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# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

## Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

### The Passing of

### Ha-Rav Avraham Shapira

25 Tishri 5768

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בסד

**יתומים היינו ואין אב**  
עטופי אבל ויגון אם מודיעים על השבר אשר השברנו  
על הלקח ארון האלוהים הכהן הגדול מאחז  
שר וגדול בישראל אדיד התורה  
**מרן ראש ישיבת מרכז הרב**  
**הרב הראשי לישראל**  
**הרב אברהם אלקנה כהנא שפירא זצ"ל**  
בי"ט ראשון של חג סוכות  
שצדיקים יושבים ועשרותיהם בראשיהם ונהנים מזיו השכינה  
**אוי לה לספינה שאבד קברניטה**  
הלוויה תצא מחר (יום ו' א' דחודש) בשעה 10:00 משיבת מרכז הרב  
ישיבת מרכז הרב



### How Glorious was the Sight of the Cohain Gadol

### On the True Gaon (Genius) – Rav Avraham Shapira ztz"l

By Rav Shlomo Aviner

How glorious was the sight of the cochain gadol, the cochain exalted above his brethren, the great master of Israel, the master of Torah and awe of Hashem.

Anyone who saw his illuminated face saw the face of Torah, and absorbed Torah from him. I, the little one, did not merit to be one of his students, but his position was so central that all of us were his students, whether to a large or small extent. I am certainly unable to describe his personality, this is the job of his leading students, but we are discussing a true Gaon, one

of the leading rabbis of our generation. And, for us, who believe in the idea of the revival of our Nation in its Land – the leading Rabbi of our generation.

During the course of his entire life, this same Gaon fulfilled the verse, "This book of the Torah should not leave your mouth day and night" (Yehoshua 1:8), and in his youth he was already a sharp prodigy and expert. His Torah learning was the learning of the past generation and past generations, generations of Torah giants who everyone stands before with trembling of holiness. I can therefore only gather sparks from his light, by which we can warm ourselves.

In this generation of widespread usage of superlatives, the honorific "Gaon" is given to every rabbi. Our Master, Rav Avraham Shapira, however, was a true Gaon, the great rabbi of this generation, he therefore did not need this honorific, and all of his tens of thousands of students and admirers simply called him, "Rav Avrum."

This mighty Torah personality learned and taught all of his life to the point where it was impossible to distinguish between the man and his Torah, "he owned his Torah" (Kiddushin 32b), and he filled exalted Torah positions in our Nation: in giving Torah rulings, as a judge in Rabbinic courts, as Chief Rabbi of Israel, as Rosh Yeshiva of "Mercaz Ha-Rav," and as spiritual leader to those who believe in the Torah and the Land of Israel. For years he gave halachic rulings, since the entire Torah was before him like an open book, from the Talmudic sources to the latest halachic rulings. He was therefore capable of ruling in every area of Halachah, and to that which people say, "Hashem was with him," can be added, "You have spoken correctly" (see Berachot 30a, Ketubot 109b, etc..).

Out of the midst of this great Torah, he loved Klal Yisrael (the Entirety of Israel), like the love of the cohein gadol, and he was concerned about the life of Klal Yisrael. Not only did he have a wide open heart, a loving heart, for Klal Yisrael, but for each and every individual Jew. It once happened that he heard about a Jew, a Holocaust survivor, who was childless and had no relatives or close friends, who lived in the Bucharian neighborhood, throughout the years he went to visit him in his house to talk to him for hours at a time. It once happened that he was a sandak (the one who holds the baby) at a brit milah, and they saw that tears were pouring from his eyes. The mohel was not careful about the baby's head, despite the Rav's request, and the baby was crying...and this great Rabbi was crying along with the baby as he tried to calm him. This same Gaon, a man of kindness, once said that it seems that Avraham Avinu smiled all of the time, because smiling is a great kindness. He himself also received every person with a cheerful face.

And out of the midst of his great Torah, he loved the Land of Israel, and courageously stood against any weakness of its leaders. Despite those who mistakenly believe that the State's existence is dependent on concessions and compromises, he believed the true belief that to the contrary, its existence depends on strength and courage without concessions and compromises. This same Gaon stood at the forefront of the struggle for the entirety of our Land, the struggle was not only in his brain, but in his heart, in which he felt terrible pain. When he was asked, what use is it going to protest when there are no results, he was surprised by the question and responded, "When we hurt, we scream." He was once asked a question in deep learning, he said that he was unable to answer. He held his head and said that these traitorous plans remove sleep from his eyes and he was not able to fall asleep.

And out of the midst of his great Torah, he loved the State of Israel, as a Torah mitzvah and as a part of the process of the Redemption. He loved it, identified with it and even with all of the criticisms he periodically had with it, he loved it without distortions, hairsplitting or sophisticated arguments. "Regardless of whether the State is more or less beautiful, it remains our State." He therefore fought against any weakness in relation to our national possession of our Land. In truth, with all of his gentleness, he was a warrior; not over trivial matters, but over the essence of our lives: over the preservation of the Torah, the Nation and the Land. To this same Gaon, these were not three separate entities, but one entity of Torah, since his teaching was whole and united. He fought against any distortion of Torah which was passed down from generation to generation. It once happened that a student told him about a relative who said that our Rabbi was ready to make compromises with Reform Jews. Rav Avrum was shocked. "And you didn't give him a slap?!" "A slap?!" – The student said surprisingly. "Yes, a slap. This is what you should have done if you had faith in our Sages [Emunat Chachamim]!"

Our master emphasized again and again that we should not move from what has been accepted by faithful Jews. He therefore said about the castigating statement of the Maharal (Rav Yehudah Loew of Prague) that Tosafot should only be introduced when students were fully capable of understanding them, "Klal Yisrael did not accept this." When a great authority permitted shaving on Chol Ha-Moed, he said: "Klal Yisrael does not act this way." On the ending time to recite the Shema according to the Vilna Gaon, which is lenient since it is a doubt regarding a Torah mitzvah, he said: "This is the custom of the yeshivot," and he added: "Do not stand out. Be careful about being too nervous. There is a thin line between it and the fear of Heaven." Regarding Rav Natan Adler (the teacher of the Chatam Sofer), who daven using the pronunciation of Sephardic Jews (saying it was authentic), he said: "He did not follow the custom of the community." Regarding specific customs mentioned in the Will

of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Chasid, he said: "They were not accepted in Israel." And when he was once asked about the source of a particular ruling, he responded in a joking way: "My massechet."

In the place where you find his greatness, you find his humility. It once happened that our Rabbi entered the beit midrash and his seat had been put on the side. A student came and moved it to its proper spot. Our Rabbi did not like to be served and he said: "I can arrange it myself." The student said: "But this is serving a Torah scholar." Our Rabbi shook his head negatively. And it once happened that a student washed our Rabbi's hands for birkat cohanim, and handed him a special towel which he brought for this purpose. Our Rabbi signaled to him that he preferred to use the towel hanging on the wall. And in the place where you find his humility, you find the recognition of his worth, since he found it necessary to relate that the Chazon Ish discovered him. Our Rabbi was hidden among the vessels (like King Shaul – see 1 Shmuel 10:22), Ha-Rav Greenman brought him to the Chazon Ish, and despite the fact that the Chazon Ish was elderly and laying in bed, he stood up to honor our Rabbi and walked toward him to greet him. And in a place where you find his Torah, you find his fear of Hashem. During the repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei, he would follow along with his finger in the siddur. And he once saw a student davening maariv with great devotion, he paused for a long time and stared at him in amazement.

The ark of G-d has been taken. We have lost the great Rabbi of this generation, a great leader, a great captain in the stormy sea of our spiritual and National lives, but his ways and his instructions will remain with us forever.