

## Chazon Ish זצ"ל



**Rav Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz**, known as the “Chazon Ish” after the title of his *sefarim*, was born on 11 Cheshvan, 5639 (1878), in Kossowa, White Russia.

His knowledge of Torah was extraordinary, to the extent that the Chafetz Chaim said about him, “One must know both how enormous the Torah is and how deep it is. A living example of this is the Chazon Ish.” He was blessed with an incredible memory and an ability to quickly understand new information. Still, he pushed himself to learn and

review as much as he could. Before becoming involved in helping Klal Yisrael, he sat and learned Torah *lishmah* for decades, while his wife, Basya, supported them.

Soon after arriving in Eretz Yisrael in 1933, he made himself available to everyone and addressed the important issues of his time. He became the primary halachic authority in Eretz Yisrael and one of Klal Yisrael’s *gedolim*. He suffered from various health problems throughout his life, but he did not let that stop

him. Known for his flawless *middos*, the Chazon Ish was so humble that someone once mistook him for his own *gabbai*. He cared deeply for others and brought many orphan boys into his home. People came from all over to speak with him and he consistently gave them sound advice. Many stories are told about the Chazon Ish’s *ruach hakodesh* and the wonders that came about through his involvement.

He was *niftar* on 15 Cheshvan, 5714 (1953).

**Did You Know?**

Many sick people came to the Chazon Ish for *brachos* — and for medical advice. Even though he never studied medicine or read any books on the subject, he still had tremendous medical knowledge that even impressed many doctors. He once drew up the surgical procedure for a complex heart case!

It is unusual that, though he was one of the *gedolei hador*, the Chazon Ish never held any official position — he was not the *rav* of a town or a *rosh yeshivah*.

When he was three years old and had learned the *aleph-beis*, he told his father, “I am fluent in all of *Shas*!” He then explained, “Show me one letter anywhere in *Shas* that I cannot read!”

The Chazon Ish’s parents put a yarmulke on his head from the day he was born and washed him *negel vasser* from when he was 30 days old.

The word *Chazon* means “the vision of” and *Ish* (*aleph, yud, shin*) is an acronym for Avraham (*aleph*) YeSHayah (*yud, shin*).



## Family Tree



The Chazon Ish was a descendant of the Ba'al Hamaor and the Maharal. His parents were Rav Shmaryahu Yosef and Rasha Karelitz. Rasha was the daughter of Rav Shaul Katzenelenbogen who — with the encouragement of the *gadol* Rav Yitzchak Elchonon Spector — became the *rav* of Kossowa, White Russia. After him, Rav Shmaryahu Yosef, his son-in-law, became *rav* there.

Rav Shmaryahu Yosef and Rasha had four sons: Rav Meir (*rav* of Le-kovitch, Poland, and a leader of Klal Yisrael), Rav Yitzchak Zundel or “Itzele” (*rav* of Kossowa after his father), Rav Moshe (a member of Vilna’s Vaad HaRabbanim), and Rav Avraham Yeshayah (the Chazon Ish). They also had five daughters who all married outstanding *talmidei chachamim*: Rav Shmuel Eliyahu Kahan (*rav* of Ortshe), Rav Shmuel Greineman (who was very

close with the Chafetz Chaim and the Chazon Ish), Rav Abba Swatitski (*rav* of Kossowa), Rav Nachum Meir Karelitz (*rav* of Maishegola), and Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (the Steipler Gaon, father of Rav Chaim Kanievsky).

The Chazon Ish married Basya, the daughter of Rav Mordechai Bei, a *talmid chacham* who would complete *Shas* each year. The Chazon Ish and his wife did not have any children of their own.

## AMONG THE CHAZON ISH’S NUMEROUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS WERE:



When learning from the writings of the Chazon Ish, a person can begin to see how massive the Torah truly is. In his *sefarim*, *Chazon Ish*, he wrote on nearly every topic in halachah, with everything detailed yet clear. His works show incredible wisdom, in one area of Torah after the next, for thousands of pages. One *gadol* commented that *sefarim* such as these could have been expected from one of the *Rishonim*; it is a wonder that they were written in modern times. The Chazon Ish wrote on nearly every part of *Shas*, even those seldom learned then because there were few *peirushim* available on them at the time. By doing so he made those areas of Torah more accessible to Klal Yisrael.



The Chazon Ish worked hard to ensure that Jews in Eretz Yisrael would keep the Torah. When he noticed that farmers were milking their cows on Shabbos in a way that was against halachah, he convinced them to switch to a permissible method. He saw the laws of *shemittah* as a chance to keep halachah and fought to persuade farmers to stop working their land. He built Torah in Bnei Brak and was involved in almost every Torah organization there. He pushed that the Torah’s view and rules should be respected by the secular government, specifically being active in preventing the State from drafting girls into the army or national service.





## Story Time

**THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE**, the Chazon Ish worked to make sure that the laws of the *Shulchan Aruch* were kept, by himself and by others in Klal Yisrael. He always took this position,

even when others fought against it.

In 1952, the State of Israel was planning to force all girls of age to serve in the national service. The Chazon Ish, the *posek hador* of *chareidim* in Eretz Yisrael, said that it was *assur* for girls to join the service. This disagreement created a lot of tension. Hoping to talk it over and improve their relationship, the prime minister of the State of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, asked to meet with the Chazon Ish.

Ben-Gurion came to the small, simple home of the Chazon Ish. It is said that the Chazon Ish took off his glasses for the meeting because he did not want to look at the face of a *rasha*. The Chazon Ish told Ben-Gurion that he would not agree with him on any issue that could prevent a Jew from living a Torah life. Ben-Gurion challenged that since most people living in Eretz Yisrael then were secular, the *frum* people should be obligated to follow the rules set by the secular, even if it would hinder them from keeping mitzvos!

The Chazon Ish quoted a Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 32b) about two ships, one empty and one full of cargo. If they are in a place where there is not enough room for both to pass, which goes first? The ship that is full is allowed to pass first, while the empty ship passes afterward. He then explained that the “ship” of the *frum* Jews was filled with 3,000 years of history and *mesorah*. The “ship” of the secular Jews was empty, without anything real to show for itself. He ended by asking, “So who should step back and let the other one lead?”

Ben-Gurion again challenged the Chazon Ish by questioning

whether there was a better way to run the State of Israel. Didn't a government need an army? Did the Chazon Ish think that a soldier should be given a Gemara instead of a gun?

The Chazon Ish replied with a *mashal*. A man was traveling in his horse-drawn cart during the freezing winter. Over time he got so cold that he grabbed some snow and rubbed it between his hands, making them a little bit warmer. He then thought, “It is so good to have winter and snow. Without them, how else could one get warm?!”

The Chazon Ish explained that it's true that the State of Israel needed an army, along with all the other things a government needs. However, those needs only came about because they had formed a state. Like the man who went out in the freezing weather and was glad for the snow that made him a bit warmer, the State of Israel had brought their needs and problems upon themselves. *Chareidim* were not obligated to help them fix these problems, especially when doing so went against the Torah! (Although the government did not change its position on the drafting of girls as a result of this meeting, ultimately they did not force girls to join the national service.)

*Didn't a government need an army? Did the Chazon Ish think that a soldier should be given a Gemara instead of a gun?*

### THE CHAZON ISH'S DVAR TORAH

#### *Halachah: Our Guiding Light*

Many years ago, *melamdim* (*rabbeim*) from afar came to a big city and began to teach the children there Torah (see *Pischei Teshuvah* on *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 156:17). Several local *melamdim* felt that the newcomers were wrongfully taking teaching jobs away from them. They wanted to make the newcomers leave, even if that meant having the local government force them out. Before acting, they asked Rav Yosef Shaul Nathanson, the *Av Beis Din* of Lvov and the author of *Yad Shaul*, if they were correct. Rav Nathanson answered that people are allowed to come to a city and teach Torah. Though in some cases it is forbidden for a person to move to a city and set up a business in competition with an existing one, the halachah is different when teaching and spreading Torah is involved. Therefore, the newcomers were in the right and should be allowed to stay in the city.

Let's think about this: There were two possible outcomes in this case. If the halachah would have forbidden the newcomers from teaching in that city, it would have been permissible to force them out. It would have even been a mitzvah to do so because it would be bringing down the Torah's laws into the world. The other option was that halachah would allow the newcomers to stay and teach. In that case it would be forbidden to remove them from the city. If one would force them out with the government's help, he would be labeled as a *moser*, an informer, and be punished most severely. The verdict between these two completely opposite outcomes depended only on the correct halachah in that case – and nothing else.

This demonstrates how much power lies within every halachah! With this in mind, we can understand why Klal Yisrael have always turned to the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *gedolim* of their time to find out what they should do in each situation – because it is halachah that is the deciding factor in every case.

(Chazon Ish: *Emunah U'Bitachon* 3:14)



# GEDOLIM GAME

See *The Circle* for further details.

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great Circle prizes

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