back a fellow Jew no what matter how far they were.

R' Shlomo, a"h, and I were chavruses in Rabbi Trachtman's shiur in the Skokie Yeshiva. As I recall, I was in tenth grade and he was in eleventh. He was a masmid and we even would go to Rabbi Trachtman's house in the evening for extra learning. One Shabbos we decided we were going to walk to Rabbi Trachtman's house from the Yeshiva, but after five minutes, Shlomo got a small pebble in his shoe and was concerned about carrying in Reshus Harabim (public domain), so he got rid of the pebble and we walked back to the Yeshiva (apparently he didn't want to get any more rocks in his shoes!). He was a masmid and even though at the time we were fairly ignorant of the finer points in Halacha, he wanted to be very medakdek.

Jack & Marlene Daniel

After our first trip to Israel, when we were inspired to learn and grow Jewishly, we had no clue where to begin. Hodu LaHashem Ki Tov! We were directed to you! You taught us how to live a Torah life. When I wash my hands before a meal, I still sometimes picture myself at your kitchen sink with Rabbi Porter behind me, directing me to cover all the way from my wrist to my finger-tips. You and your whole family introduced us to living an Orthodox life as a joyful privilege, never a struggle or burden, heaven forbid.

Pesach seders with you were a favorite. Your brother, Moishy, along with his sons from Philadelphia (aka: The Unger Tabernacle Choir) added to the resonance of the Porter voices in song. One year our son added a new tune for Chad-gadya which was quickly adopted by your nephews and sons, singing it outside in front of your house the next day as we walked past. Your family included us warmly and generously, with so much love and affection.

Rabbi Porter was so gentle and always encouraged us not to take on too much too fast when kashering the kitchen and going through the pantry. He was guided by our questions and needs, so our growth step by step was owned as natural to us. When asking him shailos, his answer was inevitably less harsh than our uneducated conclusion. Rabbi Porter's gentle Torah wisdom guided us and set a path for our continuing to grow with clarity and confidence. When we had Rabbinic needs, he directed us where to go for the guidance needed.

One day Rabbi Porter asked my husband and I to go to a certain house across from Ner Talmid to be interviewed, to speak about our delight in keeping Shabbos (used to produce a video to inspire the JCC Board to keep closed on Shabbos). The MC for that interview was Rabbi Hauer, who invited us to his shul. Soon afterwards, Rabbi Hauer became our Rabbi, Rav, teacher and neighbor.

Rabbi Porter said that my husband and I could be the poster children for Etz Chaim, for the way we had been integrated into the larger frum community. As his children, I trust we brought him nachas. We are eternally grateful that Hashem brought us to your doorstep.



I remember standing next to R' Porter at Agudah during Mincha many times and in middle of Davening he would take out a long list of cholim and Daven for them. I mean the list was at least a foot long hanging down. He was usually still Davening long after people left, reading from his list.

When my older brother, who lived outside of Baltimore, passed away 12–13 years ago, I was back in Baltimore and feeling very down. No one really knew him and no one was showing me any sympathy.

I met Rabbi Porter at the Agudah, and at one point, I remember Rabbi Porter saying to me with such care, "So you must feel no one understands what you are going through." — and then he pulled my head towards him and gave me a kiss on my head.

This made me feel so much better, and I tear up till today when I think about his intuitive understanding, and the kindness and compassion he demonstrated that day. (This story was told to R' Porter's son, and it had happened right where they were standing at the time, by the sinks outside the main sanctuary.)

After the fire of the original Etz Chaim house on Fords Lane, and before the new Etz Chaim building was built, the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur beginners' minyan was held in the large basement of someone's home.

When the idea was first brought up to have the minyan there, there was strong opposition from one of the neighbors, an irreligious woman. The staff of Etz Chaim was in a quandary how to deal with the situation.

Rabbi Porter, however, wasn't fazed. He told the (potential) hostess to invite this woman out for lunch. All he asked was to be notified of when and where they would be dining. Later that afternoon, Rabbi Porter came into Etz Chaim and announced, "The issue with the minyan has been resolved. Everything has been arranged; the woman agreed."

When asked how he accomplished this seemingly impossible task, Rabbi Porter explained: "During their lunch, I happened to walk into that restaurant and notice them. I pulled up a chair and started speaking with them."

Rabbi Porter realized that this woman had never had a positive interaction with a frum Jew. When she came across the warmth and care of Rabbi Porter, all her opposition melted away.

We met Rabbi Porter over 32 years ago. We lived in Randallstown. We built a sukkah for 4 families out of wood. After laying the covering on the roof we laid plastic over it to keep out the rain. Rabbi Porter came over to visit and gently explained that the rain was supposed to come through. We did better the next year.

I always loved Rabbi Porter's shiurim at the Shabbat and Holiday meals. I loved the classes that he gave at Etz Chaim. I loved his smile and sense of humor. After I donated a kidney, I told Rabbi Porter about my adventures donating in a New York Hospital. I said that I wanted to write an article. Rabbi Porter suggested that I make the title, "The surgery was no problem, I survived 2 weeks in New York." One of the many times that Rabbi Porter made me laugh.

My father, z"l, passed away during the summer of 2000. When Rabbi Porter, zt"l, learned of my loss, he invited me to his office to talk with me and to see if there was anything he could do to help. Rabbi Porter started off the conversation by asking me if I would share some of the circumstances of my father's death. "My father died on Shabbos morning," I began, "On Parshas Chukas." Upon hearing this piece of information, Rabbi Porter informed me that dying on Shabbos reflects very well upon the departed. "For a neshama to return to G-d on G-d's holy day," Rabbi Porter explained, "Means that your father had a special neshama. So, you can rest assured that your father is in a good place in Heaven."

Rabbi Porter's warmth and kind words consoled me that day. May his memory be a blessing.
Note: Rabbi Porter also passed away on Shabbos. How fitting these words are!



RABBI PORTER'S LIFE WORK HAD A LASTING IMPACT ON THE BALTIMORE COMMUNITY & ACROSS THE WORLD. HE WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED.

לְהִיא זְכָרוֹ בְּרוֹר



Please send your memories, stories, tributes, and pictures to: rabbiportermemories@gmail.com