



הרב אהרן ישעי'ה שפירא זצ"ל

**Rav Aharon
Yeshaya
Shapiro** *zt"l*

*R*av Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro lived his life as an expression of shira, of a melodious song. He was pleasant; he was sweet; he was a living example of הנחמדים מזהב מתוקים מדבש ונופת צופים.

Rav Aharon Yeshaya was beloved by the gedolim of yore - by Rav Shimon Shkop, Rav Boruch Ber and Rav Yeruchem. When he became a rebbi, that was irrelevant to him. He had an unusual ability to clarify the Gemara and meforshim not only orally, but in writing. Rav Shimon recruited him to write Shaarei Yosher, which is still a classic in the yeshiva world.

He focused not on himself. He was there solely for his talmidim. He cared for them, elevated them, showed them how to plumb and enjoy the depths of Torah learning.

While many decades have gone by since Rav Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro graced the bais medrash of Torah Vodaath, scores of early Torah Vodaath talmidim still can't stop talking about the deep impact he had on them.

Born in Pinsk on Chanukah of 1907, Rav Shapiro was educated in local chadarim and entered Yeshivas Mir at the age of 15. He quickly became known in the yeshiva as a promising talmid chacham, learning b'chavrusa with a young Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. He became a close talmid of both Rav Hirsh Kamai and Rav Laizer Yudel Finkel, and eventually received semicha from them.

Having recognized young Aharon Yeshaya's writing prowess, Rav Chatzkel Levenstein assigned him the prestigious task of copying over the shmuessen of Rav Simcha, the Alter of Kelm. This was the first of what would become many writing projects. Another assignment was given to him by Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, who charged him with writing up his own shmuessen. Rav Yeruchem was so enamored of Rav Aharon Yeshaya's way with a pen that he once exclaimed, "When I read his writings, I can see the *kneitch* I gave with my finger!"

All this led to his most extensive and significant writing task: Rav Yeruchem sent him to serve as the personal secretary for Rav Shimon Shkop. For the next two years, Rav Shkop would deliver a daily, personal shiur to Rav Aharon Yeshaya, who would then put it on paper. From hearing these shiurim and consulting Rav Shimon's own notes, Rav Aharon Yeshaya would thus learn Torah, write it down, sharpen and edit the words, proofread the document and prepare it for print. All this toil produced Rav Shimon's classic sefer, *Shaarei Yosher*. These writing projects were all accomplished while Rav Aharon Yeshaya was just a bochur, and while they were an exceptional achievement for someone so young, he never spoke about it later on. His writing talents could only be inferred from the



Rav Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro (top row, second left) with fellow talmidim from Yeshivas Mir in Poland





Rav Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro with Rav Moshe Feinstein



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praises Rav Shimon bestowed upon him in the introduction to his sefer.

Rav Aharon Yeshaya returned to learn at Yeshivas Mir following his two years with Rav Shimon. There he was chosen by Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz to help write his seforim, but Rav Yeruchem intervened, saying that at this point Rav Aharon Yeshaya needed to redirect his energies into his own learning.

In addition to his talents in learning and writing, Rav Aharon Yeshaya was an excellent chazzan and *baal menagen*. Although Rav Boruch Ber had not been able to take advantage of his writing talents, there were several occasions in which they shared niggunim together. Rav Aharon Yeshaya was familiar with many niggunim from Europe, especially Karlin-Stolin, and in 1959 made a recording of all the tunes he knew from his childhood, so they would not be lost.

He was also an expert *baal korei*, both in Chumash and the haftoros, and had a beautiful voice. He was very exacting in his pronunciation and use



Rav Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro (l), Rav Mordechai Gifter (r)





Rav Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro (r) with Rav Avrohom Pam (l)

of the proper trop, which came from his knowledge of dikduk and the correct conjugation of words. But his skills went beyond the ability to deliver a perfectly enunciated laining: He also had an expressive way of reciting a parsha or haftorah that made his listeners *feel* the meaning of the text.

Rav Aharon Yeshaya arrived in New York in 1941, and shortly afterward took a position at Torah Vodaath as the first year bais medrash rebbi. The first year boys were making the transition from learning with a rebbi in mesivta to learning independently b'chavrusa in bais medrash, and Rav Aharon Yeshaya was ever present to help them ease into this new status. Unlike most bais medrash rebbeim, he didn't leave the bais medrash after the morning, but would stay there the entire day, even through night seder, offering an optional evening learning shiur.

It's no wonder his talmidim remember him for his encompassing warmth and concern: Rav Aharon Yeshaya went above and beyond his role as a rebbi and maggid shiur, devoting his entire day to them and serving as their mentor. He monitored their progress constantly and would engage them at their level. Some bochurim had chosen to attend college, and while Rav Aharon Yeshaya was a product of European

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Rav Aharon Yeshaya Shapiro with his son-in-law Rav Herschel Schachter

yeshivas that didn't countenance university education, he would nevertheless show genuine interest in their studies.

Rav Aharon Yeshaya's shiur always focused on the *blatt* Gemara itself; he didn't discuss the "*reid*" of the *sugya*. He believed that bochurim first needed to learn basic skills, that they should "break their heads" on the daf with only Rashi and Tosafos, rather than getting involved with all the Acharonim. He was very strict about this, and showed dismay if he noticed the bochurim doing otherwise. At night, however, he would give a "*reid*" style shiur in Shev Shmaitza, training his bochurim to think deeply and broadly.

In this and many other areas, Rav Aharon Yeshaya taught his students that everything has a time and a place. For example, as much as he enjoyed singing and was a talented *baal menagen*, he believed that singing had no place during learning. Talmud Torah requires a serious approach, *koved rosh*, and singing lightens the gravity of that endeavor. Hence he would gently chastise talmidim who tried to put melodies into their learning. "You can't harmonize a Gemara," he once said.

As much as he poured love into his talmidim, he modestly held no expectations that they owed him anything in return. He was once invited to the Sheva Brachos of a young man who had been his talmid about five years prior. When asked to speak, Rav Aharon Yeshaya thanked the choson for inviting him, saying he really hadn't had any obligation to do so.

Yet his talmidim deeply valued his caring and his sensitivity, as well as his Torah, and miss him still. His legacy lives on through them.

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