
The '*Chazon Ish*'

Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz s.z.l.
(1879-1954 C.E.)

An example of Jewish learning, moral and
ethical integrity in our time





Overview

The city of Bnei Brak in central Israel, adjacent to Tel Aviv, is known for its traditional, religious population. Once it was a quiet town, a city full of Jewish learning and *Yeshivoth* (Torah High Schools), a city in which no traffic could be seen on *Shabbat* and where attention was paid to *Ma'asim Tovim* (good deeds), righteousness and piety. Since the founding of the city in 1923 C.E. it was thus and it is still like this today.

During the first half of the 20th century C.E. a veritable pilgrimage started and swelled to the most Orthodox quarter of Bnei Brak, *Zichron Me'ir*, consisting of men, women and even children from all walks of life, and all parts of the world. One inhabitant, in a small house on the edge of this pious quarter, was the magnetic attraction of the pilgrimage.

Hundreds of people, the elderly and the young, the religious and non-religious, Rabbis and Sages, judges and labourers, continued their pilgrimage along a narrow path that led them from the country lane to this small house.

Some came on horse or on a donkey, others came in rich limousines, still others in simple vehicles, but most came on foot.

They all however came with a similar intent: the longing for a mentor and a spiritual guide in life, searching for an answer to a halachic or life problem that preoccupied or worried them. Even the very first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973 C.E.) was one of those who came for a consultation. He also sought the advice of the mysterious and famous Sage living in the small house, on issues of state and religion in modern Israel, so as to be able to take important decisions.



David Ben-Gurion (on the right), the first Prime Minister and founder of the State of Israel, on a visit to the *Chazon Ish*, to ask his advice on the exemption of *Yeshiva* students and religious young women from military service

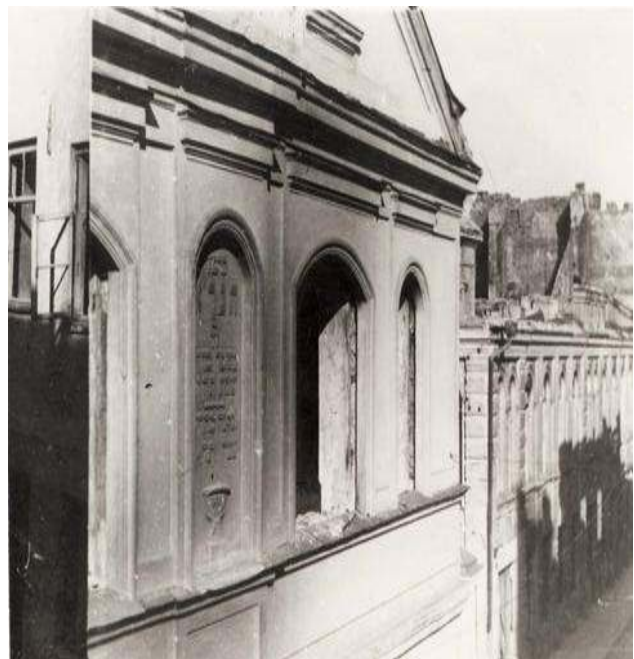
Who was this extraordinary personality in Bnei Brak who was the focus of so much interest and created such an epicentre of pastoral advice?

It is a historical and documented fact to be found in many biographical books on the *Chazon Ish*, that most of those who entered the house of this Sage, fearful or worried, left the house self-assured and spirited, with an expression of hope and trust on their faces. Who was this Torah figure who, with his penetrating gaze and far-reaching words, could drive away the sadness and fear of these seekers of council and turn them into harmony and satisfaction?

His pseudonym is a household name and very few have never heard of his penname: Vision of Man, the *Chazon Ish*

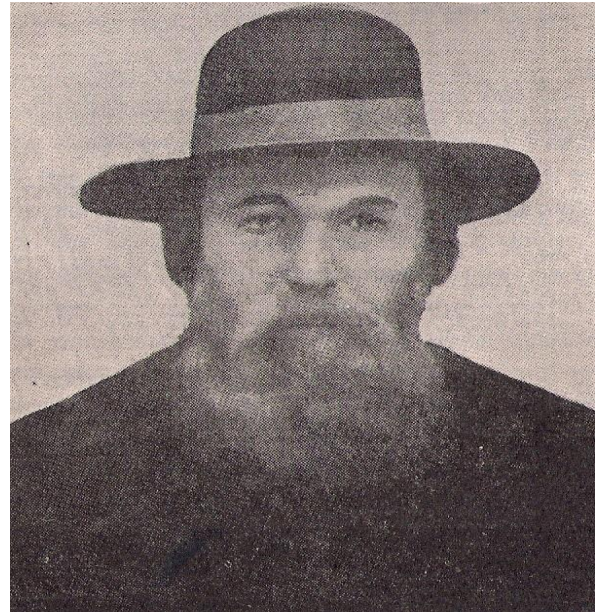
His life and how he came to this universal prominence and reverence within religious Judaism, is the subject we wish to highlight in this essay.

Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz s.z.l., known to the halachic world as Vision of Man, was born in 1879 C.E. in the small town of Kossova or Kosava (known these days as Brest Voblast in Bellarus) in the neighbourhood of the big Jewish *Talmud* citadel of Vilnius (Vilna), the capital of Lithuania. He was blessed with an intellect characteristic of genius, talmudic "*Ilui*", a brilliant youngster with an excellent photographic memory.



Left: the most famous Rav of the Enlightenment, the "*Vilna Gaon*" (1720-1797 C.E.)
Right: the facade of the famous *Beth Midrash* (House of study) of the *Vilna Gaon* in Vilnius, Lithuania

In his younger years it did not take long till no talmudic teacher could be found who was capable of teaching him in his birthplace Kosova. His father, Rabbi Shmaryah(u) Yoseph Karelitz, the chairman of the local Beth Din (Rabbinic court), decided to educate this talented son himself.



Left: the mother of the *Chazon Ish*, Rashke Leah Katzenellenbogen-Epstein
Right: the father of the *Chazon Ish*, Rabbi Shmaryah(u) Yoseph Karelitz

Around the time of his *Bar Mitzvah*, his religious adulthood at age 13 (for boys), the young man Avraham Yeshaya(hu) was already a qualified *Talmud Sage*. During the meeting of leaders and members of the Jewish community of Kosova for his *Bar Mitzvah* celebration, the young Avraham Yeshaya(hu) publicly promised to devote his entire life to studying *Torah*, without any ulterior motives to gain a Rabbinic position or a position in a Rabbinic court.

He remained true to his word of honour during the rest of his life. He married Bashe (Batya) Bei, the daughter of those who loved *Torah* and he learned day and night, while his wife took care of their livelihood. Their daily life was far from comfortable with the meagre income from a small shop in textiles. When the young scholar was too tired to study *Torah* or write *Torah-Novellae* (*Chidushim*), he energetically helped his wife, till late at night, with the accounts of the shop and with keeping the client accounts up to date. The couple was not blessed with any children, despite many childless couples later coming to the *Chazon Ish* with a request for a blessing for children, and with these requests granted.

The young Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz was a self-taught man who tended towards solitude and anonymity. His *Torah-Novellae* and new interpretations of the *Torah* were published under the penname of *Ta Shma* (the meaning will be explained in the next paragraph) in *Kneset Yisrael* (Gathering of Israel), a monthly Rabbinic magazine for scholars concerned with halakhic and talmudic subjects. *Kneset Yisrael* was published in Vilna and widely circulated.

Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz chose to write under the penname of *Ta Shma*, the classical concept for solutions for talmudic and halachic problems. His halachic positions and published new *Talmud* interpretations were always very well thought through and concisely written. The anonymous identity of Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz was soon discovered by the last Chief Rabbi of Vilna, the world famous Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky (1863-1940 C.E.).

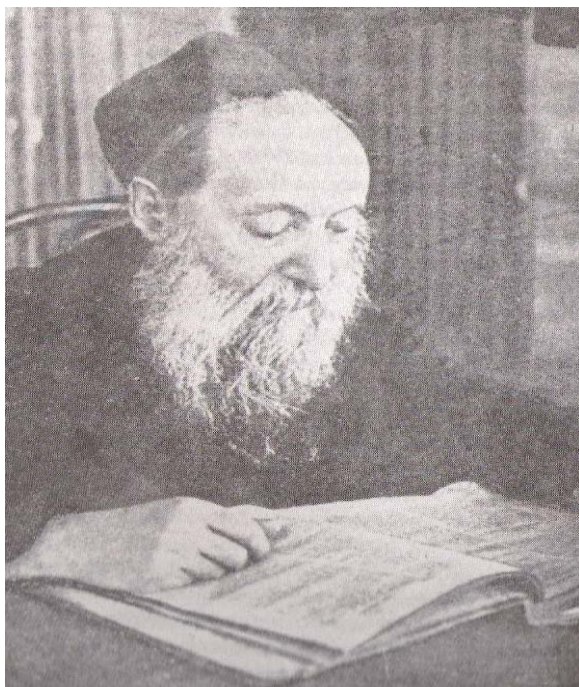
During the First World War (1914-1918 C.E.) the economy in Kosova was so bad that Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz and his wife were forced to move to Vilna.

From then on the Chief Rabbi of Vilna Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, constantly sought the advise of the young Rabbinic genius. On important issues Chief Rabbi Chaim Ozer would first seek the position of Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz before taking a decision himself.

Rabbi Moshe Blau (1885-1946 C.E.), one of the most important founders of *Agudath Yisrael*, a religious umbrella organisation of *Torah*-faithful Jewry from *Eretz Yisrael*, the erstwhile Palestine, paid a visit to the Chief Rabbi of Vilna during the 1920s. Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky asked his secretary to show the visitor the main attractions of the city of Vilna.

The secretary spent several hours visiting the city, the synagogues hundreds of years old, the world famous Jewish cemetery where great Jewish Sages like the "Vilna Gaon" (1720-1797 C.E.) found their place of rest. The secretary showed the visitor from *Eretz Yisrael* the famous Rabbinic library of Rabbi Shmuel Strashun (1794-1872 C.E.) with its rich collection of rare religious books and manuscripts and also many other sights of historical importance.

On reporting the details of the tour of Vilna and the interesting sights seen with the visitor from the Holy Land, the Chief Rabbi of Vilna said to his secretary: "Yes, yes, all these sights are historical monuments, but they do not represent the current highlight of the city of Vilna. Have you introduced Rabbi Moshe Blau to the real pearl, Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz?"



Left: the last Chief Rabbi of Vilna, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky (1863-1940 C.E.), a great admirer of the *Chazon Ish*

Right: Rabbi Moshe Blau (1885-1946 C.E.), the most important leader of *Agudath Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael* before the proclamation of the State of Israel

The *Chazon Ish* was unique in everything he did, but also in his method of learning. While other scholars would be very proud of the fact that they could study the enormous study assignment of sixty or more pages of *Talmud* on one day, he was often busy with one single page of *Talmud* for four days or more, until he was satisfied and understood in detail everything that he had thoroughly investigated and learned.

Once he immersed himself for four months, for fifteen hours each day, in one single Tractate of the *Mishnah*. Apart from *Torah* and *Talmud* he also studied general and profane subjects like anatomy, astronomy and agriculture, because a thorough knowledge of these subjects is required for a complete insight into several aspects of Jewish Law and practise in these fields. His example in this method of study was the “*Gaon of Vilna*” (1720-1797 C.E.).

He distinguished himself from other *Torah* scholars also in his method of learning outwardly. He learned in a silent and discrete manner. He also did not rhythmically sway his body (shockeln in Yiddish) while studying Torah. Rather, his mind and body were concentrated as one on the *Torah* subject that preoccupied him and this remained the case until he was satisfied and had found the correct interpretation.

Then his face showed a harmonious and satisfied expressions, a sign to his family that he had solved the umpteenth difficult problem.



Self study and learning *Torah* is the biggest *Mitzvah* in Judaism. Why? Because one cannot put *Torah* and *Mitzvoth* into practise without knowing the contents of *Torah*

His first halachic and talmudic work with new interpretations on *Torah*, *Torah* and *Talmud-Novellae*, was published anonymously in Vilna, the then citadel of *Talmud* in Europe, in 1911 C.E., with the title *Chazon Ish*. The second word of the title of this work, *Ish*, consists of the first Hebrew letters of his first names: *Alef* for Avraham, *Jud* and *Shin* for Yeshaya(hu). The Rabbi refused to publicise his officially known,

complete name on his work: "My work is not written to advertise and publicise my name, but to be of service to the world of *Torah*. It is thus completely irrelevant who wrote it. What is really important, is the content of the book and that is everything."



Above: A collage of the books by the *Chazon Ish* with pictures from his life. The picture of the *Chazon Ish* is in front of his monumental magnum opus, *Chazon Ish*
 Below: A biographical work on the *Chazon Ish*, his life and works, by Benjamin Braun: The Halachist, the true believer and the leader of the *Charedi* revolution

The more he went out of his way to hide his true identity and remain anonymous to the Jewish scholarly world, the more famous he became and the more his advice was sought.

His approach to many problems of *Halachah* was no less revolutionary and pioneering. His new *Torah* and *Talmud* interpretations were designed to reach a decisive and definitive solution. His Rabbinic writing style was concise and succinct in the extreme, which led to Rabbinic Authorities and authors in his day remarking full of admiration: "What makes him so unique is that Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz manages to say in half a dozen lines what we all would say in sixty pages."



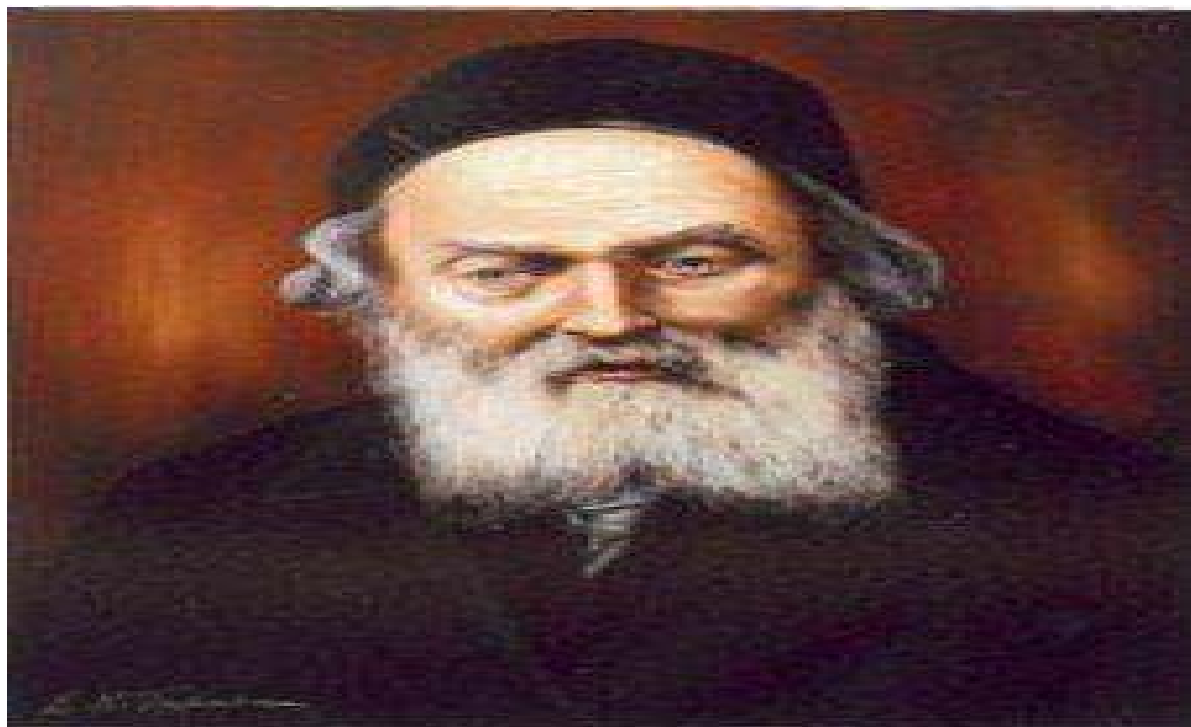
The first imprint of the work *Chazon Ish* in Vilna, 1911 C.E.

Were it not for the fact that he mentioned the “*Gaon of Vilna*” and contemporaries like the *Chafetz Chaim* in his works, one could be of the opinion that the author of his works was an early Tossafist (from the school of Rashi) from France, who lived about eight hundred years earlier.

He was once asked: “Please explain to us Rabbi, why do you use such a difficult style in your works, in stead of making your works understandable for everyone?” “Well”, Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz answered, “the truth is that I only publish my works for myself, because my handwriting is so illegible, that I myself have difficulty reading it. And as no one only publishes only one copy, I had a few published.”

He appreciated his *Torah* manuscripts enormously. One day, as he was teaching, a man suddenly entered the room in a panic to tell that a fire had broken out, not far from the house of the Rabbi. In addition there was the danger that the fire would spread and engulf the house of the Rabbi. Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) immediately halted the lesson and hurried out of the building. Shortly afterwards he returned triumphantly holding a bundle of handwritten manuscripts that he had managed to save from the fire. The fact that his house and furniture would be destroyed by the flames did not seem to concern him in the least...

Chazon Ish became a household name in the pre-*Shoah* scholarly *Torah* world of Lithuania and Poland and hardly any public Jewish effort failed to first ask for the wise advice and endorsement of the great Sage



The *Chafetz Chaim* (Hebrew for Desirer of Life, a penname taken from Tehillim/Psalm 34:13) or Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838 -1933 C.E.) in his later years. He was a close friend of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, Chief Rabbi of Vilna. The *Chafetz Chaim* is the author of the famous halachic work *Mishnah Berurah*, which is now a standard work taught in *Yeshivoth* and studied among learned Jews

A good example of this occurred during the First World War (1914-1918 C.E.), when the *Chafetz Chaim* (1838-1933 C.E.) was stranded in Russia and could not return to his *Yeshiva* and house in Radin, Poland.

The *Chafetz Chaim* sent an express letter to his friend Chief Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky of Vilna (1863-1940 C.E.) to ask him to use his influence to obtain a visa for the *Chafetz Chaim* to enter Lithuania.

The *Chafetz Chaim* further insisted on mentioning that it concerned a matter of life and death. The letter reached its destination on the Eve of *Shabbat* and Chief Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky decided to send an emissary to Warsaw, the Polish capital, as soon as *Shabbat* would end the next evening. That *Shabbat*, the *Chazon Ish* sat silently in his corner listening to everything that was said about the desperate letter. In the end he remarked: "I do not understand the course of action of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky".

The *Chafetz Chaim* himself wrote in his very well known work *Mishnah Berurah*, that, where it concerns a matter of life and death, the Laws of *Shabbat* are not applied. Had he not written in his letter that in this case it concerned such a matter? Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky did not hesitate and immediately sent an emissary to Warsaw to negotiate with the Polish authorities to issue an entry visa for the *Chafetz Chaim*, even though it was still *Shabbat*.

In those pre-*Shoah* times Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) was known as a very competent authority in *Halachah*. When he made known his desire to settle in the Holy Land, the leading talmudic and halachic authorities of Vilna tried to dissuade him. They did not want the *Chazon Ish* to leave them. They could however not convince him, he so longed for *Eretz Yisrael*. In an introductory letter to the scholars of *Yerushalayim*/Jerusalem and the Holy Land it was written: "A lion among the Sages is leaving Lithuania to settle in *Eretz Yisrael*".

The Holy Land represented everything that was good in the world for the *Chazon Ish*. He loved it with all his heart

Once, when an American tourist came to see him for a blessing and advise, the first question the *Chazon Ish* asked this man was: "Have you come to settle?" "No, I came as a tourist, to see the sights of the country", the American Jew replied.

"Are Jews permitted to leave *Eretz Yisrael*?" was the next question of the *Chazon Ish*. The American Jew was very surprised. "But I understood from *Torah* scholars" he spluttered, "that, if one comes to *Eretz Yisrael* with the intention to visit the Holy Land and not to settle, one is permitted to then leave *Eretz Yisrael*."

Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) looked at his conversation partner sadly. "Really, I cannot understand that you, dear friend", he said, "take all this trouble to find reasons and excuses to leave *Eretz Yisrael*, while we, the religious immigrants, rack our brains to find ways and means to settle in *Eretz Yisrael*."

"How is it possible", the *Chazon Ish* once remarked, "that a scholar or Rabbi who has been brought up with *Tenach* (the Hebrew Bible), and who studied *Chumash* (Hebrew for the first five books of the Hebrew Bible), does not overflow with a boundless love and deep affection for the Holy Land? What has he learned from the *Torah*? The *Torah* teaches him about *Moshe Rabbeinu* (Moses Our Teacher), the father of all Prophets, the inimitable and unique leader who succeeded in freeing the

Israelites from Egypt and leading them to *Har Sinai*/Mount Sinai, to receive the *Torah*.

Moshe Rabbeinu, about whose greatness and miracles can be read from one end of the *Torah* to the other, had only one small humble wish, which he wanted to see fulfilled above all else before his death: to be able to see the Promised Land, *Eretz Yisrael*. That was all. Who can study this *Torah* and absorb it into his bones without being in love with *Eretz Yisrael*?"



The *Chazon Ish* together with the greatest authority in the field of Mussar and ethics, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953 C.E.), author of the famous Mussar work *Michtav MeEliyahu*. Both luminaries were enthusiastic and real lovers of *Eretz Yisrael*

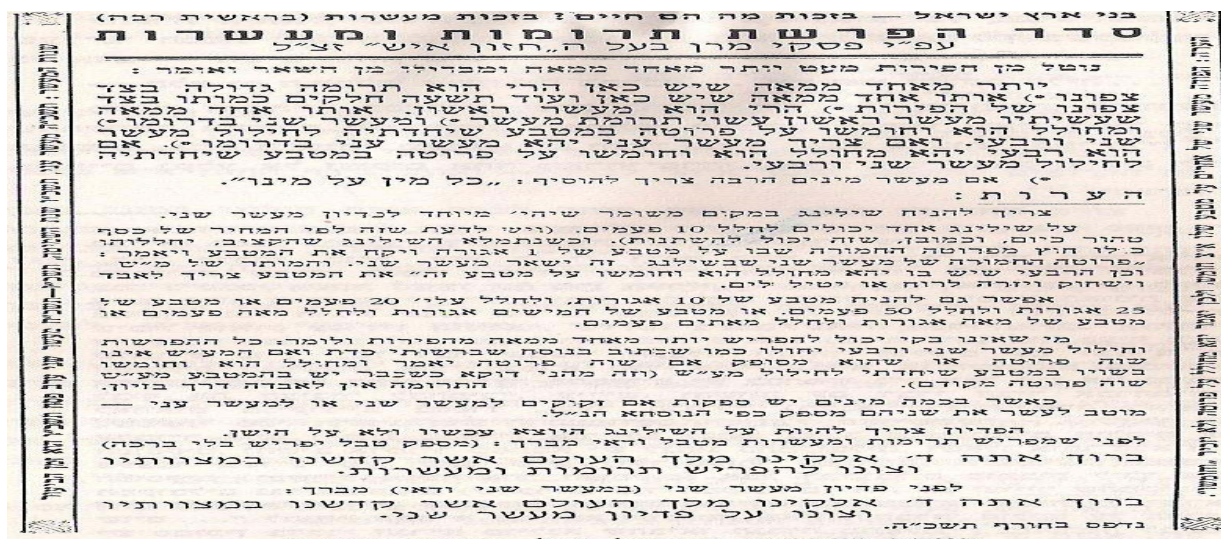
When Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* in 1933, he lived together with his wife in a room near the coast of Tel Aviv. No one knew his identity. Later on he moved to Bnei Brak, to the heart of the new *Yishuv* (religious population centre) that was being built at that time.

His home was a small, dark, damp hut in Givat Rokeach, a hill in Bnei Brak. He explained why he had chosen to live in Bnei Brak: "The pioneer religious *Yishuv* that has emerged there, needs spiritual *Torah* guidance and support. I wish to live in the midst of this new religious *Yishuv* and to influence it with the spirit and enthusiasm of *Torah*. If I do not succeed to be a religious mentor and guide, I would prefer to live in a desert."

The *Chazon Ish* did not preach for the sake of preaching. Whatever he set himself as a task, he succeeded at. He was always actively busy wherever he could, as in visiting and encouraging the new religious immigrants who settled in the neighbourhood of Bnei Brak.



The two main streets/thoroughfares in Bnei Brak. On the right the Rabbi Akiva Street, named after the most famous *Mishnah* Sage Rabbi Akiva (second century C.E.), who established his big *Yeshiva* with 24.000 students in the historic Bnei Brak. On the left the Chazon Ish Street, named after the greatest halachic authority after the *Shoah* who resided in Bnei Brak



The famous formula of the *Chazon Ish* to nowadays separate *Terumah* (originally meant for the Priests) and *Ma'aser* (originally meant for the Levites) in *Eretz Yisrael*. This formulation is accepted within all circles these days and is used and printed in nearly all *Siddurim* (prayer books)

His special love however went out to the *Torah* faithful Jewish young men and women who took part in the ideal of the agricultural life and greening of the Land. The *Chazon Ish* regularly visited their settlements and *Kibbutzim*. He stimulated and influenced them in the great, idealistic work they undertook and taught them the *Halachah* and *Mitzvoth* concerning agriculture specific to the Holy Land. For the religious farmers bound by *Torah* the *Chazon Ish* established the *Shemitha* Fund, so that they would have enough income to live from during the *Shemitha* year (the seventh year in the cycle when the land had to lie fallow and also for the first of the new cycle, when everything had to start from scratch).



The *Chazon Ish* on a working visit to *Kibbutz Chafetz Chaim*, surrounded by young religious pioneers to whom he is explaining the *Halachoth* on agriculture in *Eretz Yisrael*. These *Halachoth* are added to nearly every contemporary edition of the *Kitsur Shulchan Aruch* (the concise Code of Jewish Law)

“Be disappointed, be bitter”, he said, “but never be depressed. You must always be prepared for setbacks, nothing has ever been achieved without a struggle. Bitterness and disillusionment will disappear and success will eventually be achieved. However, if one is depressed, prosperity will never be achieved.” The *Chazon Ish* was always set on helping, not only with advise and guidance, but very often also financially. He was always ready and willing to help support a new religious project, like the building of a *Mikvah* (ritual bath), a *Talmud-Torah* (school for younger children) or a *Yeshiva* (Torah High School). He was the initiator of many of these pioneering projects and his energy and enthusiasm inspired others to realise his plans efficiently and speedily.

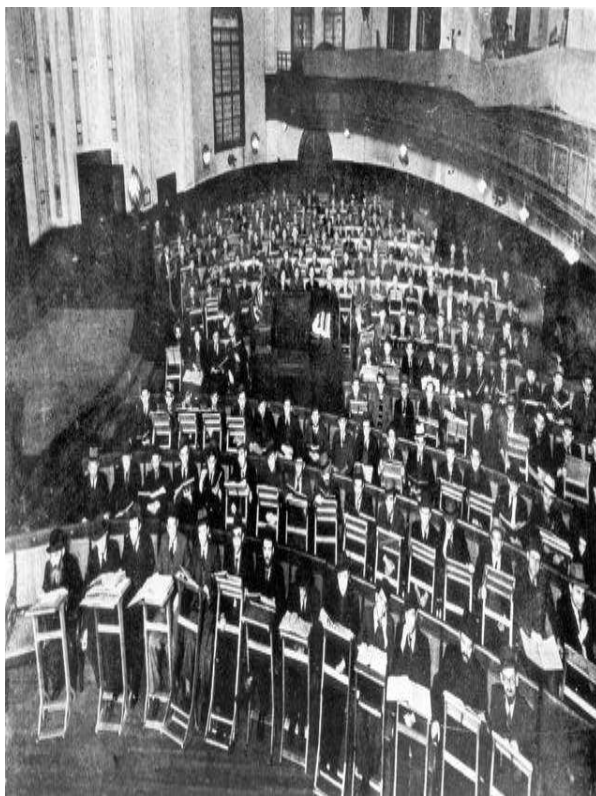
It is not an exaggeration to declare that the *Chazon Ish* was the most authoritative, halachic resort during the last generations. Even the Israeli Court of Appeal and Supreme Court took his halachic decisions, analyses and expert opinions on all questions of Jewish religious Tradition and Law into consideration. His advise and opinions were followed by *Torah*-faithful Jews and Rabbinic circles from across the world, as is still the case today.



The *Chazon Ish* surrounded by world famous Rabbis. On the left is Rabbi Shmuel HaLevi Vosner (1913 C.E), Rabbi of Zichron Me'ir, the most pious neighbourhood of Bnei Brak. On the far right is Rabbi Yaakov Rosenheim (1870-1965 C.E.), founder of the religious movement *Agudath Yisrael*

During the persecutions of the *Shoah*, when a relatively large group of *Yeshivah* and *Torah* scholars from Lithuania and Poland could flee from the European inferno to Shanghai in China, to find asylum there, the question was raised when *Shabbat* and *Yom Kippur* began. Because of the big time difference between *Eretz Yisrael* and *Yerushalayim*/Jerusalem and the Far East, the refugees were not certain at which time they should observe *Shabbat* and *Yom Kippur*. The halachic decision of the *Chazon Ish*, that one should consider geographic time differences, was accepted because he had a profound knowledge of astronomy.

He was the highest authority on *Halakhah* in his day. Every problem or question presented to him was weighed on the scale of *Halakhah* and logic. He would spend days thinking about the solution to a question, until he was satisfied with his decision and it could no longer be refuted.



The *Yeshivah* of Mir and other *Yeshivoth*, whose students and teachers were given asylum in Shanghai, China during the *Shoah*. They deferred to the *Chazon Ish* on the time difference between Israel and China concerning the time related observance of *Shabbat* and *Yom Kippur*

He often meditated by himself and was impatient with those who bothered him with unnecessary chatter. He once remarked to a troublesome person who was trying to engage him in conversation: "Sir, do you know why people listen to what I have to say? Because I speak little and listen to others especially attentively..."

Still, despite the many halachic and religious-social problems that preoccupied him, his house remained open to everyone who wanted to see and consult him. His front door was never locked and even when he badly needed to rest, he refused to limit the visiting hours or to tell pilgrims to leave.

Not all those seeking his council came in dire straights. Many were industrialists, manufacturers, traders or entrepreneurs who came to consult the *Chazon Ish* on their business dealings or disputes with colleagues. He listened attentively to everything they had to say and his opinion was based on *Halakhah*, logic and contract. Also for mundane, simple issues his position was requested and accepted with understanding.

Some people came to him, like to a Chassidic *Rebbe* (Yiddish for Rabbi) or *Tzaddik* (very righteous person), simply to request his blessing, or for a prayer for an ill person. When he heard that a doctor had declared a person hopelessly terminal, he remarked: "The duty of a doctor is to heal. No one gave him the right to let the patient despair."

A religious American-Jewish admirer built him a simple house, with its own *Mikvah*, on a hill in the neighbourhood of the *Zichron Me'ir* quarter of Bnei Brak. This area is known as the most pious quarter of Bnei Brak.

It was planned as a surprise and the *Chazon Ish* had absolutely no idea of it until he received the key and was asked to go and live there. He immediately refused the gift and did not want to live there, until the generous initiator consented to a reasonable rent. The house of the *Chazon Ish* was furnished in a Spartan way and after his death the house was converted into a *Talmud Torah* school for very religious children. This school still exists today and thousands of children take their first steps in the learning of *Torah* there.

He himself was generous with his gifts and assistance. My grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Yuda Daum s.z.l. (1889-1965 C.E.), who was his personal *Gabbai* (assistant) and took care of all matters concerning *Tzedakah*, told us that the *Chazon Ish* occupied himself with some hundred couples wanting to marry and financed their weddings himself.

From my own father, Rabbi Shmuel Yosef Daum s.z.l. (1924-2003 C.E.) I often heard that the *Chazon Ish* anonymously relieved worthy Torah scholars of their financial worries so that they could continue to study. He even had comfortable lodgings built for them.

He supported many *Yeshivoth* and higher *Torah* institutes (*Kollel*) when the means from other sources proved insufficient.

He himself lived very modestly and he lacked many conveniences, which, without his generosity, he could easily have afforded.

When asked out of curiosity on what he lived, Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) answered: "From loving kindness – *Chesed* – for my fellowmen ..."



Left: My great-grandfather, Rabbi Ezechiel Daum s.z.l. (perished in 1942 C.E. in the *Shoah*) was a great Talmudic Scholar following the *Mitnaged* way and a adherent of the learning method of the Lithuanian *Yeshivoth*

Right: My grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Yuda Daum s.z.l. (1889-1965 C.E.) was a great lover of *Torah* and *Tenach*. I owe my love for *Tenach* to him. As a young grandson I spent hours studying *Tenach* with him. In my library a set of his personal *Tenach* is kept in a place of honour. He was very closely associated the *Chazon Ish* and was his right-hand man for *Tzedakah*. On the orders of the *Chazon Ish* he distributed *Tzedakah* to many *Torah* Scholars in need

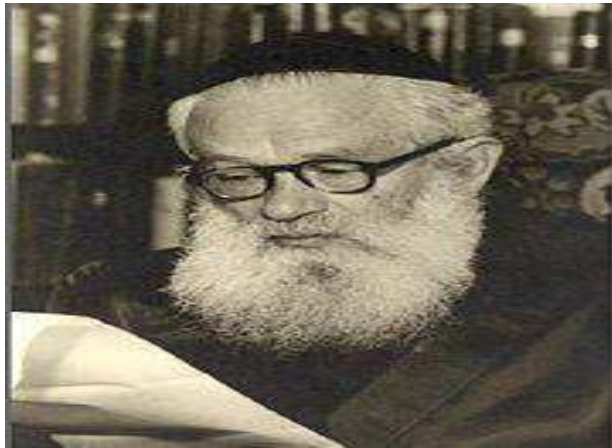


Left: my father, Rabbi Shmuel Yosef Daum s.z.l. (1924-2003 C.E.) who often merited to be with the *Chazon Ish* and who told us, his children, much about this luminary of our generation

Right: Prof. Rabbi Ahron Daum (1951 C.E.), on the left, who according to the story told by his father was privileged to sit on the lap of the *Chazon Ish* and be questioned on the *AlefBeth* According to his father he owes his life to a blessing of the *Chazon Ish* at the time of a life threatening disease during his infancy

Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) earned his living from the sale of his publicised halachic works and sold his well known halachic books for two Israeli pound a piece. Whenever someone tried to pay more than this price, the *Chazon Ish* indignantly gave back the difference.

The Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog (1889-1959 C.E.), bought one of his halachic works and left a five pound note in an envelop as payment. The next morning the *Chazon Ish* sent a messenger to *Yerushalayim*/Jerusalem to return three pounds



Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog (1889-1959 C.E.), also known as Rabbi Isaac Herzog, the first Chief Rabbi of Ireland and the second Ashkenasi Chief Rabbi of Israel

While Rabbi Abraham Yeshaya(hu) gladly and enthusiastically partook of all celebratory occasions for which he was invited (like circumcision ceremonies, marriage festivities for young *Torah* scholars, dedications of a *Torah* scroll, the questioning and encouraging of young *Talmud* students ...), he was very reluctant to go to a public occasion where he would be called on to speak. His well known motto was: "Man is a weird creation except for one aspect: he speaks, even if he has nothing to say. I am an exception, because I am even too lazy to speak."



The *Chazon Ish* as *Sandek* (man holding the infant boy during the circumcision) at a *Brit Milah*/circumcision ceremony

Rabbi Yitzchok Gerstenkorn, the initiator of the establishment of Bnei Brak as a religious, modern, Orthodox city in Israel, had the courage to ask the *Chazon Ish* why he was so sparing with words and insinuated that he seldom took part in Talmudic discussions. Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu)'s classic answer, well known in Torah circles, was: "I received a special talent from *HaShem*. I am not able to speak about a complete and developed idea, before it gives pleasure to my spirit. Until such time, I am incapable of bringing out a word in public. From the moment my spirit has brought an idea to completion, I hurry to write it all down so that I cannot forget it. By the time I wish to talk about the subject, it is not longer necessary, because it is all written down"



החזו"א במעמד יריית אבן-פינה למוסד הצלה רוחנית של ילדי פליטים ועולים, משוחח עם ר' יצחק גרשטנקורן (ביניהם נראה ר' נחום הלפרן)

The *Chazon Ish* talking to the founder of Bnei Brak, Rabbi Yitzchak Gerstenkorn (on the right)



Left: the official weapon of Bnei Brak, with the main symbols of the Light of *Torah*, the Two *Luchot HaBrit*/Stone Tablets of the Covenant and the book as symbol for the People of the Book
 Right: the welcoming sign at the entrance of Bnei Brak

Unfortunately, The *Chazon Ish* was not granted any children. He saw all young *Torah* scholars as his spiritual children. To these youngsters the *Chazon Ish* was more than willing to talk and he spent many hours with them to discuss their problems, to advise them, to study *Torah* with them and to give fatherly advise to those who needed it. Often he spent a long time in his study with a *Yeshiva Bachur* (a young man studying at a Talmudic High School) or a young farmer from an Orthodox settlement to listen and to help with the cares and problems. The young from the *Yeshiva* world venerated him and saw in him the prime example of a *Torah* leader. One of them once said: "If the *Chazon Ish* were to tell me that my right hand was really my left hand, then I would have put my *Tefilin* on that hand."

With such large wealth of wisdom it was not surprising that his hometown Bnei Brak was flooded with pilgrims from the four corners of the globe to see this great *Tzaddik* and Man of Wisdom. It is also not surprising that, when he passed away in 1954 C.E., his burial ceremony was described as not before seen in Israel. Tens of thousands followed the cortege and thousands more mourned in their homes because of the loss of one of Israel's great spiritual *Torah* princes.



עליית נשמה : החזו"א מתייחד עם האלקים

The *Chazon Ish* at a moment of great concentration during *davvenen* (praying). It is notable that the *Chazon Ish* stands like a soldier before his commander, without *shockeln* (swaying). This cannot be compare to *Chassidim* who *shockeln* to all four sides, to aid concentration.

A personal appraisal of the *Chazon Ish* by Prof. Rabbi Ahron Daum, Shlita



I was three years old when the *Chazon Ish* passed on to a better, eternal world. Our family lived very close to the house of the *Chazon Ish*. In fact, we lived in the same street, about 200 meters on. My grandfather, parents and the rest of the family were closely connected to the *Chazon Ish*.

My grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Yuda Daum s.z.l. (1889-1965 C.E.), was born in Kalisch, Poland and spent his younger years in famous *Yeshivoth*. He was a *Shochet* and *Chazan*, but above all he was infused with a limitless love of and diligence for studying *Torah* and for *Torah* scholars.

As a refugee for the Nazi barbarity, he left everything in burning Europe and chose to live in the religious town of Bnei Brak, so as to educate his children in the Jewish religious way. I am sure I inherited my love of *Torah* from my grandfather.

“*Sabba*” (grandfather) Rabbi Chaim Yuda Daum s.z.l. was one of those trusted men who always had free access to the *Chazon Ish*. He was the confidant of the *Chazon Ish* for all matters concerning *Tzedakah*.

Many are the stories told me by my “*Abba*” of the special and mostly anonymous *Tzedakah* assignments that my grandfather completed at the instruction of the *Chazon Ish*. The motto of *Chazon Ish* was ‘anonymous and discrete’, so that the recipient did not know from whom he was receiving the *Tzedakah*.

The *Chazon Ish* especially set high standards in the fulfilment of *Mitzvoth*. In general one can state that he chose to perform the *Mitzvoth* at the halachically highest standard, for himself as well as for his followers.

Examples, which will be elaborated on subsequently, are:

1. The electrical *Shabbat* light
2. Halachic measuring standards
3. The institution of *Kollel*
4. Military service for women

5. Military service for *Yeshiva* students
6. Political activism for religious Jewish people and parties
7. Great care during prayer, according to its set times
8. An independent *Charedi* network of schools
9. Special dedication to the fulfilment of the *Mitzvot* concerning the Land

1. The electrical *Shabbat* light

Obviously, the electrical light for *Shabbat* was put on before *Shabbat*. According to *Chazon Ish* it is not legitimate to derive enjoyment from such electrical light within the State of Israel, because non-religious Jews who work in the electricity plants, desecrate the *Shabbat*, willingly or unwillingly. As a consequence, the *Chazon Ish* never used electrical light, but he had his own generator or he used a petroleum lamp. This practice is still adopted by his followers.

2. Halachic measuring standards

To be able to practice *Mitzvot* in the best possible halachic manner, the *Chazon Ish* introduced higher halachic standards for measurements like among others *Kezajit*. He based himself on his incredible knowledge of the complete Rabbinic halachic literature, which was phenomenal. It is of practical importance to know the minimum measures for the *Zitzit* garment, for a cup of wine, for the eating of *Matzah* on Seder night to fulfil the obligation of *Matzah*, etc.

3. The institution of *Kollel*

The general ideal of Judaism and its most important *Mitzvah*, is studying *Torah*. Obviously, one cannot choose to be a Jewish person and practice *Mitzvot* according to *Halachah*, if one does not know *Halachah* and *Torah*.

Thus one cannot transmit the rich tradition of the Jewish People to the next generation if one does not know it. The *Chazon Ish* bases himself on Maimonides in his description of his ideal of studying *Torah*.

Maimonides describes the Levites and mentions that the Levites and Priests are the servants of G'd because they have no share in the Land of Israel, but that G'd is their portion. Maimonides expands this understanding of the position of the Levites to all people who dedicate their lives to studying *Torah*.

Before the catastrophe of the *Shoah*, *Torah* institutes for married men, who spent their lives only in studying *Torah*, were established. After the loss of the citadels of *Talmud* and *Torah* learning in Eastern Europe as a consequence of the *Shoah*, the *Chazon Ish* saw the necessity of recuperating the loss by introducing the *Kollel*. This means fulltime *Torah* study, during the entire life of a married man. The inspiration of the *Chazon Ish* took such deep root, that these days in Israel, and worldwide as well, hundreds of *Kollelim* have been established, where married men study *Torah* fulltime, for life, for the ideal goal of, in the words of the Prophet *Yeshyayahu/Isaiah* "... and all your children are scholars of G'd...". These idealists in the field of *Torah* study have done much to spread the study of *Torah* in Israel and worldwide. This up to a point in Jewish history, where never before so much *Torah* study, both

quantitatively as qualitatively, has been achieved as these days. These idealists in *Torah* study live off a small pension to which the wider religious community contributes. Their partners, the wives, are the workers who earn a living for the family.



The *Kollel Chazon Ish* named after him in his memory after his passing, is the most famous *Kollel* in the world. Many great *Torah* scholars study and studied at this *Kollel*, among them the leader of this *Kollel*, a nephew of *Chazon Ish*, Rabbi Yakov Kanievsky Shlita

4. Military service for women

The modern State of Israel has confronted religious Judaism with the issue of military service for women and whether this is halachically permissible. During the long history of Israel, including the period of *Tenach* and the times of the Maccabees, we can find no noteworthy examples of women serving in the army. The Prophetess Devorah did however encourage Barak, the general of Israel, in the battles with the Canaanites, but she did not participate actively in the war herself. Yael, a non-Jewish woman who killed Sisera, the general of the Canaanites, however did. Judith, from the circle of the Chasmonians-Maccabees, beheaded the Greek general Holofernes in his sleep (164 B.C.E.) in extraordinary circumstances. Halachically army service for women could be considered as women wearing

clothes and weapons meant for men. This is halachically prohibited, as women are not permitted to wear trousers or to carry weapons, because they are typically pieces of clothing or defence items for men.

Another argument against military service for women is based on *Tehillim*/Psalm 45:14 ... (as well as) every honourable princess dwelling within, whose raiment is of golden settings - From this the Rabbis understood that the place of the woman is in the home as a wife and mother and not in the army or on the battlefield.

The modern profane State of Israel has suggested that women can also contribute to the army and thus strengthen the defence of the State of Israel. During this controversy, all halachic Authorities, including national religious Rabbis like the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, have come out against military service for women.

Besides the halachic prohibition, another major objection concerns moral and ethical integrity, namely that young women can become demoralised and be influenced by immoral behaviour through military service and can abandon religious Judaism.

Chazon Ish succeeded in persuading the then time Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to free religious young women from active military service on their request. This leniency still exists.

National religious circles like *Mizrachi* and others have a national service for young women during which they volunteer as nurse or teacher or work to integrate new immigrants.



Proclamation by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel that according to *Torah* army service for women is strictly forbidden



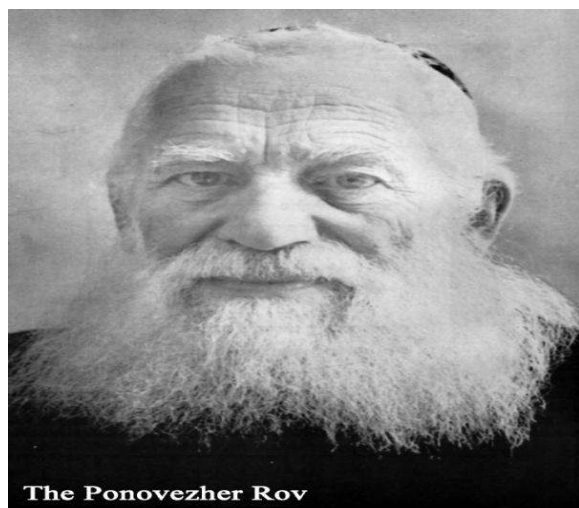
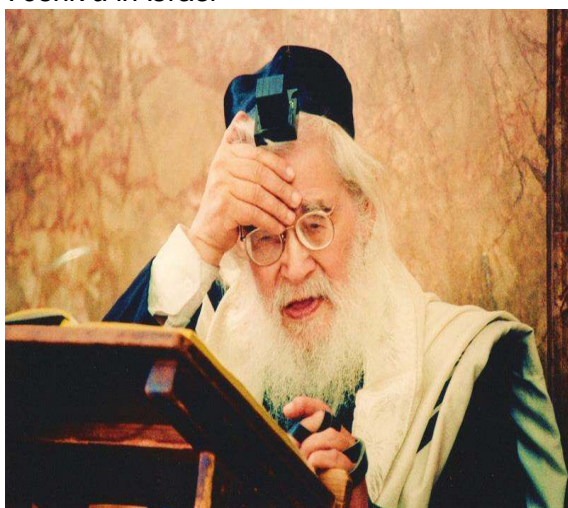
The public pronouncement by *Chazon Ish* against military service for women. This proclamation appeared with his full consent a few days before his passing



Left: Scene from inside the Ponovitch Yeshiva in Bnei Brak
 Right: The special *Aron Kodesh* of the Ponovitch Yeshiva from Padua, Italy



View of the front of the Ponovitch Yeshiva. *Chazon Ish* was the mentor of this largest Yeshiva in Israel



The Ponovezher Rov

Left: The legendary *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ponovitch, *HaRav HaGaon* Elazar Shach (1899-2001 C.E.)
 Right: *HaRav* Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman (1886-1969 C.E.), founder of Yeshiva Ponovitch

5. Military service for *Yeshiva* students

As stated, *Torah* learning is the ideal in Judaism. For realising this ideal, no other institute can equal the millennia old *Yeshivoth* and *Torah* academies. Without these high schools for studying *Torah*, religious Judaism would have ceased to exist a long time ago. It is in these schools where the famous two *Talmudim*, the Babylonian and Jerusalem, came into being. During the course of the past two thousand years, a limitless amount of *Torah*-Novellae, new ideas, arose within the walls of the *Yeshivoth*.

Since biblical times the Levites and Priests, were, as servants of G'd, exempt from military service. The Talmud also teaches that *Torah* scholars were exempt from military service and taxes. Even in Christian Europe priests and theology students were exempt from military service so as to perform a divine service.

Along these lines, the idea and thesis developed in the *Talmud* and Jewish Code of Law *Shulchan Aruch*, that *Torah* scholars and their followers are exempt from military service because their service to G'd is equal to military service. Morally and ethically, Judaism underscores, that without active *Torah* study and *Yeshivoth*, creation and the People of Israel would not exist. This is based on *Yermiyahu/Jeremiah* 33:25.

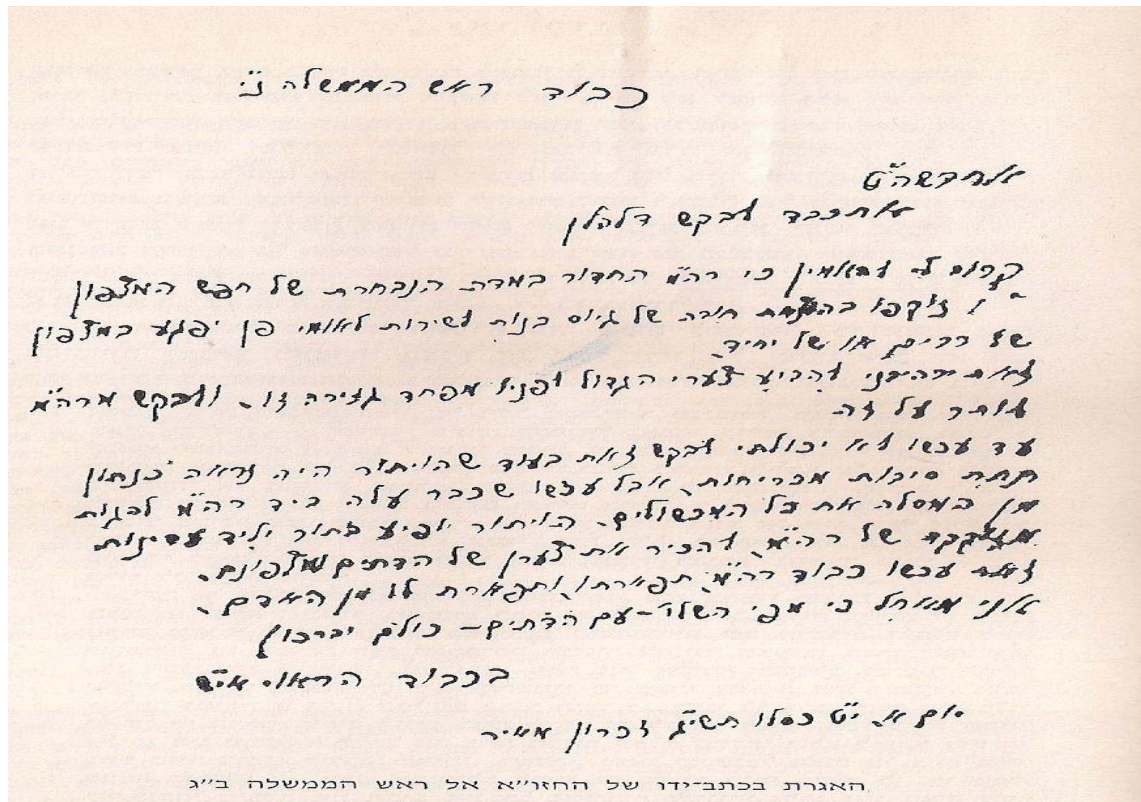
The profane State of Israel wanted all young men from the age of 18 and upward (till at least 50) to perform military service, to contribute to the national defence of the Jewish State. This wish was fervently countered by religious and halachic Authorities. The idea that young *Yeshivoth* students would not be exempt, was rejected by them on the following grounds.

- a. During the long Jewish history there has never been a compulsory military service for *Torah* students.
- b. To force religious Jewish men to perform military service, would be an existential threat to *Yeshivoth* and would probably mean the end of the great *Yeshivoth* tradition.
- c. The moral integration of the religious young men with the a-religious men during military service is questionable and will probably cause these religious young men to abandon religious Judaism.
- d. *Yeshiva* student also contribute to the defence of the Jewish State of Israel by studying *Torah*, because in and of itself learning *Torah* protects the State of Israel according to the Tradition.

Chazon Ish reached a agreement with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, that all those whose fulltime occupation is studying *Torah* and all *Yeshivoth* students will be exempt from military service, as long as they are occupied fulltime in the study of *Torah*. This decision is still current.

Every *Kneset* (Israeli Parliament) has tried to modify this rule, without success, because nearly every Israeli government needs the support of the *Charedi* (Ultra-Orthodox) religious parties to be able to form a coalition. In the current *Kneset* (2013 C.E.) the issue is again much disputed.

It is striking that *Mizrachi* circles (national religious parties in Israel) have instituted a sort of military service in combination with *Yeshiva* studies, named *Nahal*. Young men serve in a military, religious unit and at the same time spend a large part of their service in *Yeshivoth*. This service lasts five years instead of the customary three years. However, this model has been categorically rejected by Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox circles for the reasons cited above.



Letter by *Chazon Ish* to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion with the request to exempt Yeshiva students from military service

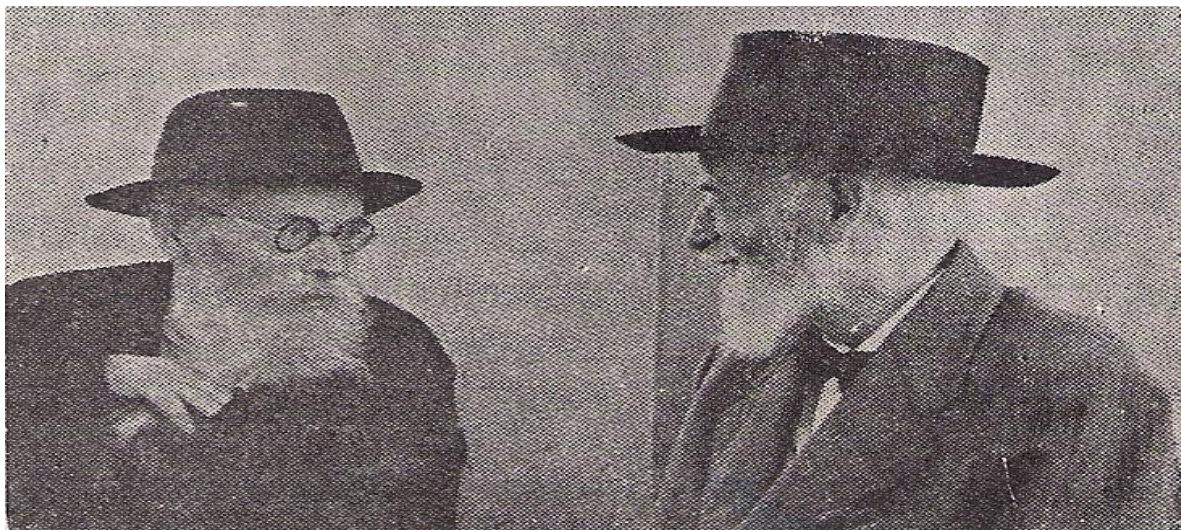
6. Political activism for religious Jewish people and parties



Left: view of the *Knesset*, the Israeli Parliament in *Yerushalayim*/Jerusalem
 Right: a view from inside the *Knesset*

The modern State of Israel is, as a non-halachic state, historically seen, certainly not the millennia old dream of *Torah*-faithful Judaism. The reason for this is that for most religious Jews, the realisation of a Jewish State only becomes an issue when this State is governed according to halachic guidelines and norms, both politically and socially. Examples are: no traffic (both private and public) on *Shabbat* and Feast days, only *kosher* food in foods and restaurants, religious education for the young, military service according to the halachic norms, etc. Seen from this perspective, the strong resistance to a-religious and even antireligious Zionism, can easily be understood. This sort of Zionism was dominant in the 19th and 20th centuries. Nearly all religious Orthodox factions in Eastern- and Western Europe were categorically opposed to a Jewish State in *Eretz Yisrael* which does not fulfil the ideals and concepts of the Prophets and Sages. As a consequence of the *Shoah* in Europe and the loss of religious centres in Eastern-Europe, a marked ideological split emerged vis-à-vis the State of Israel within religious Judaism, with the establishment of the State of Israel under David Ben-Gurion, out of modern Zionism.

At one extreme of the spectrum was the small splinter group under the leadership of the Satmar Chassidic dynasty, called *Netouré Karta* (the true, loyal guardians of the city of *Yerushalayim*/Jerusalem), which demanded the total negation of the State of Israel, with all its institutions and their following. Examples of the consequences of this attitude are the prohibition of taking part in Israeli elections for the *Knesset*, the prohibition on forming religious parties or engaging in Israeli politics, the refusal to accept financial support by the modern State of Israel for *Yeshivoth* and social services, the prohibition of speaking *Ivrit* (Yiddish is permitted). With these measures, these small groups wanted to remain independent of the State of Israel. On the other side of the spectrum, the majority of the religious Orthodox Jews, with the recommendation by the *Chazon Ish*, chose, post priori, to recognise the modern a-religious Zionist State of Israel and not to ignore it. From this point of departure, the *Chazon Ish* and most religious Jews in modern Israel, chose an active engagement with the political system in Israel, so as to influence everyday a-religious life in Israel as much as possible. *Chazon Ish* argued the formation of religious parties like *Agudath Yisrael* and *Poalè Agudath Yisrael*, two parties which adhere strictly to halachic guidelines and follow the normative *Torah* Authorities.



Chazon Ish with Rabbi Morenu Rav Yakov Rosenheim (1870-1965 C.E.), founder of the Orthodox *Torah*-faithful party *Agudath Yisrael*



Left: The official poster of *Yehiduth HaTorah*/Torah-Judaism with the letter *Gimmel*

Right: Religious men at a voting booth, voting for a *Knesset* election

Chazon Ish declared it to be the duty of all religious Jews to take part in the parliamentary elections for the *Knesset*. In this way the religious parties will represent and defend the interests of the religious people in politics. Examples are: the prohibition of public transport on *Shabbat*, the prohibition of rearing pigs in *Eretz Yisrael*, the official prohibition of selling *Chametz* in all public shops and restaurants during *Pesach*, an independent religious educational network know as *Chinuch Atzamai* and *Beth Ya'acov* at the social level, large amounts of child benefits for large families, the exemption from military service of *Yeshivah* students and religious girls and women, marriage and divorce according to *Halachah*, halachic criteria incorporated in law for determining “who is a Jew?” (either born to a Jewish mother or undergoing halachic *Giyur*-proceedings (conversion)).

7. Great care during prayer, according to its set times

Chazon Ish grew up, developed and learned *Torah* in Lithuania, the citadel of Talmudic and halachic Judaism, inspired by Rabbi Eliya ben Shlomo, known as the “*Gaon* of Vilna” (1720-1797 C.E.). In contrast to Chassidic Judaism under the leadership of Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760 C.E.), who did greatly emphasise prayer as one of the three big pillars of Chassidism, but who did not accentuate the prayer times according to the *Shulchan Aruch* (Jewish Code of Law), the “*Gaon* of Vilna” was a proponent of a strict and punctual observance of the times for prayer according to the *Shulchan Aruch*.

Thus great attention was paid and care was given to praying within the halachically foreseen times in the *Torah* citadels and *Talmud* academies in Lithuania.



The Biblical and Talmudic human lived with nature and did not use watches or clocks, but directed his time according to the position of the moon and stars, sunrise and sunset.

Left: sunset, which halachically is nearly night (essential for the beginning of Shabbat)

Middle: moon and stars, important for determining night and the birth of a new halachic day

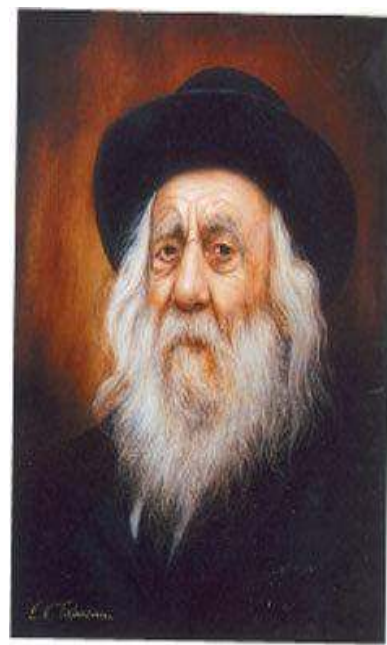
Right: sunrise, the beginning of an ordinary, non-halachic, day

Examples are: According to *Halachah*, there is an exact time after which *Shema* cannot be said during *Shacharit* (morning prayers), and also for the completion of *Shacharit*. This is connected to the start of sunrise. *Chazon Ish* especially emphasised the reading of *Shema* at the halachic time of the starting of the shining of the sun (*Netz*).

My father told me repeatedly that the *Chazon Ish* started his morning prayers very early every day, so as to be able to say *Shema* at the time when the sun begins to shine (*Netz*).

I can remember as a small child starting the *Yom Kippur* morning prayer together with my grandfather Rabbi Chaim Juda Daum s.z.l. (1889-1965 C.E.), at 04.30 hours at the brother-in-law of the *Chazon Ish*, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (1899-1985 C.E.), known as The Steipler, after his place of birth in the Ukraine.

The *Torah* dynasty of the Karelitz family



Left: Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya(hu) Karelitz s.z.l. (1879-1954 C.E.), know as *Chazon Ish*

Middle: The older brother of *Chazon Ish* Rabbi Meir Karelitz s.z.l. (1877-1955 C.E.)

Right: The brother-in-law of *Chazon Ish*, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky s.z.l. (1899-1985 C.E.)



Left: Rabbi Nissim Karelitz Shlita (1926 C.E.), nephew of *Chazon Ish* and son of Rabbi Meir Karelitz z.t.l.

Right: Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky Shlita (1928 C.E.), nephew of *Chazon Ish* and son of Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky s.z.l.

8. An independent *Charedi* network of schools

The future of every people depends on its children and youth. Religious education does not grow in a vacuum. To be able to form children in the religious Jewish way of life, they must get a Jewish religious education. The most important place of learning is the parental home. This however is not enough, as most parents are not pedagogues or trained teachers. A child is influenced by the parents, the environment and especially by the school and the friends at school.

Obviously religious *Torah*-faithful children need a religiously orientated education. The Israeli State has, like every modern European and Western state, instituted compulsory education for all children up till the age of 18 years. The Jewish state schools in Israel however are not religiously orientated, are completely dissociated from the Jewish religious tradition and are not able to provide even a minimal authentic Jewish religious instruction. In the state schools the children are taught the general subjects, superficially a bit of *Tenach*, Jewish history at a minimal level and the Hebrew language. The state schools lack a deeply authentic education based on Jewish values and are not suited to deliver future religious young men and women. Also the national religious schools, which have a higher level of religiosity to dispose of, lack the excellence in Jewish subjects like *Tenach*, *Mishnah*, *Talmud*, ... and are satisfied with mediocrity. These schools also have the problem that they are mixed. Boys and girls together in one school, is halachically unacceptable from a certain age upward. One can only state with regret that most graduates of these schools are non-religious.

Both these networks of schools are influenced by the State of Israel and the non-religious Ministry of Education, which subsidises these schools and thus also dictates the educational programme.

Chazon Ish argued for an independent, self-supporting, religious, Orthodox educative network of instruction, in the long tradition of *Agudath Yisrael*, founded by the *Chafetz Chaim* (1838-1933 C.E.) and Rav Yakov Rosenheim (1870-1965 C.E.). For the education of boys a religious *Charedi* network of schools has been established with the name *Talmud Torah Chinuch Atsmai*. In these *Charedi* schools the accent is on an authentic religious instruction, which means that the largest part of the school curriculum is dedicated to religious subjects like *Torah* with the classical commentaries and *Mishnah* and *Talmud* at the highest level, which prepares the youngsters for the *Yeshiva*. Other relevant Jewish subjects are also taught, like Jewish History from a religious perspective, Hebrew grammar and obviously *Halachah*.

General subjects are taught rudimentarily, according to the minimal demands of the government authorities (basic mathematics, basic language skills, basic English).

Most of these pupils study for eight years without any secondary education, but continue their studies immediately with the *Yeshiva*. Naturally a high level in Jewish religious studies is acquired through this method of learning, but the other side of the coin is that these graduates are without any prospect of finishing a university degree or other form of higher education, because they have not had any secondary education. This severely limits the prospects for a job.

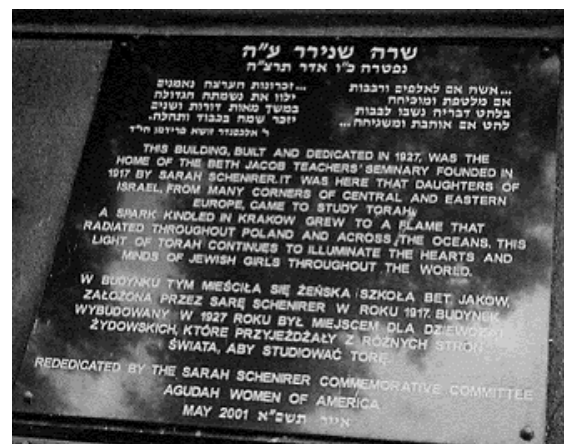


Left: the official emblem of the network of schools in Israel, which educates according to the guidelines of *Agudath Yisrael*

Right: the grave of Mrs. Sarah Schenirer (1883-1935 C.E.) in Krakow, Poland. Mrs. Sarah Schenirer established the *Beth Ja'acov* network of schools for girls with the help and support of *Agudath Yisrael*. These days *Beth Ja'acov* is the largest network of girl schools orientated to the guidelines of *Agudath Yisrael*

For Orthodox girls an educative network was founded named *Beth Ja'acov*, which goes back to a pre-*Shoah* tradition.

Mrs. Sarah Schenirer (20th century) established the first *Beth Ja'acov* school in Krakow, Poland, with the blessing of the *Chafetz Chaim* and Rav Yacov Rosenheim. Sarah Schenirer was a very pious and learned lady, very much aware of Jewish ideas and inspired with the ideal that Jewish girls also needed a religious and general education to guard against assimilation and to immunise them against profane Jewish society.



Left: a portrait of Mrs. Sarah Schenirer (1883-1935 C.E.), founder of the *Beth Ya'acov* religious Orthodox network of schools for young girls and young unmarried women

Right: Commemorative stone on the building of the *Beth Ya'acov* building in Krakow, Poland, not destroyed by the *Shoah*.

Another aspect that was important, is that future fitting partners for the *Yeshiva* students also had to be provided for. In these pre-*Shoah* schools a very high level of religious instruction was accomplished. These schools were the model for *Chazon Ish* and the *Agudath Yisrael* leaders to expand this tradition and apply it to schools for boys.

The Orthodox Beth Ja'acov network of schools is widely dispersed among Jewish religious centres in Israel, but also in the Diaspora. Unlike the religious education of the boys, the girls finish their schooling after twelve years with a certificate in secondary education. Very few of these girls however start to study for a university degree, as they mostly continue with a Beth Ja'acov seminary where they gain more in-depth religious Jewish knowledge, with the aim of working in a Jewish school, at whichever level.

One can determine at a critical glance that the religious network that *Chazon Ish* established with other Orthodox leaders, is a completely independent network. This means that for the major part the network is unsubsidised. This however causes this sort of education to be expensive and selective. Another point of criticism is that the level of general instruction leaves much to be desired and that the chances of finding a job remain very limited.

9. Especial dedication to the fulfilment of the *Mitzvot* concerning the Land of Israel

The *Chazon Ish* can be considered a pioneer in the area of halachic education concerning the agricultural *Mitzvot* of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Due to the exile of about 2000 years, the Jewish People had lost its connection to agriculture and the earth. From a People originally of farmers, firmly rooted in the Land of *Yisrael* and the *Mitzvot* of the *Torah*, our People have become mainly traders, scientists etc. Little feeling for agriculture remained. A big change occurred during the past 150 years, with the gradual return, under the influence of Zionism, of many Jews to Israel.

The Zionist movement considered it an ideal to engage those Jews returning to their original home more strongly with agriculture and so create a new type of Jewish human, a Jewish human who could renew his/her experience of being connected to the earth. The Zionist movement acquired great merit in this area by establishing tens of *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim* (communities of farmers). The Land of *Yisrael* thus turned from being a wasteland into a green oasis.

Under this influence a metamorphosis also occurred on the religious level. Slowly national religious Jews as well as Orthodox Jews started their own colonies, which distinguished themselves by practising the agricultural *Mitzvot*. A large problem arose, because these practises had not been applied for the past 2000 years and only theoretical knowledge on these subjects existed. All kinds of questions on the *Shemithah* year, the *Shabbat* year, *Terumah* (part set aside for the Priests), *Ma'aseer* (part set aside for the Levites), *Orlah* (no enjoyment of fruits for the first three years) etc. arose and they were terra incognita for most farmers. All these *Mitzvot* apply only to *Eretz Yisrael*.



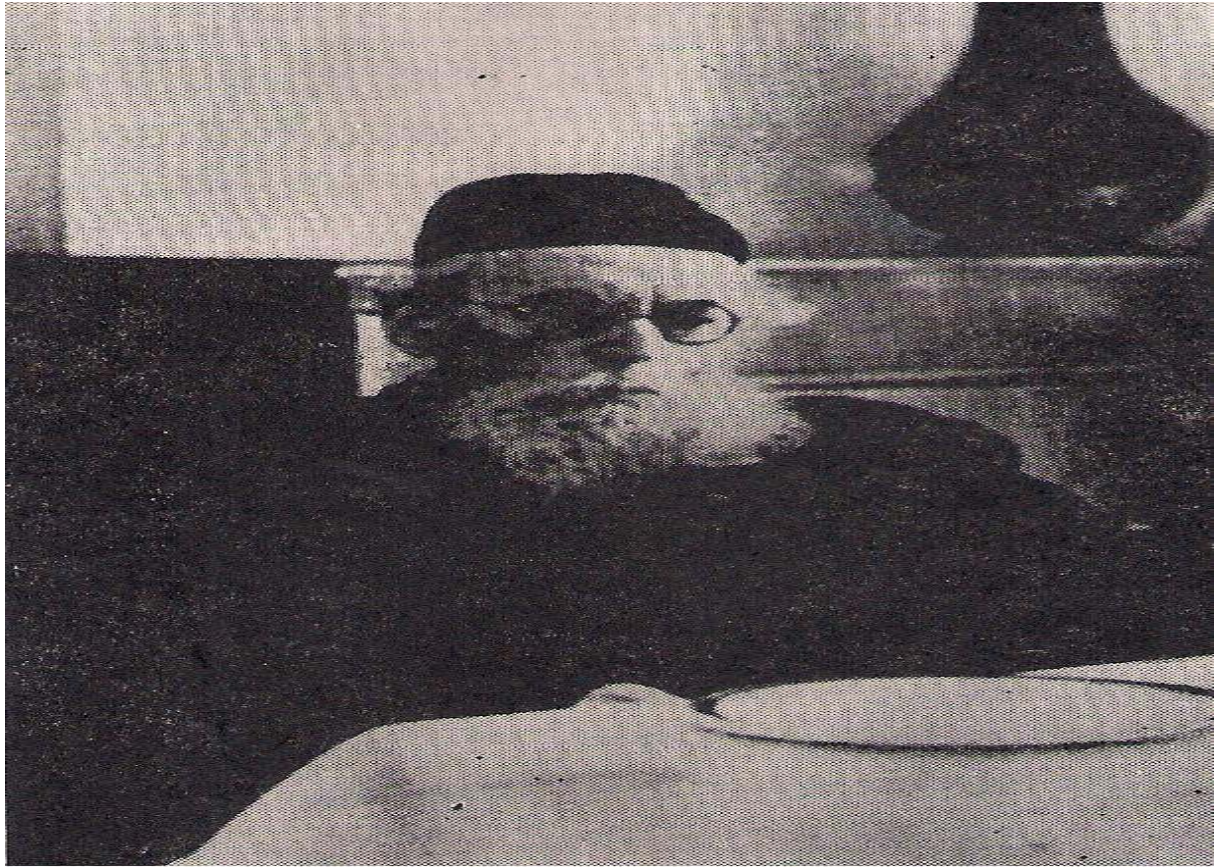
Left: The landscape of *Emek Yisrael* (valley of Israel), which was a marsh 120 years ago and is today a flourishing green landscape, in conformity with the vision of the Prophet *Yechezkel*/Ezekiel

Right: the synagogue of the *Kibbutz Chafetz Chaim*. This religious *Kibbutz* is one of many religious *Kibbutzim* and agricultural villages which cultivate their land according to *Halachah* along the guidelines of *Chazon Ish*

The first big controversy concerned the *Shemittah* year. The first religious farmers started their colonies around 100 years ago, and when the *Shemittah* year came around, they were confronted with their unfamiliarity with its laws. They did not know whether to leave the land to lie fallow for a year, as the *Torah* commands, with the possibility of an enormous loss ensuing, or whether to postpone this till later, so as to further the construction of the Land. For a solution to this problem they first turned to the then very well known Rabbi from Jaffo, Rav Avraham Yitschak HaCohen Kook (1865-1935 C.E.), who would later become the first Ashkenasi Chief Rabbi of Israel. Rav Kook based his opinion on the existential threat to the religious farming pioneers, that if they were to leave the Land fallow, this could turn out disastrous for them. In his solution he suggested temporarily selling the Land to non-Jewish people during the *Shemittah* year (an idea parallel to the selling of *Chametz* during *Pesach*), thus halachically enabling the farmers to continue working the land, as the earth legally belonged to non-Jews. Many *Kibbutzim* adopted this solution, but not *Chazon Ish* or the Orthodox farming colonies.

Chazon Ish demanded the uncompromising fulfilment of the commandment of *Shemittah* according to the original meaning in Torah. His reasoning was that we must accept a high standard, also in agriculture, and trust in G'd that HE would not abandon the pious *Mitzvot* practising farmers.

To further this, *Chazon Ish* set up a fund to financially support these farmers. Religious farmers can still these days obtain financial support during the *Shemittah* year.



A photo of *Chazon Ish* taken shortly before his passing

Chazon Ish is considered the most decisive halachic authority in the field of *Mitzvoth* connected to the Holy Land. It was *Chazon Ish* who reinstituted and gave concrete instructions for the fulfilment of the *Mitzvah* of *Terumah* (the levy for the *Cohanim*/Priests) and the *Mitzvah* of *Ma'aser* (the levy for the *Leviim*/Levites). In most *Siddurim* (prayer books) one can find how these days, when there is no Temple, the Rabbinic duty of separating *Terumah* and *Maaseer* must be done according to *Chazon Ish*. Many new editions of the *Kitsur Shulchan Aruch* (the concise Jewish Code of Law) devote a section to these *Mitzvoth* connected to agriculture in *Eretz Yisrael*. This section of the *Kitsur* was compiled by Rabbi Kalman Kahana s.z.l. (1910-1991 C.E.), a close confidante and follower of *Chazon Ish*, and also the founder of the *Kibbutz Chafetz Chaim* and chairman of the religious Orthodox party *Poale Agudath Yisrael*. This party was a pioneer in the establishment of Orthodox *Moshavim* and *Kibbutzim*. These *Moshavim* and *Kibbutzim* applied the guidelines of *Chazon Ish* on the agricultural *Mitzvoth*. The national religious *Moshavim* and *Kibbutzim*, as well as the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, department of agricultural interests, accepted many guidelines of *Chazon Ish* on agricultural *Mitzvoth*. The teaching of *Chazon Ish* in this specific domain has also been generally accepted.



The grave of the *Chazon Ish* in Bnei Brak, Zichron Me'ir

Noteworthy is the simplicity of the grave stone and especially that no *Ohel* (mausoleum) has been made over the grave. This is in marked contrast to the Chassidic movement where every unknown Rebbe has a beautiful mausoleum on his grave. Surely the words of Micah are relevant here.

Micah 6:8 "He has told you, man, what is good. What does *HaShem* require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your G'd? "

A true lesson for all of us to live humbly, but also to die humbly.

Epilogue

Chazon Ish lived in the 20th century. During this century, characterised by two world wars, he lived through the First World War as a young man in Europe. At the age of around 35, he saw the doom of the Jews in Eastern-Europe. Hunger, mass expulsion, upheaval and extermination and much more misery crossed his path. This uprooting of Jewish values was probably also one of his motives to say good-bye to Europe for good and express his love for *Eretz Israel* concretely. As a man in his sixties he witnessed from the far *Eretz Israel*, the destruction of European Jewry, which had grown and flourished in Europe for 2000 years, in an unprecedented depth of brutality and bestiality. It is not possible for us to describe the impact on *Chazon Ish* of this great catastrophe for the Jewish people. *Chazon Ish* was a faithful, pious and strong man, who saw in these intensely sad and desperate events a message to establish a new haven for religious Judaism in *Eretz Yisrael*

Also thanks to his engagement in all areas of religious life, *Eretz Yisrael* has today become an important religious centre of the Jewish People.

What is the current message of *Chazon Ish* for us?

We live at the beginning of the 21st century. We are spoiled with all sorts of technical and ingenious gadgets and innovations, but in reality we are very poor spiritually. Most of us are lonely and alone. The world that surrounds us is perceived as sterile, is full of violence and even the material world, which for many is the idol of money and mammon, has been eroded by the economic crisis.

Chazon Ish lived surrounded by the most basic of circumstances. He put no value on luxury. His loved *Torah* and its practise. *Torah* gave purpose to his life, gave

inspiration, warmth, humanity and the moral strength to bring the ship of religious Judaism to a safe haven. No one can today reach the level of great learning combined with the enormous spirituality of *Chazon Ish*, but in his love for *Torah*, moral values and pioneering in the field of *Torah* and *Mitzvoth*, *Chazon Ish* is a model for all of us.



May the memory of the righteous be a blessing

זכר צדיק לברכה

Colofon

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