

# MY NEIGHBOR, MY REBBI

I was 12 years old when the Kalishes moved in across the street. I didn't know it then, 30 years ago, but it was a move that would shape my life.

From our first conversation, Rabbi Kalish made me feel important. "Dovid, I'm hosting an *oneg Shabbos* for my *talmidim*. Will you join us?" I eagerly accepted, beginning a weekly tradition that would last for years. Each Friday night, I found myself captivated by Rabbi Kalish's insight, warmth, and the deep respect he showed each *talmid*.

Rabbi Kalish turned cholent-scooping into an art. As he handed out the steaming bowls, he listened as much as he shared. His *talmidim* asked about halachah, *hashkafah*, relationships — even personal challenges and struggles. No question was off limits. Once, a *talmid* asked a question relating to undergarments. We all cringed, wondering how Rebbi would respond. But sensing that the boy was sincere, he answered clearly and respectfully — treating it with the same thoughtfulness as any other question.

I was a full-time *mesivta* student, but Rabbi Kalish's Shabbos *shiur*, which he delivered in shul, became the highlight of my week. What I loved most was how he bridged every Gemara to the halachah, walking us through each step in between. Rabbi Kalish's approach opened a whole new world for me, showing how Gemara and halachah are always two sides of one coin.

The rav's humility was genuine and deep. Once, he shared that if he knew how to make serious money, he would do that instead. "If I could make enough money to support 400 *avreichim*, I would do it without a question. Who am I to think that my learning is worth more than that of 400 *avreichim*?"

But his humility never came at the expense of truth; he was a *mevakeish emes*.

When attending an event or simchah, if the speaker shared a Torah thought that he believed was not *emes*, he would shake his head to signal his disagreement. It wasn't politically correct, but he cared more about protecting the integrity of Torah.

Similarly, he held that the "done" *shiur* for a *k'zayis* of matzah was massively inflated, causing people to eat far more than required — which meant they didn't enjoy the mitzvah. He didn't care that he was a lone voice in this regard; he stood up for what he believed to be *emes*.

But his leniencies were hardly universal. In matters involving money, for example, he was quite stringent. For example, he did not permit copying software or music. When asked about these issues, he would reply, "I think you should ask someone else. I'm very *machmir* when it comes to these *inyanim*."

Over the years, I asked Rebbi many, many questions.

Once, he remarked, "Dovid, I can't get over how someone as smart as you gives over the impression that he's stupid, that he doesn't understand. You could easily get away with a superficial understanding of the Gemara, but you're not satisfied with that and so you ask. I've seen that those who take your approach end up understanding their learning better than anyone else."

During my transition from kollel to work, I confided in Rabbi Kalish. "I'm not learning full-time anymore," I shared, "and I feel bad about it."

"Feel bad?!" he exclaimed, visibly upset. "Why should you feel bad? Now is your opportunity to apply all that you've learned!"



Mishpacha