



Noda B'Yehudah R' Yechezkel Landau



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Boca Raton Synagogue
People of the Book Part II

Childhood



- ❧ 1713-1793
- ❧ Born in Apta, Poland
- ❧ Son of R' Yehudah Leib Segal Landau and Rebbetzin Chaya.
- ❧ Grandfather was R' Eliezer, Rav of Dubno.
- ❧ He was an only child
- ❧ Family was wealthy and distinguished.
- ❧ He learned with R' Yitzchak Aizik of Ludmir until he was 12 yrs. Old. After that he taught himself.



Building a Family



- ❧ When he turned 14, R' Yechezkel went to learn in Brody where he stayed for four years.
- ❧ At 18, he decided to pursue a wife and many matches were suggested to his parents including large dowries that would allow him to continue to learn full time.
- ❧ In 1732, R' Yechezkel married Liba, the daughter of R' Yaakov of Dubno, a wealthy and charitable Talmud Chacham.
- ❧ After his wedding, R' Yechezkel went to Dubno to study full time



Rebbetzin Liba



- ❧ Liba encouraged her husband to sit and learn without distractions.
- ❧ They were married for close to 60 years.
- ❧ R' Yechezkel understood that his Torah accomplishments were only due to her support.
- ❧ In his introduction to Nodah B'Yehduah he writes:
"My wife has helped me a great deal. She was willing to tolerate my frequent absence from the house, as I devoted myself to learning Torah."

Back to Brody



- ❧ After only a short time in Dubno, R' Yechezkel's father in law decided to move back to Brody and asked his daughter and son in law to come.
- ❧ They agreed and after returning to the city he had studied in for 4 years as a young man, in 1734 at only 20 years old, R' Yechezkel was appointed the Av Beis Din, Chief Judge of the Brody Rabbinical court.
- ❧ He served in that position for 11 years and in that time rendered significant halachic decisions that made him well known in Rabbinic circles.

Leaving Brody



- ❧ In 1745, R' Yechezkel and the Beis Din denounced a man for violating Torah values.
- ❧ The man was well connected with the Russian government who in turn forced R' Yechezkel to leave Brody.
- ❧ They left immediately together with his in laws. The carriage rode until it came to a town that turned out to be Dubno.
- ❧ They stayed in Dubno only for a few months before an envelope arrived from the city of Yampol.

Yampol



- ❧ The city of Yampol needed a Chief Rabbi and heard that R' Yechezkel, who had already earned a great reputation, was forced to leave Brody.
- ❧ They eagerly recruited him to be their Chief Rabbi and he agreed.
- ❧ He quickly rose to be a Rabbinic leader, Av Beis Din and head of the town's Yeshiva where many students flocked to study with him.
- ❧ He remained in the position for ten years, and then another envelope arrived...

Shabbtai Tzvi

1626-1676



- ❧ 1648-1649 Chmielnicki slaughtered over 100,000 Jews.
- ❧ Turkish Rabbi and Kabbalist
- ❧ 1664, proclaimed by Nathan of Gaza as the long awaited Moshiach
- ❧ 1666, at age of 40, forced by Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV to convert to Islam
- ❧ Spurned series of false Messiahs
- ❧ Introduced suspicion for centuries that great rabbis were truly Sabbatians.



Emden – Eibshitz Controversy



- ❧ In 1725, a group of Rabbis in Prague announced that followers of Shabbtai Tzvi should be excommunicated. The Rabbis were led by the head of Prague's yeshiva, R' Yehonasan Eibshitz (1690-1764)
- ❧ In 1751, R' Yehonasan Eibshitz wrote a kameya, an amulet for a sick woman who feared dying in childbirth.
- ❧ The great R' Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) announced a suspicion that R' Eibshitz was a follower of Shabbtai Tzvi and embedded references to the false messiah in the amulet



Emden – Eibshitz Controversy



- ❧ A huge controversy erupted and Rabbis from all over weighed in including such great luminaries as the Pnei Yehoshua and others.
- ❧ Many wrote to R' Yechezkel asking his opinion. In an attempt to reconcile the two great rabbis, in 1754 he issued Igeres Ha'Shalom:

“Let us gain understanding from the elders and learn from the wise. The Sage of the Talmud declared that the book of Kohelles should be part of Tanach because both its beginning and its end teach the fear of Heaven.



Emden – Eibshitz Controversy



Similarly, this Torah genius (R' Eibshitz) is also full of fear of Heaven from his beginning to his end. From his youth until today, he has toiled to learn Torah without cease. He has acquired the Torah and taught it to others, and as our Sages say, a sin cannot come about through a holy person. His Saintliness, his humility and his good deeds are well known. He has helped many people abandon their evil ways. Who else in our generation speaks out against evil as strongly as he?...

Indeed, the reason that the amulets should be put away has to be made clear, so that no one misunderstands it. It should be clear to everyone that R' Eibshitz is not suspected of having any bad intent and that he is perfectly blameless."



Prague



- ❧ Jews had lived in Prague since the very beginnings of the city. In the 1300's they were confined to a ghetto which expanded with the Jewish population.
- ❧ The center of the ghetto was the Alteneushul, a great and beautiful building. The old-new shul was originally built in 1270 and then renovations were made.
- ❧ The residents of Prague included great scholars. The position of Chief Rabbi of Prague was among the most coveted and prestigious in Europe. It had previously been held by such great men as the Shlah Ha'Kadosh, R' Yeshaya Ha'Levi Horowitz and the Tosfos Yom Tov, R' Yom Tov Lipman Heller.



Maria Theresa



- ❧ In 1740, Charles VI died and his daughter Maria Theresa became empress of Hungary and Bohemia.
- ❧ In 1744, Maria Theresa, a pious Catholic gave an order expelling the Jews from Prague. A year later she expanded the decree to expel Jews from all Bohemia and Moravia. The second decree never was carried out but the expulsion from Prague was enacted.
- ❧ In 1748, after tremendous bargaining and negotiating, Jews were allowed back to their homes in Prague in exchange for an extraordinarily high tax.



R' Yechezkel Comes to Prague



- ✧ It was time to select a new Chief Rabbi and R' Yechezkel's name was suggested. One person objected saying he supported R' Yaakov Emden by demanding R' Yehonasan Eibshitz put his amulets away. Another person claimed the opposite. He sided with R' Eibshitz and testified to his innocence.
- ✧ As they debated which side he had taken they came to realize that through his brilliant Igeres Ha'Shalom he attempted not to take either side and just to pursue harmony and peace.
- ✧ They decided to extend an invitation to R' Yechezkel to leave Yampol and become the Chief Rabbi of Prague.
- ✧ Upon accepting, he was welcomed to Prague with live music, dancing and a great celebration. The streets were filled with people who were excited and eager to usher in a new era of Rabbinic leadership and scholarship.



Yeshiva of Prague



- ❧ One of R' Yechezkel's first priorities was to strengthen the yeshiva in Prague. He spent only half a day functioning as Rabbi and dedicated the other half to learning and teaching in the yeshiva each day.
- ❧ He continued teaching when others took off. The yeshiva met during chol ha'moed, on fast days and on Fridays.
- ❧ He begins many of his letters by stating he doesn't have much time as he is very busy in the yeshiva.

Students



- ❧ R' Yechezkel was very dedicated to his students.
- ❧ Prominent student include:
 - ❧ Chayei Adom - R' Avrohom Danzig 1748-1820
 - ❧ Match Efraim - R' Efraim Zalman Margolios 1762-1828
 - ❧ Teshuva Mei' Ahava - R' Elazar b. Dovid Fleckeles (1754-1826)
- ❧ In one letter he writes:

"I received your letter and I recalled your studies in the yeshiva in Yampol and now I am very happy to hear that you have become a rabbi of a community."
- ❧ In another letter he writes:

"To tell the truth, I have been very surprised that you haven't written since leaving me. Nevertheless, I asked about you and heard that you are succeeding in your learning. I am always delighted to hear that my students have grown and succeeded. That is my delight both in this world and the world to come."

Communal Decrees



- ❧ In 1763, after the 7 year war, Jews were financially decimated. In order to not put pressure on people, R' Yechezkel created communal takanos:
 - ❧ He limited the amount of money that people could spend on celebrations.
 - ❧ Only ten men can be invited to a bar mitzvah meal besides the boy, his father, the caterer and out of town guests.
 - ❧ No musicians or badchanim (jokesters) at the meal.
 - ❧ If a person pays less than a certain amount of communal taxes he may serve only beef, duck or chicken but not two of those dishes.
 - ❧ No more than 4 musicians at a wedding.
 - ❧ At the banquet no more than fifteen couples.
 - ❧ No walking around with ostentatious clothing
 - ❧ No more small private minyanim in people's houses instead of coming to shul.

Maria Theresa



- ❧ Despite her virulent anti Semitic measures, R' Yechezkel wrote a prayer for her recovery from smallpox in 1767.
- ❧ He delivered a public eulogy upon her death in 1780 where he extols her virtues and contributions. He praised her political skills as a ruler and her success as a warrior. He also acknowledged her piety and ascetic lifestyle and philanthropy.

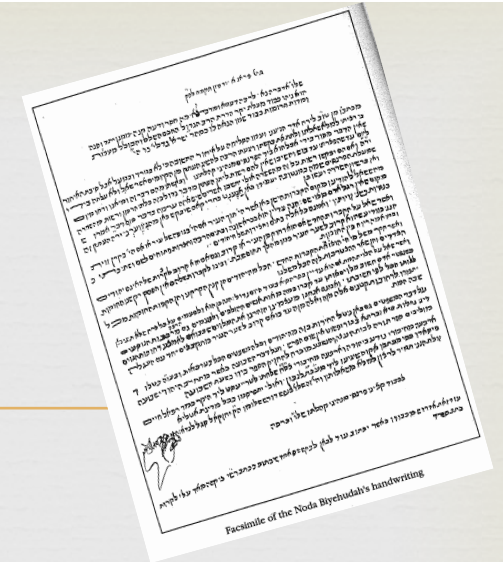


Fire & Noda B'Yehuda



- ❧ A terrible fire broke out in the small ghetto and R' Yechezkel's home was burned. He was devastated by the loss of his writings and took it as a sign that it was time to publish.
- ❧ In 1777 his responsa, Noda B'Yehuda was published on all four sections of Shulchan Aruch including 850 responsa.
- ❧ He explains in the introduction that he called it Noda B'Yehuda (Tehillim 76:2), known because of Yehudah, because:
 - “the only reason I am famous is due to the merit of my father Rabbi Yehuda who was a great man.”

Noda B'Yehuda



- His responsa spread quickly and broadly. He began receiving letters of rebuttal, agreement and further questions.
- He corresponds with people in the Bohemian Lands, Poland, Germany and Italy.
- He addressed his responsa in a very personal and identifying way and mentions his correspondents often.
- He answers them and when asked why he answered ignorant people, he responded, "it is my custom to answer whoever writes to me, even the smallest of the small."



Other Sefarim



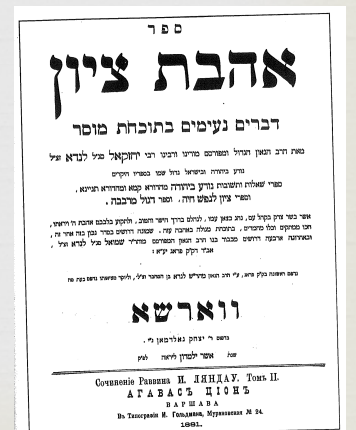
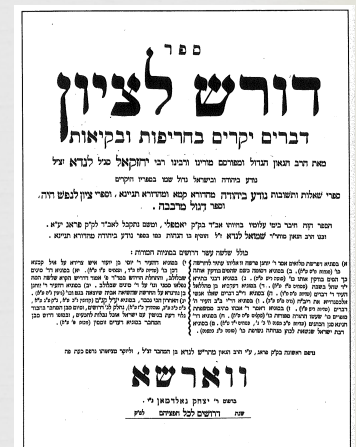
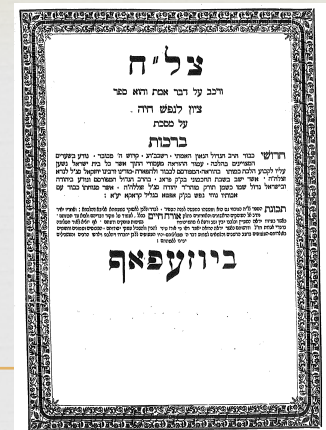
✧ In 1783 he published the first volume of his Tzlach – Tziyon L'Nefesh Chaya commentary on the Talmud heavily based on his shiurim in the yeshiva. In subsequent years he published further volumes and after he was too ill, his son R' Yisroel published more.

✧ Other sefarim:

✧ Doresh L'Tzion (1827) – Sermons and homillies

✧ Ahavas Tzion

✧ Dagul Mei'revava on Shulchan Aruch (1794)



R' Yechezkel and the Government



- ✧ R' Yechezkel while a great traditionalist, was not opposed to certain changes and reforms.
- ✧ In response to the rule that all children were required to receive a secular education, he helped found a government supervised Jewish elementary school in Prague in 1782.
- ✧ In 1788, when Joseph II became the first European ruler to enlist Jews, R' Yechezkel supported conscription and spoke to the first group before they set off.



R' Yechezkel and Chassidus



- ❧ The Ba'al Shem Tov was born 13 years before R' Yechezkel and began a movement that swept across Europe.
- ❧ R' Yechezkel, like many other great rabbis including the Vilna Gaon, opposed Chassidus.
- ❧ Yet, Chassidim admired him nevertheless for his greatness:
 - ❧ Ba'al Shem Tov said he was a "new soul."
 - ❧ R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Ba'al Ha'Tanya said he had no equal in deciding halacha and had never made a mistake in his decisions.
 - ❧ Years later, R' Chaim of Sanz, the Divrei Chaim wrote:
"If R' Yechezkel were still alive, I would climb under his table to serve at his feet, because his intentions were all for the sake of Heaven. He was an extraordinarily holy and pious man."

R' Yechezkel and Chassidus



- ❧ R' Yechezkel issued many rulings disputing Chassidic practices.
- ❧ For example:~
 - ❧ No l'shem yichud formula before a mitzvah (1:y.d.93)
 - ❧ No visiting one's Rebbe on holidays (2.oc.94)



R' Yechezkel and Maskilim



- ✧ R' Yechezkel was very upset about and censured Moses Mendelssohn's translation of Chumash into German. He feared it would lead to study of High German and assimilation.
- ✧ The Maskilim in turn censured his writings and rejected his view.





Meta-Halacha



- ❧ In his responsa on hunting (tinyana, y.d. 10), R' Yechezkel introduces a category of meta-halacha where something is technically permissible, but still should not be done.
- ❧ Meta halacha speaks to the issue of halachic values independent of halachic law.
- ❧ “However, I am most surprised at the very question. For the only hunters we find in the Torah are Nimrod and Esav; this is not the way of the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov... How can a Jew actively kill an animal, while motivated by no need other than enjoying himself in hunting?!”

Famous Responsa



- ❧ Autopsies
- ❧ Delayed burial
- ❧ Jewish oath in secular court
- ❧ Get of Cleves
- ❧ Shaving on Chol Ha'Moed
- ❧ Size of modern day eggs
- ❧ Adultery with mother in law (O.C. #35)

Children



- ❧ His daughter Freida married R' Yosef the Tzaddik, a Torah giant.
- ❧ Yaakov (1745-1822) was a scholar and wealthy merchant in Brody.
- ❧ Shmuel (1750-1834) was Av Beis Din of Prague from 1826 to 1824.
- ❧ Yisroel (1758-1829) was a hebrew printer and influential in Prague's haskalah.
- ❧ He had three more daughters.~

Death of Liba



- ❧ After almost 60 years of marriage, Liba died in 1790.
- ❧ She had raised their children and supported him in all his learning and communal leadership.
- ❧ R' Yechezkel was broken by her loss and despite being a brilliant public speaker sat silently at her funeral and could not bring himself to speak.
- ❧ Two weeks after his death he called everyone to the Beis Midrash so he could eulogize her.
- ❧ With a broken spirit he said:

“because I wasn’t worthy, I did not pass away and serve as an atonement for the sins of the generation. But she, my saintly wife, died as an atonement for the sins of the generation and for my sins as well. And now, I grieve for this calamity that has struck me in my old age. I feel that what has happened to me is as great as the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. I do not even have the strength to cry for my tragedy.”

R' Yechezkel's Death



- ❧ Three years later, when he was 80 years old, R' Yechezkel became sick. For 2 days he lay in bed unable to speak but his lips continuously uttered vidui.
- ❧ On the 17th of Iyar, 5554, 1793, R' Yechezkel passed away and he was buried on Lag Ba'Omer
- ❧ All of Prague went into mourning as he had been their leader for 38 years.
- ❧ He left a will asking that he not be eulogized with the title tzadik or chassid. He asked that only a simple gravestone be placed over his grave and that it not be engraved with praise.



For Further Reading



- ❧ The Noda Biyehudah, Rabbi R. Weingarten, CIS, 1991
- ❧ In Praise of an Anti-Jewish Empress, Marc Saperstein, Shofar 1987
- ❧ Ezekiel Landau, a Political Rabbi, Pavel Sladek
- ❧ Ha'Nodah B'Yehuda U'Mishnato, Leon Gellman, 1962