

Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz זצ"ל



Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz was born on 8 Adar I, 5651 (1891), in Dilatsch, White Russia, where his father, Rav Aharon Aryeh Leib Kalmanowitz, was rav. He first learned under Rav Yosef Zundel Hutner of Aisheshok and then went to the Yeshivah of Slabodka. In Slabodka, most *bachurim* were clean-shaven, yet Rav Avrohom refused to shave his beard. This was his family's *mesorah* and he would not deviate from it.

When Rav Avrohom was only 21, he became rav of Rakov, his wife's home-

town. He led his *kehillah* through the turmoil of World War I and staunchly defended Yiddishkeit against the local *maskilim*. Later, he was rav in the towns of Tiktin, Otovsk and Bialystok.

Rav Avrohom also served as one of the *roshei yeshivah* of the Mir Yeshivah and went to America to fundraise for the Mir. When World War II broke out, Rav Avrohom was able to escape there. In America, he became one of the leaders of Vaad Hatzalah and worked day and night to help Yeshivas Mir and many other European Jews escape the

Holocaust. In addition to the Mir, Rav Avrohom was *zocheh* to help rescue thousands of Yidden, including Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Reuven Grozovsky, and Rav Laizer Yudel Finkel.

After the war, Rav Avrohom founded Yeshivas Mir in Brooklyn. He also headed the efforts to stop the assimilation of Moroccan Jewry and was involved in rescuing a large part of Syrian and Egyptian Jewry.

Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz was *niftar* on 2 Adar, 5624 (1964).

Did You Know?

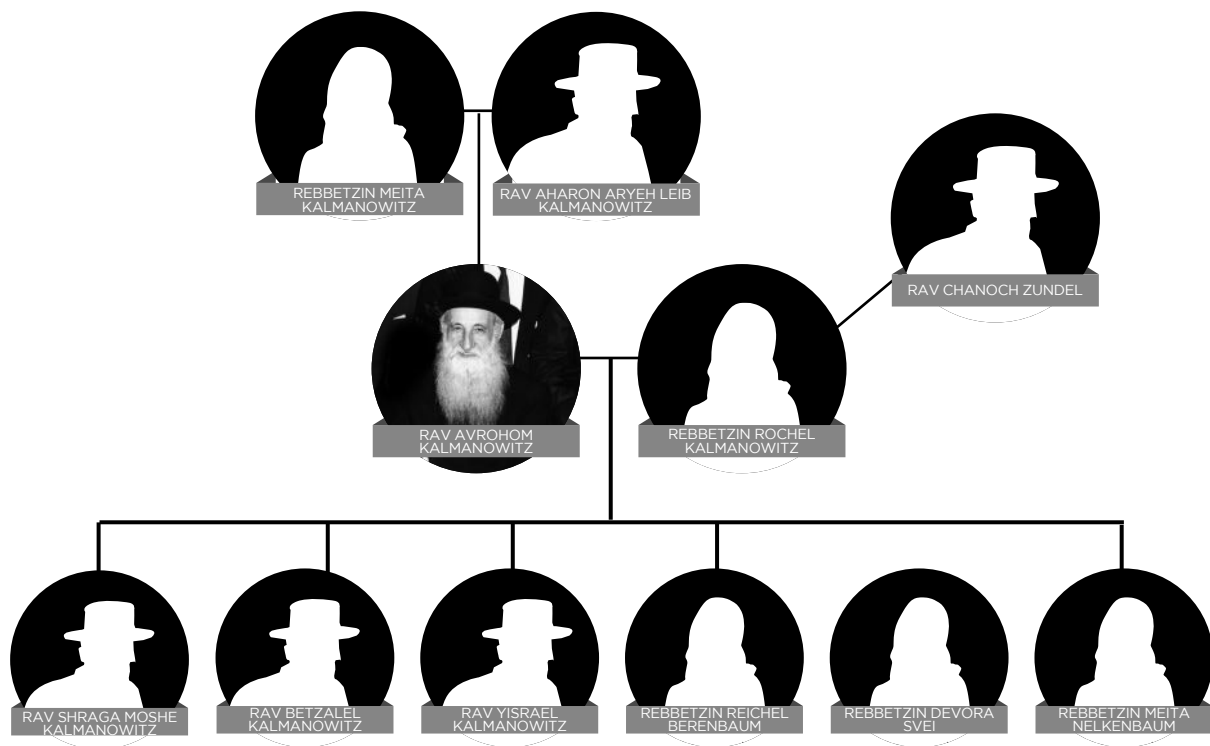
The FBI came to investigate Rav Avrohom during World War II, because he was sending so much money to Shanghai (which was controlled by Japan, an enemy country). Rav Avrohom thundered, "The refugees in Shanghai are my children! That's whom I'm sending money to! Do whatever you want to me, but I won't stop!" They backed down.

After World War I, Rav Avrohom met his *rebbe*, the Alter of Slabodka, and discovered that he and the Slabodka yeshivah were penniless due to the war. Rav Avrohom promptly took his life savings and gave it all to his *rebbe*!

Once, when Rav Avrohom was still in Europe, the communists barged into his home and covered and sealed his bookcases of *sefarim* with government seals. Before leaving, they warned him that if he broke the seals, he would be severely punished. But Rav Avrohom needed his *sefarim*! So he removed the back panels of the bookcases so he could carefully slip out his *sefarim* - leaving the seals intact.

Rav Avrohom raised over a million dollars to sustain the Mirrer Yeshivah *bachurim* in Shanghai during World War II, then bring them to America. That's equivalent to over ten million dollars today.

Family Tree



Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz was born to Rav Aharon Aryeh Leib and Meita Kalmanowitz. Rav Aharon Aryeh Leib was rav in several Russian towns, including Dilatsch, Didkovitz, Barashi and Anapoli. He served the local Yidden with great *mesirus nefesh* through many years of communist rule until he was able to flee to Eretz Yisrael in 1948.

Rav Avrohom married Rochel, daughter of Rav Chanoch Zundel and granddaughter of Rav Betzalel Hakohen, author of *Mareh Kohen on Shas*. Rav Avrohom's children includ-

ed Rav Shraga Moshe, Rav Betzalel, Rav Yisrael, Rebbetzin Reichel (married Rav Shmuel Berenbaum), Rebbetzin Devora (married Rav Elya Svei), and Rebbetzin Meita (married Rav Avrohom Yaakov Nelkenbaum). After Rav Avrohom was *niftar*, his son Rav Shraga Moshe and sons-in-law Rav Shmuel and Rav Avrohom Yaakov took over as roshei yeshivah of the Mir. Today, the yeshivah is also led by Rav Osher Kalmanowitz (son of Rav Shraga Moshe) and Rav Asher Dov Berenbaum (son of Rav Shmuel).

SOME OF RAV AVROHOM KALMANOWITZ'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

When Rav Avrohom was rav of Rakov, many refugees fled there due to World War I. Rav Avrohom took charge of relief efforts, ensured all refugees were housed with dignity, and distributed food rations fairly. Among the refugees that Rav Avrohom helped in Rakov and nearby Minsk were Rav Chaim Brisker, Rav Refael Shapiro, and the Alter of Slabodka.



During the Holocaust, Rav Avrohom raised the enormous funds needed for the Mirrer Yeshivah *bachurim* and many others to travel through Russia so they could escape to Japan, then Shanghai. Not only that, but even after Japan became an enemy country, Rav Avrohom channeled money through neutral countries to Shanghai so the *bachurim* could survive. When Rav Avrohom heard that the *bachurim* had a shortage of kosher tzitzis and mezuzos, he sent those also!



Rav Avrohom founded the Mirrer Yeshivah of Brooklyn and included many Alter Mirrers on his staff. The presence of the Alter Mirrers elevated the level of learning and gave American-born boys a taste of the intense Torah learning of Europe. Soon the Mir became one of the leading yeshivos in America.



Rav Avrohom didn't know a word of Arabic, yet he traveled to Morocco twice to help save the Jews there from assimilation. He founded the Otzar HaTorah network of schools throughout Morocco and later brought a large group of Moroccan boys to learn in the Mir, where he raised them to become the next generation of Sephardi Torah leaders.



DURING RAV AVROHOM KALMANOWITZ'S

struggle to rescue European Jewry, he fought against uninterested American Jews and uncaring government officials. A lesser man would have given up, yet Rav Avrohom's tireless *bitachon* drove him

on. He went to visit every government official he could and tried to convince them (in his broken English!) to help Jews escape the Holocaust.

In the beginning of the war, Rav Avrohom persuaded some secular Jewish leaders to arrange a meeting with a few government officials, including Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, an assimilated Jew who had never shown any interest in anything Jewish.

At the meeting, Rav Avrohom realized he was surrounded by polite, cold officials and secular leaders who were simply not interested in helping Jews escape Europe and just wanted the meeting to be over already. Seeing that there was nothing he could do, Rav Avrohom broke down and cried. His tears reached Morgenthau like no words could. From then on, Morgenthau helped Rav Avrohom and the Vaad Hatzalah save many Yidden.

But Rav Avrohom didn't stop there. In 1941, many Jews trying to flee the dangers of Europe acquired entry permits to Curacao, an island in the Caribbean Sea. To travel to Curacao, they had to cross Russia via train and enter Japan. But then Intourist, the Russian train agency, raised the price of the needed train tickets to the then-outrageous sum

of \$170 each, to be paid in cash, *in American dollars* — which were near-impossible to obtain in Russia!

Rav Avrohom found out about this on Shabbos, when he was speaking in a wealthy shul on behalf of Vaad Hatzalah. He knew it was *pikuach nefesh* and every second counted, so he persuaded three of the richest men in shul to join him in a taxi to visit the chairman of the Joint (a large wealthy secular Jewish organization). Rav Avrohom frantically banged on the door, only to have it opened by a butler who politely said that his master

wasn't home. Rav Avrohom pushed him aside, ran through the house and found the chairman, who was indeed at home. He cried and pleaded with the chairman to loan \$50,000 from the Joint to Vaad Hatzalah and transfer it immediately to Europe so there would be enough money for the hundreds of stranded Yidden to buy train tickets. He assured the chairman that the three rich men who had come with him would be cosigners on the loan, so the Joint wouldn't lose any

money. But the chairman refused, saying it was impossible to send so much money. Rav Avrohom then grabbed the chairman by the collar and yelled at him to WIRE THE MONEY NOW! The chairman stopped resisting and did whatever Rav Avrohom told him to do.

Through the money that Rav Avrohom made the chairman send that day, hundreds of Yidden, including the *bachurim* of the Mir Yeshivah, were able to escape the Holocaust.

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Try This!

When Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz came to America, he barely spoke English. He was on his own in a strange land. Yet that didn't stop him from trying to save as many Yidden as possible. He knew that Hashem would give him the ability to do whatever he could.

Sometimes we see another person who is suffering. Maybe a classmate is being bullied or a friend looks overwhelmed. We often ignore the situation, because we think we don't have the ability to make a difference.

Think of Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz. You also have the *kochos* to help!

RAV AVROHOM KALMANOWITZ'S DVAR TORAH

Filling the Void

The Gemara (*Ta'anis* 9a) tells us that, in the *Midbar*, Klal Yisrael were given the *Be'er* in the *zechus* of Miriam, the *Ananei Hakavod* in the *zechus* of Aharon, and the *mann* in the *zechus* of Moshe. When Miriam died, the water of the *Be'er* stopped, but it came back in the *zechus* of Aharon and Moshe. When Aharon died, the *Ananei Hakavod* left, but they came back in the *zechus* of Moshe. So, in the end, the *Be'er*, *Ananei Hakavod*, and the *mann* were all in the *zechus* of Moshe.

Let's think about this! If the *zechus* of Moshe and Aharon was enough, why did the water stop when Miriam died? Shouldn't it have continued without stopping in the merit of Moshe and Aharon? And why did the *Ananei Hakavod* leave when Aharon died? Shouldn't they have stayed in the *zechus* of Moshe? (See Maharsha on that Gemara.)

Really, each person's *zechus* brought each item. However, when the water stopped when Miriam died, this presented Moshe and Aharon with a *chiyuv* to grow in Torah and *yiras Shamayim* so they could deserve the same *zechus* that Miriam had. They worked on themselves and succeeded in bringing Klal Yisrael water. When Aharon died, the *Ananei Hakavod* left, and Moshe had a *chiyuv* to *shteig* even more. He succeeded and, in his merit, Klal Yisrael were given back the *Ananei Hakavod*.

This is a lesson for all of us. When a person who greatly benefits our nation, like one of the *gedolei Yisrael*, dies, we have a *chiyuv*, a responsibility, to step up, rise to his level, and fill the emptiness he has left behind.

(*Chazon Hakulmus*, page 66)