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Subject: Dan Segal - Reb Don Chaim Haleivi Ben Michael Z'L

Just over a week ago I had the merit of being with a close friend when he was taken from this World. I knew that he was not well and that the end was imminent but I did not anticipate what would take place. I did not know the exact state that he was in and it greatly saddened me that he would likely leave our world alone. I felt that I should go and at least visit and be with him one more time. I also feared that if he did leave this world alone who would do those rituals with him that are customary for one who has reached their final moments of life. And so I hoped to have the opportunity to do them with him now so that when his time would finally come he would at least have the comfort knowing they were done.

What ultimately took place was one the most profound personal experiences I have ever had. After I left my friend, Dan Segal Z"l, I knew that this experience needed to be shared with others and wrote down every detail. If you are receiving this it is because you either knew Reb Don or in some way you were apart of the experience.

How is one able to describe such a special and unique person. A person of such pristine and refined character. Words are truly inadequate to describe Reb Don Chaim Haleivi ben Michael.

Our Rabbis teach us that there were many great sages who suffered unimaginable poverty and sickness and despite their impossible challenges they persevered and achieved incredible spiritual heights and Torah scholarship. It is the stories of these great sages that obligate each and every one of us throughout the ages despite our own personal struggles.

Like the sages of the past Reb Don did not have an easy life. He suffered many physical ailments long before he was stricken by the disease that he finally succumbed to. He was also a person of extremely modest means. Yet despite his personal challenges he tolerated nothing less than perfection in his pursuit of Talmud Torah and Avodas Hashem and he did so with an infectious Simchas Hachaim. Reb Don Chaim Haleivi lived each of his days with a beautiful smile and a genuine happiness and satisfaction with his lot in this World. Like the great sages of the past Reb Don obligates us to pursue and persevere in our quest for Torah scholarship. He obligates us to tolerate nothing less than perfection in our service of Hashem. And perhaps his greatest achievement he obligates us to live each and every day with a joy of life despite the challenges and struggles we may face.

Reb Don had an incredible simplicity that gave him absolute clarity of purpose in this world. He had an amazing love for Hashem. Completely obsessed and love sick. His mind and heart always thinking of Hashem and His Torah.

Perhaps the best way to describe this remarkable person, Reb Don Chaim Haleivi ben Michael, is to describe the final hours of his life.

I arrived at the hospital Thursday morning and Reb Don was breathing so heavily. His chest was jumping with every breath. His eyes closed. I told Reb Don that I was there. As was our custom I began to speak to Dan about what I was learning. His breathing began to calm. I told him that I was learning Mishnayos Challah and that we were going to learn it together and

hopefully make a siyum. We learned together as we had done so many times before except this time Reb Don could only listen. I sang each mishna out loud and discussed it and reviewed it until we completed the Mesechta. Although I knew that Dan would not approve of making a siyum on a single mesechta of mishna I told him that we would anyway.

We sang the holy words of Hadran (we will return)-

"We shall return to you Mesechas Challa and you shall return to us. Our thoughts are on you Meseches Challah and your thoughts are on us. We will not forget you Meseches Challah and you will not forget us - not in this world and not in the World to Come.

May it be your will Hashemthat your Torah be our occupation in this World and may it remain with us in the World to Come We thank You Hashem that You have placed our portion among those who dwell in the Beis Medrish and not among idlers. We rise early and they rise early. We rise early for the words of Torah and they rise early for idling. We toil and they toil. We toil and receive reward they toil and receive no reward. We run and they run. We run to life of the World to Come and they run to well of destruction"

I told Reb Don that he was so fortunate to be among those who call Torah their occupation in this World. How lucky he was to have the honor of being among those who dwell in the Beisi Medrish. How precious he must be that just as he had never forgotten the Torah the Torah would never forget him (one of Reb Don's gifts was his incredible memory).

Unbeknownst to us both Challah would be the final siyum of his life. The culmination of an unshakable and unwavering commitment to a life devoted to Toras Hashem. Divine providence ordained that Reb Don Chaim Halevi would enter the Yeshiva Shel Maala clinging to mishna challa.

Challah is the portion of dough that one is obligated to separate and give to a Kohen when baking bread. The word Challah, while associated with bread, in fact does not mean bread. Challa comes from the root chol which means mundane or ordinary. The opposite of Chol is Kodesh (holy). As we know the days of the week are called chol and Shabbos is referred to as Kodesh. Despite its name, this ordinary bread that serves as the primary sustenance of our mundane lives, becomes entirely sanctified reserved exclusively for the use of a Kohen.

The first verse in the Torah begins "*Breishis bara Elokim*" translated "In the beginning Hashem created the World". The Medrish (Breishisn Rabbah 1:4) suggests that the word *Breishis* does not mean "In the beginning" rather it should be interpreted as " because of *reishis* the World was created". In the merit of those mitzvos referred to as *reishis* the world was created. One such mitzva is Challa which the Torah refers to as "*reishis arisosechem*" (the first of your kneadings). Rashi (Breishis 1:1) cites a Medrish that suggests that the *reishis* the World was created for is the Torah and the Jewish people who are also called *reishis*. The Torah is referred to as "*reishis darko*" (the beginning of His way) and the Jewish people are referred to as "*reishis tevuaso*" (the first of His grain) (Interestingly the Jewish people are referred to as grain something that will ultimately be transformed into dough - challa). What is so significant about ordinary bread that it merits such lofty sanctification? Why does this seemingly minor obligation share the distinction of being considered a potential reason for the creation of the World alongside the Torah and the Jewish people?

Bread or dough is made by joining flour and water. Flour is derived from grain and ultimately from earth which is symbolic of the physical and mundane world we live in. Water on the other hand is symbolic of the spiritual and holy realm. As we know water symbolizes the Torah.

When the World was created the Torah records that God said (Breishis 1:9) "Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area and let the earth appear". In creation there was a deliberate separation of water and earth. In contrast the Torah records that when God created man (Breishis 2:6) "A mist ascended from the earth and watered the surface of the soil. And Hashem, God, formed man of soil from the earth". Rashi comments that the mist was necessary to saturate the soil in order to form man from the soil like a kneader of dough who puts the water into the flour prior to kneading the dough.

The World was created with the mundane and the holy being separated and distinct. It is mans purpose and responsibility to sanctify himself and the World by joining them. It is when the Jewish people, "the first of His grain", elevate themselves and the World through Toras Hashem, "the beginning of His way", that they merit their rightful title as a Mamleches Kohanim - a nation of Kohanim.

The mitzva of challah represents the very essence of creation and mans purpose in this World. We join flour and water and take ordinary bread, the primary sustenance of our mundane physical lives, and we elevate it creating sanctity reserved only for a Kohen.

This was the essence of Reb Don Chaim Halevi. He was by every measure simple and ordinary. Yet he elevated himself and his life, with his great love and devotion to Hashem and His Torah, transforming simple and ordinary into sanctified and extraordinary.

Reb Don Chaim Halevi arrived to his final destination in the Yeshiva Shel Mala proudly carrying mishna challa because it was a testament to the life he lived and his rightful place among the most righteous of our people.

When we completed our siyum we continued to celebrate the accomplishment. We sang our thanks and praise to Hashem, professing our faith in Him, and recognizing His kindness.

"Tov lehodos laHashem ulezamer leshimcha elyon. Lehagid baboker chasdecha veemunascha baleielos" - "It is good to thank Hashem and to sing praise to Your name on High. To declare Your kindness in the morning and Your faithfulness at nights".

Reb Don was always bothered by something that he had done that he thought upset me. Not a single conversation could go by between the two of us without him requesting forgiveness. I would tell him quite to the contrary I needed to beg his forgiveness as clearly I had done something to make him feel that way. This time it was me who requested forgiveness. I asked him to forgive me for making him feel that he upset me and the pain caused to him for carrying that burden for so many years. I asked him to forgive me for not always giving him the attention he deserved and for not finding more time for him. I told him that he had no need for my forgiveness but if he did it was granted with a full heart and yearning soul. I told him that we would say Vidui together. I did not want him to be afraid so I told him not to fear because Hashem would carry him on the wings of eagles to his salvation.

We sang the beautiful words *"shma koleinu Hashem Elokeinu chus veerachem aleinu. Hashiveinu Hashem eleicha venashuva"* - "listen to our voice Hashem our God. Spare us and

have compassion upon us. Accept our prayers in compassion and favor. Bring us back to You Hashem and we will return ". We sang it over and over again. An then we sang our confession.

I continued to sing for a while and then told Reb Don that I would step out for a few minutes. He was calm and his breathing was calm. When I returned we again began to learn. I told him that I was learning Sefer Yehoshua. We would learn it together maybe even make another siyum.

We learned several perakim and when I reached the verse -"For the Leviim have no share among you since the service of Hashem is their inheritance". I told Reb Don Chaim Haleivi that he had the great merit of being among the holy tribe of Levi. I told him he did not need a portion in the land because Hashem was his inheritance. As I tried to continue reading the next verse his breathing began to labor. I told him that if he preferred that I sing he should flutter his eye and I would. He did.

I began to sing *Yedid Nefesh*. These words I had sang so many times before never had such beautiful meaning as they did at that moment. As I sang Reb Don's breathing calmed and a serenity filled the room.

"Lover of my soul, compassionate father, draw Your servant close to Your will. Your servant will run to You like a gazelle to bow before Your Majesty. Your friendship is sweeter then the drippings of a honeycomb or any other taste.

Majestic, Beautiful, Radiance of the World, my soul is sick for Your love. Please God heal her now by showing her the pleasantness of Your radiance. Then she will be strengthened and healed and eternal gladness will be hers.

Enduring One may Your mercy be aroused to show compassion to the son of Your beloved. For so long I have yearned to see the splendor of Your strength. Only this my heart has desired so please take pity and do not conceal Yourself.

Please reveal Yourself and spread over me, my Beloved, the shelter of Your peace. Illuminate the Earth with Your glory so that we may rejoice and be glad with You. Hasten, show love, for the time has come, show us grace as the days of old"

I sang these beautiful words twice and as the words "Hasten, show love, for the time has come, show us grace as the days of old" left my lips Reb Don Chaim Haleivi ben Michael Zecher Tzadik Livracha took his final breath in this World and fell into the embrace of the All Mighty like a child finally reunited with his father.

"*Tehay nafsho tzrura betzror hachaim* " - May your soul, Reb Don Chaim Haleivi ben Michael, be bound in the bond of eternal life.