

Rav Chaim Kanievsky זצ"ל



Rav Chaim Kanievsky, the Sar Ha-Torah of our generation, was born 15 Teves, 5688 (1928), in Pinsk, Russia, the oldest child of Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, the Steipler, then rosh yeshivah in Yeshivas Novaradok-Pinsk. When Rav Chaim was six, his family moved to Bnei Brak, where Rav Chaim grew up near his mother's brother, the Chazon Ish, later calling him his *rebbe muvhak*.

At age 13, Rav Chaim went to learn in

the Lomza Yeshiva in Petach Tikvah under Rav Shach and Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz. Rav Chaim developed his intense, *bekius* style of learning there, finishing *Shas* for the first time at age 16.

When Rav Chaim was 23, he married Batsheva Elyashiv of Yerushalayim. After a few months in Petach Tikva, the couple settled in Bnei Brak.

Rav Chaim was once offered a position as a *maggid shiur*. The Steipler told

him, "Never accept a position! Your job is to sit and learn!" And indeed, that's what Rav Chaim did.

Rav Chaim and Rebbetzin Batsheva's home was open to all. People streamed to the couple's tiny apartment on 23 Rechov Rashbam for advice, *brachos* and *piskei halachah*, until it became the most well-known address in Klal Yisrael.

Rav Chaim was *niftar* on Shushan Purim, 5783 (2022).

Did You Know?

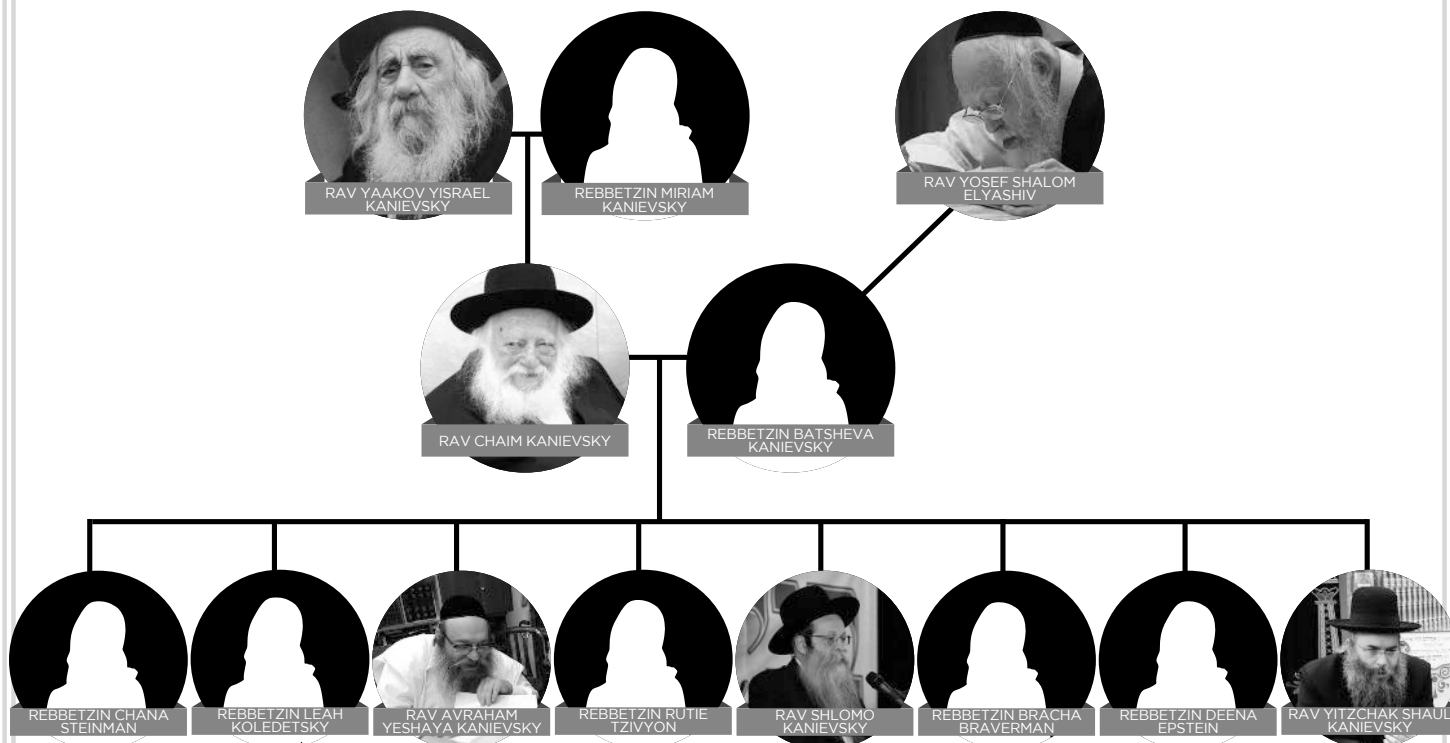
Rav Chaim never held a formal position, yet so many came to him for *piskei halachah* or answers to Torah questions that Rav Aharon Leib Steinman remarked that almost every contemporary *sefer* he saw quoted Rav Chaim!

Rav Chaim would accept any invitation to be a *sandek* at a bris, even one far from Bnei Brak. His family calculated that he served as *sandek* for over 30,000 children! He would wear the tallis of his father, the Steipler, whenever he was *sandek*.

Rav Chaim was careful to daven the daily *tefillos* at the earliest possible times to fulfill "*zerizin makdimin l'mitzvos*." Shacharis was at *vasikin*, Minchah a half hour after *chatzos*, and Ma'ariv 40 minutes after *shkiah*.

Rav Chaim was known for his immense knowledge of *kol haTorah kulah*. Once, someone asked him how many times Moshe Rabbeinu's name is in the Torah. Rav Chaim answered 614. The person countered, "But I ran a computer search and Moshe appeared 616 times!" Rav Chaim smiled and said, "The computer doesn't know *nekudos*! Twice, when *mem-shin-hei* appears, it's a different word with the same letters but different pronunciation."

Family Tree



Rav Chaim and his family were true Torah aristocracy. Rav Chaim's father was Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, the Steipler Gaon, and his mother was Miriam Karelitz, sister of Rav Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, the Chazon Ish. In fact, the Chazon Ish made their *shidduch* after he met young Rav Yaakov Yisrael and was impressed by his *yiras Shamayim*.

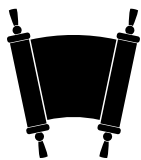
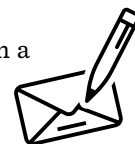
Rav Chaim had two sisters: Yuzpa, who married Rav Shaul Barzam, a *talmid chacham* who died young, and Ahuva, who married Rav Shlomo Berman, Rosh Yeshivas Ponovezh.

Rav Chaim married Batsheva Elyashiv, daughter of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, the leading *posek* of our *dor*, and granddaughter of Rav Aryeh Levin, the Tzaddik of Yerusha-

layim. Rebbetzin Batsheva was so devoted to Rav Chaim's learning that she never let him do anything in the house. She was a great *tzaddekes* who gave *chizuk* and *brachos* to many. Rav Chaim and Rebbetzin Batsheva's sons and sons-in-law are all tremendous *talmidei chachamim*. Their eight children are Rebbetzin Chana (married Rav Shraga Steinman, son of Rav Aryeh Leib Shteinman), Rebbetzin Leah (married Rav Yitzchak Kolodetsky), Rav Avraham Yeshaya, Rebbetzin Rutie (married Rav Yehoshua Tzivyon), Rav Shlomo, Rebbetzin Bracha (married Rav Zelig Braverman), Rebbetzin Deena (married Rav Dovid Epstein), and Rav Yitzchak Shaul.

SOME OF RAV CHAIM'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Rav Chaim would answer over a hundred letters a day. He would write back to anyone who wrote him a letter with a *sh'eilah* on a Torah topic, whether it came from a *cheder* child or a *talmid chacham*! Every day, he would sort through his letters and answer the ones from *Kohanim* first, then *Levi'im*, then *Yisraelim*. Among *Yisraelim*, he would give precedence to anyone named Yaakov Yisrael after his father.



Rav Chaim made a *Siyum HaShas* every single year as part of his *siyum bechoros* on Erev Pesach! And that *siyum* was for both the *Talmud Bavli* and *Talmud Yerushalmi*, plus the Rambam, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Midrash Rabbah*, *Zohar* and more. Rav Chaim was able to do this by starting to learn at 3 a.m. every morning to cover what he called his daily *chovos* (debts) – his learning schedule, which included at least eight pages of *Talmud Bavli*, plus the *Yerushalmi* and these other *sefarim*!

Rav Chaim wrote over 20 *sefarim* on topics as varied as *eglah arufah*, *kiddush hachodesh* and *masechetos ketanos*. Two of his most famous *sefarim* are *Orchos Yosher*, a beloved *mussar* classic, and *Derech Emunah*, an expansive commentary clarifying *Seder Zera'im*, one of the most difficult parts of the *Talmud Yerushalmi*.





RAV CHAIM saw hundreds of people each day, greeting everyone with patience and a warm smile and helping many through his powerful *brachos* and *eitzos*. Your father or *rebbi* might

have received a *brachah* from Rav Chaim.

Once, an older *bachur* came to Rav Chaim and tearfully related that he couldn't find a *shidduch* due to a large scar disfiguring his face. "How did you get that scar?" asked Rav Chaim compassionately. The *bachur* related that when he was a young teenager in Yerushalayim, he saw an Arab chasing a Jewish girl. He ran over to protect the girl and the Arab stabbed him several times in the face, leaving him permanently scarred. "The next time you go out on a *shidduch*, tell the girl the story," Rav Chaim advised. The young man did just that and the girl asked him for more details. Finally, she cried, "I'm the girl you saved! I didn't know who you were and I wanted to thank you all these years!" In the end, they got married!

Another time, a *yungerman* in America was involved in a car accident that caused

the death of an elderly non-Jewish man. Although he was not at fault, the distraught *yungerman* wrote a letter to Rav Chaim asking how he could attain a *tikkun* in *Shamayim* for causing a person to die. Rav Chaim responded with one word: "Amalek." The puzzled man couldn't figure out what Rav Chaim meant. Several months later, he received a call from a friend who was a real estate agent. "Remember that accident?" he asked him. "I was asked to empty out and sell

that old man's house. I found a whole collection of Nazi artifacts in the basement, together with a picture of that man in a Nazi uniform!" Finally, the *yungerman* understood Rav Chaim's cryptic response. Hashem had caused him to bring about the death of a modern-day Amalek!

The fact that Rav Chaim made time for so many is even more amazing when we realize how devoted he was to his learning. He never wasted a minute and Hashem granted him special *siyata d'Shmaya*. Rav Chaim once was writing a *sefer* on the *simanim* of kosher locusts,

but he felt he needed to see a live locust to understand the way the Gemara describes its legs. Suddenly, a locust flew onto his desk. Rav Chaim examined it until he understood the Gemara's description – and then the locust flew away!

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Try This!

Rav Chaim was so busy, yet he answered anyone who wrote to him with a question because he felt it was a *chessed*. You can do *chessed* through writing letters too – it can be a brief note to cheer up a friend, a chatty letter to your grandparents, or a get-well card to someone who is sick. And you can write your parents letters when you go away to camp – then you get the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av* as well!

RAV CHAIM'S DVAR TORAH

New Name, New Identity

When Vashti refused to come to King Achashverosh, he became angry and asked his advisers how to respond. Memuchan, the lowest of the seven officers of Parash and Madai (see *Megillah* 12b), suggested having her killed, and the king accepted his idea.

It seems that the higher officers hadn't suggested that idea because they were concerned that the following day, when the king was no longer drunk, he would become upset that he'd killed Vashti and kill them for having thought of it. Only Memuchan, the lowest one, spoke up with this advice. After the other officers saw that the king liked the suggestion, they decided to make it appear as if they liked it too.

Truthfully, there is a midrash (*Abba Gurion* 2) that says that after the king was no longer drunk, he did kill all the advisers who had told him to kill Vashti. (So the higher officers were right to be concerned, and they were not saved just because they weren't the ones to first suggest the idea.) However, the Gemara (*Megillah* 12b) tells us that Memuchan is Haman. If so, how was he still alive?

An answer could be that when the king commanded that the officers be killed, Memuchan changed his name to Haman. He was then able to save himself, since the king didn't know him very well and didn't realize who he was once he assumed a new name. The king wanted to kill Memuchan, but now he was "Haman" so he managed to escape!

(*Ta'ama D'kra*, *Esther* 1:16, *Vayomer Memuchan*)