

## Rebbetzin Sifra Tendler, a"h

By Hamodia Staff

She was a *bas Gedolim*, a woman who exemplified the royal *middos* of the home in which she was nurtured. A true *baalas chessed*, she manifested from a young age an ability to feel the needs of another, and to give to others in a way that made a difference.

Rebbetzin Sifra Tendler was the daughter of Harav Moshe Feinstein, z"l, and Rebbetzin Sima, a"h. Rav Moshe was Rav of Luban, Russia, where Jews suffered greatly under the oppressive Communist regime. Children were encouraged to inform on parents who practiced religion; on Pesach night, government agents peered through windows, looking for clandestine *Sedarim*. The Communists did whatever they could to suppress *Yiddishkeit*.

The Rav and Rebbetzin did not want to raise their children in an atmosphere where Torah and *mitzvos* could not be practiced openly. For ten years, they attempted to get permission to leave the country and obtain visas to the U.S. Finally it happened. The Feinstein family, which included Faya (who became Rebbetzin Shigal), Sifra, and Harav David (today Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim, and one of the leading *poskei hador*) emigrated to New York City.

Their youngest child, Harav Reuven, Rosh Yeshiva of Tiferes Yerushalayim of Staten Island, was born in the U.S.)

The New York City school system did not at that time offer special classes for immigrant children. In order to learn English, Faya, then 13, and Sifra, 9, were placed in first grade. Rebbetzin Shigal recalls that, despite the humiliation inherent in that situation, her sister rose to the challenge with enthusiasm and drive. Any new word she learned, she practiced and practiced, determined to master the language.

That enthusiasm and determination were hallmarks of Sifra's personality and of the way she lived her entire life. Upon her marriage to Rabbi Moshe David Tendler, Rav of Community Synagogue of Monsey and chairman of the

Biology Department at Yeshiva University, she became, in the words of a beloved daughter-in-law, "a most dedicated wife, a role model for all women." Her exceptional devotion, *derech eretz*, and caring were also evident in the way she was "a wonderful daughter to her parents and her parents-in-law."

Rebbetzin Tendler raised her children and managed her home with wisdom, ingrained Torah values, and rare talent. An exceptional *balabusta*, she imparted her skills to her children and grandchildren. Who better than Bubby could give an *einikel* the best lessons in how to bake delicious challah, how to fold a sheet just so, and how to keep a linen closet in good order?

The Tendlers' home was a warm, wonderful, and welcoming place. People were drawn to the Rebbetzin as to a magnet, because of her listening ear and understanding heart. During a "welcome to Monsey" visit to a newlywed couple, the Rebbetzin sampled a piece of homemade cake the young woman served her. "How delicious this is," she smiled. "May I please have your recipe?" The new bride's heart soared at these complimentary words from a renowned *ishes chavil*.

Countless people, from Community Synagogue and beyond, relate the unforgettable impact of the Rebbetzin's encouragement, her special smile, her awesome *kavod habrytos* and her *ayin tovah*.

"She was a great *farginer*," recalls a friend and admirer. "When someone had a *simchah*, it became her *simchah* as well."

Her confidence in others helped them to believe in themselves, and achieve what they never thought they could.

"When I doubted myself," recalls a close relative, "Sifra would laugh and say, 'Don't be ridiculous; of course you can do it.' And I did."

Similarly, a long-time co-president of the synagogue sisterhood — the organization that was "the Rebbetzin's baby" — was hesitant to take on that responsibility when the Rebbetzin approached her.

But as it turned out, "Her confidence in me was the

greatest compliment. And working with her was a remarkable time for me. It enabled me to get to know her very well — to see her greatness up close."

All of the funds raised by sisterhood activities were dedicated to *hachnasas kallah* and other *tzadakah* causes in Eretz Yisrael and the U.S. For several years a practicing nurse, Rebbetzin Tendler was highly involved with seeing that her patients were comfortable and well cared for. She brought this sensitivity and knowledge of what was needed to the Bikur Cholim organization she founded in Monsey.

Says a physician who served as shul president for several years, "The Rebbetzin cared about everyone as if they were family. She inquired about our parents, our children, about *shidduchim*. The whole community deeply mourns her loss."

Someone told Rebbetzin Tendler about a woman, not known to her, who had given birth shortly before Pesach and had no family to help her. On Erev Pesach, the new mother opened her front door to find two Tendler daughters, ready to help her prepare for Yom Tov.

In the *chedes* the Rebbetzin did, one saw the powerful *mesorah* of her upbringing. When young Sifra was growing up on the Lower East Side, she wouldn't go to sleep at night before checking with her mother whether her bed was reserved for a guest.

At any occasion, Rebbetzin Sima Feinstein could not bring herself to sit down unless every other person had a seat. "And Sifra was the same," reflected a family member. "She had a special eye — the ability to zero in on a person's needs and sensitivities, no matter how subtle."

At the *levayah*, her brother, the Rosh Yeshiva Harav Reuven Feinstein, *shitta*, said that his sister was *osek in kiruv rechokin* long before it became popular. If she met a Yid, no matter how removed from *Yiddishkeit*, that person became her focus.

"She made people feel comfortable; she was easy to converse with. I am a better person because I knew her," says a

community member.

So many spoke of her *malchus*; her noble bearing and conduct.

"Even when she had to correct someone, it was never with anger or harshness, but with warmth and kindness."

A daughter-in-law, her voice choked with emotion, recalls the self-discipline with which the Rebbetzin conducted herself, even at the most difficult moments. Toward the end of her life, she was so weak that she could hardly open her eyes. But if a nurse or visitor walked in she found the strength "when she had no reserves left," to smile and acknowledge the individual's presence. While taking a short stroll outside her home, she noticed a neighbor standing across the street. Fueled by her characteristic determination "to do the right thing," she laboriously crossed the street to greet the neighbor.

A woman of good taste, she delighted in sending gifts, things she knew people would enjoy, "just because I love you."

When someone did her a favor, she always expressed her thanks with a phone call, a gracious note, a tray of baked goods from her blessed kitchen.

A sister-in-law fondly recalls a trip to Eretz Yisrael to attend the wedding of Yaakov, the Tendlers' oldest son. Despite the Rebbetzin's many responsibilities, before the wedding she made sure to prepare the apartment her brother and his wife were renting, making the beds and fully stocking the refrigerator and freezer. "She took us to the Kotel and then back to the apartment. We took a rest, and a few hours later, Sifra was on the phone, asking, 'Do you have everything?' Do you need anything?"

Not everyone could handle things with such finesse, empathy, and love, even for family. And, yet, she was that way for everyone — because *Klal Yisrael* was her family.

"Thursday is the day of the week I spend with my mother," a community member tells us. "In recent years the Rebbetzin, as well as another close friend of mine, began to

accompany us on those outings.

"One magnificent spring day, we decided to drive to a beautiful, quiet park in Ridgewood, New Jersey. I packed sandwiches, snacks, and some iced coffee and we all enjoyed a picnic.

"After lunch, we decided to take a walk around the lake. My mother, saying she was tired, sat down on a bench as the rest of us started off.

About two minutes later, Rebbetzin Tendler said, "You know, I'm getting tired. I'm going to sit down with your mother." "She definitely was not tired," the woman smiles. "The Rebbetzin was full of energy. But, with her characteristic ability and sensitivity, she was imparting a message to me about how to respect my mother. It was such a special day," a most cherished memory.

Those who knew Rebbetzin Sifra Tendler cherish the experience as a precious gift. We hear again and again: "She was a person who made an impact." "Watching her you could always learn something." "She was regal; she was humble; her strength of character was exemplary."

"She was so bright; she appreciated Hashem's world. She was someone who made a difference."

The Tendlers raised eight children, *ka"n*: Dr. Yaakov, Rabbi Mordechai, Rabbi Aaron, Rabbi Eli Don, Rabbi Hillel, and daughters — Rebbitzin Rivka Rappaport, wife of Rabbi Shabsi Rappaport; Rebbitzin Sara Oren, wife of Rabbi Avrohom Oren; Mrs. Russie Fried, wife of Rabbi Shalom Fried, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren who follow in the path of their illustrious ancestors.

May Rebbetzin Tendler be a *melitzas goshet* for her family and for all of *Klal Yisrael*. *Yehi zichra baruch*.

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