

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky זצ"ל



Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky was born in Kalushkove, Lithuania, on the 21 Adar, 5651 (February 29, 1891). Even as a young child, he quickly understood new information and had a remarkable memory. He would stay late at *cheder* after dark, so his mother would give him a lamp when he left in the morning to use then. He spent many years in the Slabodka yeshivah, falling into bed from exhaustion each night, and at age 15, he was seen as one of the greatest geniuses there. Later,

Rav Yaakov became the rav of Tzitevian for 11 years, forming a special relationship with the people he guided. The leading *posek* in Lithuania, Rav Avraham Duber Kahana-Shapiro (author of the *Dvar Avraham*), said that Rav Yaakov was the wisest young rav in the country. Afterward, he was hired to be a rav in Toronto, greatly benefiting the community, while also teaching in the yeshivah there. Next he moved to Brooklyn and taught at Torah Vodaas, eventually becoming its rosh

yeshivah. At Torah Vodaas, he imparted a deep love of learning. He would stand up for every bachur who came to see him to demonstrate how much he cherished one who studied Torah.

In time, Rav Yaakov became one of the *gedolei hador*. With thousands of *talmidim* and having helped hundreds of Torah institutions develop, he was *niftar* on the 29 Adar I, 5744 (1984).

Did You Know?

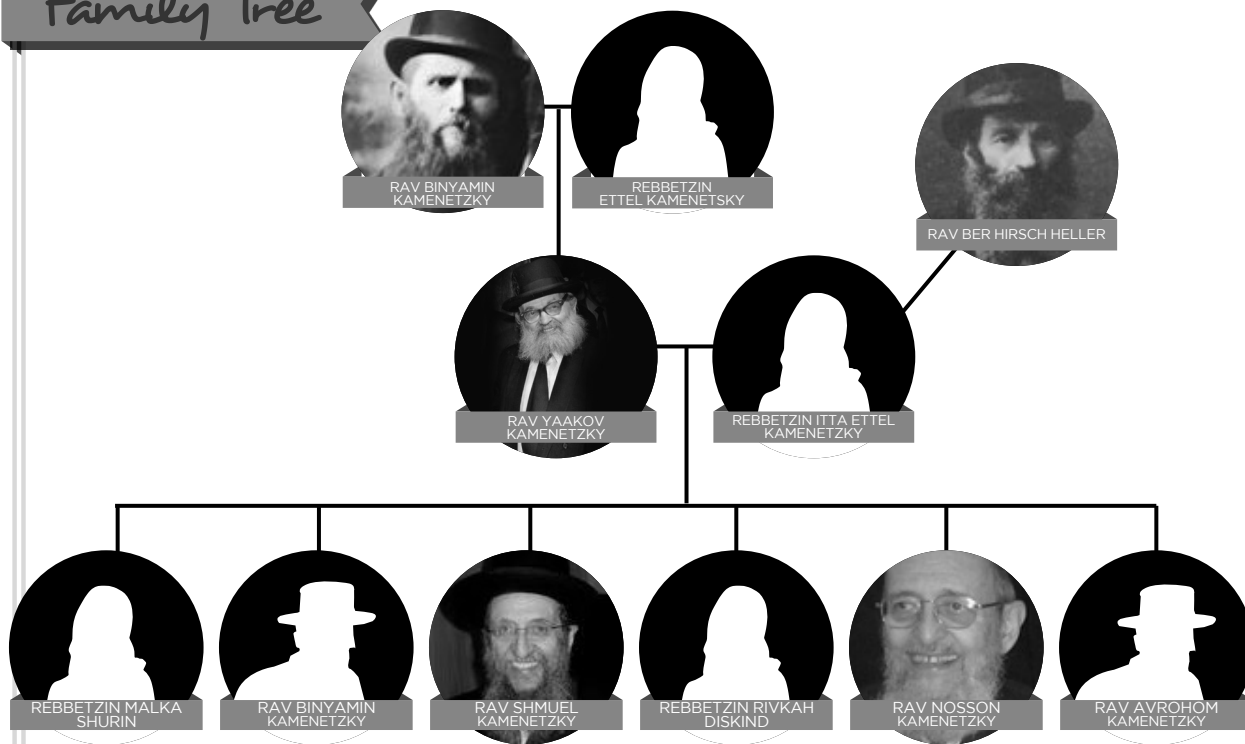
When Rav Yaakov was two years old, a bachur taught him *aleph-beis*. Two weeks later, it was discovered that he had taught himself to read.

Rav Yaakov was incredibly wise. At a *din Torah*, someone once showed a contract that stated that he'd bought something. Rav Yaakov saw the English date on it and realized that it was the second day of Pesach when Jews do not buy anything. With this information, he pressed the man, who eventually admitted it was forged.

Rav Yaakov was learned in many areas, including Hebrew *dikduk* (grammar), Jewish history, math, physics, nature, and astronomy. Due to his knowledge, he was able to defend the Torah, point out errors, and solve problems when unique issues arose.

When Rav Yaakov became the rav of Tzitevian and realized there was no doctor there, he stayed awake all night reading medical information because the Rambam says (*Hilchos De'os* 4) that it's forbidden to live in a place without a doctor.

Family Tree



Rav Yaakov's parents were Rav Binyamin and Rebbetzin Ettel Kamenetsky. His mother's mother was a descendant of the Maharsha and the Tosafos Yom Tov. His father's father, Reb Shmuel Tzvi Kamenetsky, was a timber merchant and mill owner who had everything taken away from him due to anti-Jewish decrees.

At 28, Rav Yaakov married Itta Ettel Heller, the daughter of Rav Ber Hirsch Heller, the *mashgiach* of Slobodka. Rav Ber Hirsch loved his *talmidim* and would even fast for their *hatzlachah*. Rebbetzin Itta Ettel was a goodhearted woman who was happy to sacrifice for Rav Yaakov's learning. She and Rav Yaakov had six children. After Rebbetzin Itta Ettel was *nif-teres* in 1954, Rav Yaakov married his second wife, Chana Urman, in 1958. She was a *ba'alas chessed* who was dedicated to her husband's *ruchniyus* and health.

Rav Yaakov's children are Rebbetzin Malka Shurin (wife of Rav Yisrael Shurin), Rav Binyamin, Rav Shmuel, Rebbetzin Rivkah Diskind (wife of Rav Hirsch Diskind), Rav Nosson, and Rav Avrohom. Rav Yaakov's descendants are *roshei yeshivah*, teachers, and *bonei Torah* in the business world.

SOME OF RAV YAAKOV KAMENETZKY'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS:



During and after the Holocaust, he helped Jews who had come from Europe to Toronto and supported the Vaad Hatzalah that was working hard to save Jews.



He was a founding member of the Mo'etzes Gedolei HaTorah (Agudas Yisrael), a leader on Torah Umesorah's rabbinical board (American day school movement), and a force supporting Chinuch Atzmai (network of religious schools in Eretz Yisrael).

He strongly believed that a community should have a *kollel* and pushed to make that a reality in multiple cities.



He helped Be'er Hagolah — a school created to give Russians a Jewish education when they started coming to Brooklyn in the '70s and '80s — succeed.

He encouraged the founding of Camp Ohr Shraga, the first *bein hazmanim* learning camp, so *talmidim* could continue to grow while having a break from their normal surroundings.





RAV YAAKOV used to say that the following story is a *mitzvah* to publicize:

In Tzitevian, toward the beginning of Rav Yaakov's

years as rav there, a Jew once came to him telling him that he had been at the post office and had been given the wrong amount of change for his purchase. When making his payment, he handed the postmaster a 10-*lit* note, but he was given back change as if he had handed over a 100-*lit* note. Rav Yaakov told him that he should bring the money back to the store.

A few weeks passed and Rav Yaakov was in the same post office to buy stamps. Rav Yaakov handed the postmaster the money for stamps but was given back more stamps than he'd paid for. He noticed that the postmaster smiled as he gave over the

stamps, a sign that something was going on, and he realized that the postmaster had done it on purpose. When the first man had returned the incorrect change to the store, the postmaster must have been curious to know if he'd

returned it out of honesty or only because the rav had told him to return it. So now he was testing the new rav to see what he was truly like and if he himself would take more than what he'd paid for.

With all this in mind, Rav Yaakov was so happy to have the chance to make a *kiddush Hashem*. Of course, he returned the extra stamps. In a fascinating follow-up, after the Holocaust, a number of Jews from Tzitevian told Rav Yaakov that this postmaster had hidden Jews during that difficult time, saving their lives. Rav Yaakov

commented that the postmaster seeing Jews being honest surely made an impression on him and was one of the factors that caused him to save some later.

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Try This!

Throughout his life, Rav Yaakov would always speak with honesty and act in a way that was *emesdig*. In fact, this *middah* is reflected in the title of his *sefarim*, *Emes L'Yaakov*. Similarly, keeping his word was extremely important. Let's learn from Rav Yaakov and be extra careful with how we speak. Let's pay attention to our words so that we too can be *emesdig*.

RAV YAAKOV KAMENETZKYS DVAR TORAH

Second Warnings

Just before *Mattan Torah*, Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to warn the people not to go up Har Sinai. Later, when Moshe Rabbeinu went up the mountain, Hashem told him to go down and warn the people a second time. Rashi explains that people are warned before something happens and again at the time that it happens.

Even if that is the case, why here, more so than in other places, does it seem that they needed a second warning?

We can explain that in other situations when the Jewish people were warned about an *aveirah*, they stayed away from it because they understood that they would greatly lose out if they did the *aveirah*.

However, by *Mattan Torah*, they knew that by going up the mountain they would be enjoying the *ziv*, glory, of the *Shechinah*, and in *Olam Haba*, the *tzaddikim* sit and enjoy the *ziv haShechinah*. Since this is the greatest *ruchniyus*, they might have thought it would be worth doing the *aveirah* of going up the mountain since they would gain something so wonderful. This is why Hashem warned them a second time — so that they would not go up the mountain even with this idea in mind.

Indeed, this is the lesson we are taught in *Pirkei Avos* (2:1): One should calculate the loss of a *mitzvah* (meaning what you feel like you're losing now) against its gain (its true, eternal value) and the gain of a sin (what you feel like you're gaining now) against its loss (its true, eternal loss).

(*Emes L'Yaakov*, *Yisro*, 19:24)