

HE WAS A PRESENCE WITHOUT SHOWING HIS PRESENCE ON THE FRONT LINES & BEHIND THE SCENES

By: Ratzl Graus

"Nothing was a big deal for R' Yankie a"n," says Mrs. Malkie Klaristenfeld, founder and director of the Knafayim organization. "Those 'little' forms of chesed made a huge difference in the lives he touched."

Over twenty years ago, R' Yankie purchased a plot to bury babies that were born still. He recognized the tremendous pain, expense, and bureaucratic red tape involved in the burial of these precious neshamas. "It was not only the *kevu'rah* but also the hospitals that gave parents a hard time releasing the body, compounding their pain.

Who intervened? R' Yankie a"n." expressed Mrs. Klaristenfeld.

"We, at Knafayim, may deal with the emotional and physical support, but when it came to the technical details, dealing with the medical examiner, medical facilities, and burial details – R' Yankie Meyer a"n was always there to intercede."

"His voice still verberates in my ear," Malkie relates, "Klaristenfeld, come over, I need you here! He was a commander with directives that got you there. Because if he was there, how could we not be there to assist?"

Nothing was below or above his dignity. R' Meyer a"n was a pragmatic man, yet in his unassuming manner, he exuded the presence of a man-on-call 24/7. With his ever-crisp white shirt and ready-to-roll demeanor, he was always alert and ready-even at 3 AM, "Klaristenfeld, I'm outside your house. I need you to accompany me to a home with a SIDS crisis."

"I'll never forget that incident," recalls Mrs. Klaristenfeld. "The shocked and heartbroken parents were being questioned by authorities, while R' Meyer a"n was handling the medical examiner and legalities. At one point, R' Meyer a"n picked up a broom and started sweeping the house." I questioned him: "What's going on?" And R' Meyer a"n taught me the following important life lesson.

"You can't get lost in the tragedy. "But, he explained, "We must be present and face reality. ACS will soon be summoned to the home and *chas v'shalom* if they see an unswept floor...can we add more trouble to these grieving parents?" And so, he continued to sweep. He was a commander-and-chief of an army, yet he carried his role as superior while simultaneously handling any menial duty that came his way.

He wasn't just a boot-on-the-ground presence, he was a behind-the-scenes connector, smoothing the way through bureaucracy at times when grief makes logistics seem an impossible task.

"R' Yankie a"n was on our speed dial. He was our connector – connecting us with the who's-who in our local, city, and other state medical facilities. "If we couldn't come through the front

door - R' Yankie a"h got us in through the back door," says Mr. Yidel Roth, Knafayim's burial director. R' Yankie was known to immediately spring into action. Whenever, whatever, and for whomever. There were times that I needed to contact him between three or four times a week to arrange burials. He was always available."

This past Hashanah Raba, Knafayim accompanied a couple facing a stillbirth delivery which was supposed to be their first child born after years of waiting. The pain was tremendous. "How could this couple cope with leaving the hospital while their dead baby is still there? So, I called R' Yankie a"h," recounts Mr. Roth. "He hastily arranged that the body would go through the medical examiner, filled all the hospital forms, and ensured that Mrs. Klaristenfeld carried the baby out of the hospital 15 minutes before the z'man. She then gave it over to Misaskim volunteers to handle the rest!"

R' Yankie Meyer a"h was a stickler for principles. He would do anything for anyone. But first and foremost, when a situation warranted halachic directives or a Torah perspective, he would consult with Rabbanim. Only then, after receiving their *hadrachah*, would he jump into fire and water to do whatever it took to help a fellow Yid.

"He was a selfless person," notes Mrs. Klaristenfeld. "One Erev Pesach, we were both tending to a loss at the hospital. I stayed to support the couple while R' Yankie a"h was handling the technical and legal aspects. An hour before the z'man, R' Meyer a"h told me: 'Mrs. Klaristenfeld, you must go home to your family.' And I replied: "So do you!"

"You're a mother, and your family needs you! So, I'll stay," commanded R' Meyer a"h.

"במקום שאין איש השתתדל להיות איש" - if someone needed to be there - no matter what, when, or where – R' Yankie Meyer a"h was the איש - the 'mensch' to count on in his unassuming, unassertive presence.

R' Yankie Meyer a"h was our general. If I ever doubted his swift actions, he responded: "Klaristenfeld, I know what I'm doing!" attests Mrs. Klaristenfeld: "He did know, plus so much more!"

The ***chosuv niftar, askan, and chesed champion, Reb Yankie Meyer a"h, was a man who did the job of many.*** He established an army and appointed and guided many leaders and activists to assist him in his life's missions.

Reb Yankie Meyer's a"h family, acquaintances, the team at Knafayim, and all of Klal Yisroel suffered a tremendous loss.

Who will help us march forth?

Who will teach us how to respect people in life and r"l death?

And who will continue to personify chesed the way Reb Yankie Meyer a"h did?

"גדולה צדיקים במיתתן יותר מחייהם" – just as R' Yankie Meyer a"h intervened on this world, he should intercede on our behalf in *shamayim* and give us the strength to continue his legacy. May his *neshama* have an aliya amongst all the tzaddikim and the holy neshamas he accompanied to their resting place in Gan Eden.