

Moreinu Horav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l
5651/1891 – 5746/1986
With Torah Vodaath from 1945

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l was born on 21 Adar, 5651 in Kalushkove. Before the age of Bar Mitzvah, he left his home to learn in Minsk. During this time, he became friends with the young Arele Sislovitzer and Reuvain Minsker, who would later become known as Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l, and Rav Reuvain Grozovsky zt"l. Rav Reuvain left Minsk for Slobodka, and later convinced his younger friends to join him there.

Rav Yaakov enjoyed an exceptionally close relationship with the Alter of Slobodka, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt"l, growing in Torah and Mussar under his watchful eye. During World War I, he fled to Minsk, where he met Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt"l. The threat of being drafted into the Russian army sent Rav Yaakov fleeing from there as well. He eventually settled in Tiktin where he served as a melamed. This experience gave him a unique insight into the world of chinuch that would serve him well years later when his counsel was sought by many in the field.

After the end of the war, Rav Yaakov married Itta Etil Heller, the daughter of Rav Ber Hirsh, the Mashgiach of Slobodka. In 1921, he was among the ten founding members of the Slobodka Kollel, which later merged with the Kovna Kollel. This gave Rav Yaakov the opportunity to get close to the Kovna Rav, Rav Avraham Duber Kahane-Shapiro zt"l.

After learning for five years in the Kollel, Rav Yaakov accepted the position as Rav in Tzitevian. During this era, he was able to spend much time immersed in learning. In 1937, Rav Yaakov set out for America to raise funds for the Kovna Kollel. He was employed temporarily as a Rav in Seattle, and eventually secured a position in Toronto.

In 1945, Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz invited Rav Yaakov to join the staff of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. It was in Torah Vodaath that Rav Yaakov was able to fulfill his lifelong dream – to teach young blossoming Yeshiva students. For over two decades, he imparted to the American bochurim his wealth of Torah knowledge from Lithuania and Slobodka. In his Gemara shiurim, he would meticulously delve into the words of the Rishonim, often showing how a nuance of Rashi's language answered many questions posed by the Achronim.

After the passing of Rav Shraga Feivel in 1948, Rav Yaakov, together with Rav Gedalia Schorr, guided the Yeshiva as Menahelim, with Rav Reuvain Grozovsky continuing as the Rosh Yeshiva. During Rav Yaakov's tenure, he gave shiurim in Mussar and Hashkafa as well, opening the minds and hearts of the American talmidim to the Slabodka of yesteryear. He imparted his unique approach, formed by his close contact with so many gedolim, to his talmidim. The bond that developed between Rav Yaakov and his talmidim spanned a great deal of time and distance, as he continued to guide his talmidim long after they left Yeshiva.

In 1967, Rav Yaakov retired from Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, and settled in Monsey, New York. From that time until his passing nineteen years later, the address for any major question facing Torah Jewry and yeshivos was directed to Saddle River Road. As a prominent member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of Agudas Yisroel, and a leading member of the Vaad Roshei Yeshiva of Torah Umesorah, his sagacious council was sought after by gedolim and laymen alike. Rav Yaakov was renowned for the combination of his middas haEmes as well as the profound depth of his wisdom. These two factors combined together in such a manner that his advice on all matters was legendary. Rav Hutner said, "I am *kafuf* to Rav Aharon Kotler, and I *rechen zich* with Rav Yaakov."

In 1984, the first edition of *Emes L'Yaakov*, Rav Yaakov's thoughts on Chumash, was published. This sefer, emblematic of Rav Yaakov's innovative approach to understanding T'nach, quickly became a standard text in the Torah world. A revised edition, printed in 1996, incorporated many of Rav Yaakov's drashos that were recorded by others.

Rav Yaakov was niftar on 29 Adar, 5748 (1986), at the age of 95. It was a mere two weeks before the passing of Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, with whom Rav Ya'akov enjoyed a particularly close relationship. Suddenly, Klal Yisroel was bereft of the *Posek HaDor* and the *Chakima D'Yehudaii* – the wise one of the Jews. His legacy lives on through his teachings, his *talmidim* and his *seforim*.