

Moreinu Horav Simcha Avrohom HaKohen Sheps zt'l

5668/1908 – 5759/1999

With Torah Vodaath from 1941-1999

Rav Simcha Avrohom Sheps zt'l was born on April 18, 1908 in the Polish town of Vesokov-Mizivetsk (near Lomza). Rav Simcha lost his father in early infancy and was raised by his mother and grandfather in the town of Sheptakova. He spent his early years learning in the Sheptakova Cheder. At the age of eleven, he went to learn in the Yeshiva Ketana of Bransk, after which he learnt in Lomza until his Bar Mitzvah. At the age of thirteen, he travelled to Baranovitch to learn under Rav Elchonon Wasserman zt'l, hy"d and Rav Dovid Rappaport zt'l, hy"d.

He continued learning in Baranovitch with incredible hasmoda. Once, when Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer zt'l came to Baranovitch, Rav Isser Zalman gave a shiur, which was interrupted by a levaya passing by the Bais Medrash. Being that Rav Simcha was a Kohen, he remained in the Bais Medrash to review Rav Isser Zalman's shiur. By the time Rav Isser Zalman returned, Rav Simcha had figured out a chiddush with which to answer all the difficulties. When asked if he was going to finish the shiur, Rav Isser Zalman replied, "The 'Sheptakova' figured it out already." Rav Isser Zalman went to Kletsk and told Rav Ahron to try to get the 'Sheptakova' to come to the Yeshiva.

Rav Simcha learned in the Mir from the age of sixteen until World War II (except for 1936-1937). While in the Mir, he was close with Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz zt'l, Rav Aryeh Leib Malin zt'l, and Rav Yonah Minsker zt'l, amongst others. Being a penniless orphan, his years in the Mirrer Yeshiva were an epoch of supreme mesiras nefesh for Torah.

When Rav Lezer Yudel Finkel zt'l found him tutoring for a small fee, he immediately said, "I forbid you to spend your time tutoring - you should use this time to be *mechadesh chiddushim*." Rav Lezer Yudel would learn with him every Wednesday. They learned throughout the night, for which Rav Lezer Yudel would give Rav Simcha a stipend based on the "value" of the *'sh TICKEL Torah'* that he told over. Rav Simcha would not sleep on Tuesday nights, as he spent hours preparing a vort for the Rosh Yeshiva for the following night.

In 1936, Rav Simcha accepted the offer to go to learn in Brisk under the Brisker Rav, and spent two years there. These years shaped his *derech halimud* and outlook on life. He considered the Brisker Rav as his Rebbe Muvhak.

In 1939, while stationed in Japan with the rest of the Mir, he miraculously received a visa and immigrated to the United States. Upon his arrival in New York he joined the staff of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. During this time, he developed a lifelong relationship with Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l and Rav Eliezer Silver zt'l. In 1942 he married his Rebbetzin, Sora Weitzman, the daughter of the Rav of one of the biggest Shuls in Brownsville. Rav Shlomo Heiman zt'l escorted him to the Chupah. When Rav Shlomo Heiman became ill in 1943, Rav Simcha took over his shiur.

During the forty eight years that he was marbitz Torah at Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, he was afflicted with life threatening illnesses on a daily basis. Yet despite his poor health, he

delivered shiurim with vim and vigor, displaying his sheer exuberance for the Torah as it came to life with his delivery. He was known for his *bren* for learning, and despite his poor health, he would be *moser nefesh* to say shiur. The thousands of talmidim who learned under him acknowledge that the excitement they have for Torah is an extension of Rav Simcha's passion for learning.

Rav Simcha was niftar on 16 MarChesvan, 5759, and was laid to rest on Har Hazeisim. Through his talmidim, and his seforim (*Moreses Simchas HaTorah* and *Divrei Simcha*) his legacy lives on.

Yehei Zichro Boruch!