

# Rabbi Eliezer Silver, zt"l

## Standard-Bearer Of American Orthodoxy Of an Earlier Age

BY YOCHONON DONN

*Rabbi Eliezer Silver, zt"l, was a diminutive man with a giant spirit. He waged the battles of the early 1900s to prevent Shabbos desecrators from serving as shoctim and to help those Gedolim who fought to transfer the shtetl and yeshivah town from Europe to the United States.*

*Rabbi Silver used his Rabbanus position in Cincinnati as a springboard to change the face of America Jewry and to found the U.S. branch of Agudath Israel in 1939. He stormed through the country for sixty years, using a variety of means to transform its Jews from apathetic onlookers to the slow death of Torah Yiddishkeit into concerned activists dedicated to rejuvenating its future.*

*This is the first in a series of features celebrating the one-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Agudath Israel movement in Katowice in 1912.*



Cincinnati, Ohio, in the early 1900s.

**R**ABBI SILVER WAS A DOER; he was a man with a strong personality," the Novominsker Rebbe, *shlita*, told *Hamodia* in an interview. "I remember him. He was at my bar mitzvah and at family *simchos*. My father, *zichrono livrachah*, was very friendly with him. He was a man of many hats."

Some of those hats included spearheading the Agudas Harabanim, the first unified group of Rabbanim in the United States; founding the Holocaust-era Vaad Hatzalah, which rescued thousands of Jewish lives and cared for the social welfare of many more; and changing the Jewish community of his hometown of Cincinnati, which was largely Reform, into a stronghold of Torah Judaism.

But arguably, Rabbi Silver's most lasting contribution to the lives we lead today in the United States was his founding of Agudath Israel of America in

1939; he served as its head until 1946. Several attempts had been made, beginning in 1914 and most notably in 1921, to establish Agudah in America, but none lasted until Rabbi Silver became involved.

The Rav of Cincinnati — whose distinctive *tzilender* [top] hat mirrored his own ramrod-straight personality, in the words of his son — established the organization that today holds impressive political sway and maintains offices in all major U.S. cities, but the story of how that happened is hardly known.

"Rabbi Silver was a pioneer, an *adam gadol*," the Rebbe said. "In founding the American branch of Agudas Yisrael, he went against the tide, but he did not give up."

Harav Gedalia Schorr, *zt"l*, Rosh Yeshivas Torah Vodaas, served as the unofficial Rav of the Zeiri Agudath Israel

*minyan* in Williamburg. And Mike Tress, *z"l*, ran the Agudath Israel Youth Council. However, it was "a group with all the resources [but there was no] national organization," the Novominsker Rebbe said. "Rabbi Silver founded that."

Rabbi Silver was an exceptional individual in many ways. He was an extraordinary *talmid chacham* with knowledge of all areas of Torah; as a young *bachur* in Europe, he spoke in learning for hours with Harav Yosef Rosen, *zt"l*, the Rogatchover Gaon, who was famous for his dismissive attitude toward anyone who did not grasp his terse language.

"Rabbi Silver was a *gadol* in Torah, he was a *gadol* in *chessed*," the Rebbe said. "He was a *gevaldige ish hamaasim*."

Rabbi Silver accomplished a tremendous amount during his lifetime; his good heart impelled him to immerse

At the Agudas Harabanim conference in Rockaway Park, N.Y. Rabbi Silver is in the center. (R-L:) Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, Rosh Yeshivas Ner Yisrael; Rabbi Meir Cohen, secretary of the Agudas Harabanim; Rabbi Simcha Elberg; Rav Aharon Kotler; Rabbi Silver; Rav Dovid Lifshitz, the Suvalker Rav; and Rav Pinchas Mordechai Teitz, Rav of Elizabeth, N.J. In center front is Rav Krieger.



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## Founding of Agudath Israel

IN 1937, HARAV ELIEZER SILVER led the American delegation to the Knessiah Gedolah of Agudas Yisrael in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia, where he met the *Gedolim* with whom he had been in contact by mail for many years. In particular, Harav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, *zt"l*, the acknowledged *Gadol Hador*, deeply impressed him with his immersion in the ideals behind Agudas Yisrael.

Rav Silver returned to the United States charged by Reb Chaim Ozer with the mission of starting a U.S. branch of Agudah. Although Mike Tress, *z"l* — later to be joined by Rabbi Moshe Sherer, *z"l* — had already started the Zeirei Agudath Israel movement on Manhattan's Lower East Side and in Williamsburg, it was unaffiliated with the worldwide Agudah umbrella.

The idea of subjugating the *daas Torah* of American Rabbanim to other Rabbanim around the world set off a firestorm among members of the Agudas Harabanim, most of whom were affiliated with the Mizrachi movement. Even Rav Silver's trip to the Knessiah Gedolah had been delicately framed as one by "a Rav who was the president and [is] now the honorary president of the Agudas Harabanim."

In truth, Rav Silver himself had long advocated a merging of the Agudah and Mizrachi movements, arguing that American Orthodoxy could not as yet afford the luxury of diversity. He felt that the strong opposition to Agudah planting roots in the U.S. could only be mitigated by such an alliance. However, Reb Chaim Ozer's reply was that as long as Mizrachi remained part of the secular World Zionist Organization, there was nothing to discuss.

Rav Silver sent out letters to all American Rabbanim, urging them to join him in uniting U.S. Jewry with their European brethren under the banner of Agudah.

"How much longer will we separate ourselves from these leaders of Torah?" Rav Silver implored. "The time has come for us to declare our allegiance to Agudath Israel. ... Agree, sign and answer me in the affirmative."

Over sixty Rabbanim signed on to the new organization and attended the first Agudah convention in Far Rockaway, N.Y., in July 1939. While they were only a small percentage of the Rabbanim in the country, the number was greater than expected.

"I can joyfully inform you that we succeeded in our first Agudath Israel convention," a jubilant Rav Silver wrote to Reb Chaim Ozer a week later. Among the Rabbanim attending were Harav Pinchos Mordechai Teitz, *zt"l*, Rav of Elizabeth, N.J., and Harav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik, *zt"l*, who would succeed his father, Harav Moshe, *zt"l*, two years later as Rosh Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan.

The first order of business was electing Rav Silver as the president and Harav Shlomo Heiman, *zt"l*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Yeshivah Torah Vodaas, and Harav Mordechai Shlomo Friedman, *zy"l*, the Boyaner Rebbe, as vice presidents.

An office, set up in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, was administered by Harav Zeida Eichenstein, Reb Abba Zalka Rand, and Reb Itche Meir Fershtenberg, *zichronam livrachah*.

In 1940, buoyed by his success, Rav Silver called for the second convention to be held in Cincinnati, the citadel of the Reform movement. Rav Silver assured a strong attendance by paying the travel expenses of the Rabbanim who participated.

"A miracle took place in Cincinnati," Rav Silver said in a statement following the convention. "The capital of Reform Jewry and assimilation became a center of dedicated and uncompromising Torah Judaism. Agudath Israel conquered the city."

Several of the new arrivals from Europe attended that conference, including Harav Moshe Feinstein, Harav Elya Meir Bloch, Harav Reuven Grozovsky, Harav Avraham Yaffan, and Harav Mendel Zaks, *zecher tzaddikim livrachah*.



Hagoon Harav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky

himself in projects and see them through to completion.

Rabbi Silver was beloved by a panoply of *Gedolim*, including Harav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, the Imrei Emes and Beis Yisrael of Ger, Harav Yosef Yitzchak Shneerson of Lubavitch, Harav Moshe Feinstein, and Harav Aharon Kotler, *zecher tzaddikim livrachah*.

Harav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik, *zt"l*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, and Harav Pinchas Mordechai Teitz, *zt"l*, Rav of Elizabeth, New Jersey, had an extremely close relationship with Rabbi Silver.

He was an expert in *Talmud Bavli*, *Yerushalmi*, and all four sections of *Shulchan Aruch*, and he wrote a *sefer* on the difficult *mishnayos* of *Zeraim*, *Mo'ed*, *Kodshim*, and *Taharos*. *L'havdil*, he mastered Russian, Hebrew, and English, and could discuss intelligently the poetry and literature of all of them.

Rabbi Silver traveled through Europe immediately after the Holocaust had decimated its Jewish population, wearing a U.S. general's uniform over his clothes for protection, and with \$100,000 — an enormous sum at that time — in his pocket to distribute. Rabbi Silver had gotten the uniform from Ohio Senator Robert Taft, whose father had been

president of the United States and enjoyed close ties to Rabbi Silver, and this uniform provided a modicum of protection when he endangered his life to enter Christian orphanages to rescue Jewish children who had been hidden there during the Holocaust. He narrowly escaped death in Kielce in 1946, the day before forty-six Yidden were killed in a pogrom, *Hy"d*.

Rabbi Silver was not afraid to stand up to others in protecting his people. His sharp wit is legendary; less well known is that a tongue-lashing from him was invariably followed up by an all-out effort to help the recipient. More than anyone, Reb Leizer Silver fought in the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression era of the 1930s to mold *Yiddishkeit* into a unique American tradition.

### European 'Rabbanim' vs. American 'Rabbis'

The United States at the time Rabbi Silver arrived was not a country conducive to an authentic Torah lifestyle. *Shochtim* who were *mechalelei Shabbos*, *chazzanim* who performed at *chasunos* where there was mixed dancing, and illiterate shul *gabbaim* were often accorded more respect than the shul's Rav, who was more often than not a European *talmid chacham* with a poor command of the English language.

The problem was compounded by a new generation of young American rabbis who entered the *Rabbanus* of certain cities without the necessary fortitude. Derided by the older European Rabbanim as "rabbis," often uttered with a scornful roll of the *r*, these well-meaning younger people were often shut out of rabbinic conferences.

Rabbi Silver threw himself with enthusiasm into the often thankless task of rectifying the situation. During the early 1930s, when the highest rabbinic authorities in the country were pulpit or community Rabbanim, he helped usher in an era where their honor and dignity was sacrosanct, and where the Torah's authority was supreme.

This was an era that lasted until the 1940s, when the newly arrived European *Roshei Yeshivah* and Rebbes supplanted, for the most part, the authority of the community Rabbanim,

but it was Rabbi Silver's efforts that paved the way for American Jews to accept the newcomers.

As president of the first union of Rabbanim in the Western Hemisphere, Rabbi Silver set about patching the growing schism that was developing between the European Rabbanim and the American Rabbanim. The Europeans perceived the American rabbis as polished orators who were ignorant of *halachah*. The American Rabbanim viewed the Europeans as the leading cause of the disrespect shown to Rabbanim.

When he assumed the leadership of Agudas Harabanim, Rabbi Silver sent detailed questionnaires to both groups of Rabbanim, asking what could be done to improve the relationships between them. While the Europeans tended to respond with many ideas, it was apparent from the answers of the Americans that they had been ignored for too long.

"I am extremely happy to notice this new trend in American Torah life," one rabbi responded. "The elder pious Rabbanim are beginning to concern themselves with the welfare of the American-trained rabbis. Until now the Rabbanim paid no attention to them and even drove them away from the L-rd's inheritance."

Many of them expressed satisfaction at the outreach, and they requested continuing education so that they could become more proficient in *halachah* and practical *Rabbanus*.

An interesting thread conspicuous from their correspondence was Orthodoxy's gradual acceptance of the Conservative movement. One rabbi explained that youths would not come to shul unless men and women were seated together, or even sang together in the synagogue choir.

Rabbi Silver attempted to reconcile the situation through various methods. His first solution, to allow all Rabbanim access to the Agudas Harabanim but with voting rights restricted to those ordained in the European yeshivos, was dismissed by the American-trained Rabbanim as insufficient. But he kept up an ongoing dialogue, which prevented the schism from spreading.

### Agudas Harabanim: Organizing for Torah

The founding of the Agudas Harabanim grew directly out of the heartbreak suffered by Rav Yaakov Yosef's attempts to bring *halachah* violations under control during his stint as chief rabbi of New York. Rav Yosef's saga is tragic, but historians have been kind to his contributions to the current high standard of *Yiddishkeit* enjoyed in the United States. He was a leader stricken in battle, but others carried on the war and emerged victorious.

Rav Yosef's dream was to create a central rabbinic body with authority over all rituals, such as *shechitah* and *mikva'os*. Sadly, he was felled by a stroke in the middle of his work due to the sharp resistance of the meat establishment to the halachic reforms he attempted to institute and of the many Rabbanim who opposed him. However, toward the end of



his life there was a realization among Rabbanim that something must be done, and this led to the establishment of the Agudas Harabanim.

The day before the group's founding, as Rabbanim from across the nation gathered in New York for its inauguration, they were stunned to hear the news that Rav Yosef, whose efforts had laid the foundation for the new organization, had been *niftar* on 23 Tammuz 1902.

It took several decades, but in its heyday the Agudas Harabanim succeeded in raising the regard people had for Rabbanim to a sufficiently high

level as to be effective in combating the widely held image of America as a *treife medinah*. It served as an excellent pulpit that Rabbi Silver later used so effectively to change the ability of Orthodox Jews to flourish in America later in the twentieth century.

Under the leadership of Harav Yisrael Rosenberg, *zt"l*, of New York and Harav Dov Levinthal, *zt"l*, chief rabbi of Philadelphia, in the first quarter of the 1900s, and later of Rabbi Silver, the Agudas Harabanim was the first attempt to marshal the power of individual American Rabbanim into a cohesive force.

Throughout his life, Rabbi Silver was known for his nearly photographic memory. "He instantly recalled almost anything he ever studied or wrote," according to Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, author of *The Silver Era: Rabbi Eliezer Silver and His Generation*. Into his eighties, he would learn regularly until two a.m. and then start his daily learning regimen four hours later.

Those years in Europe were difficult ones for Jews. As a child, Rabbi Silver witnessed a pogrom right outside his house. Violence by the local townspeople was the norm, and any natural disaster was blamed on the Jews.

Rabbi Silver married Basya, the daughter of a poor Vilna Jew with distinguished lineage, and was invited to learn in Reb Chaim Ozer's exclusive *kollel* in that city. But when he received a Russian army draft notice, he chose not to accept an exemption through Reb Chaim Ozer, as was commonly done by *bnei yeshivah*.

In 1907 Rabbi Silver immigrated with his wife to the United States. They settled in New York, where he worked as a garment salesman and later sold insurance. But that was soon to change.

One of Rabbi Silver's first rabbinic job offers showed how much the future fierce fighter for authentic Judaism knew about the American scene.

Solomon Schechter, the founder of the Conservative movement, invited Rabbi Silver for an interview at the Jewish Theological Seminary. The seminary had been Orthodox but had turned into a bastion of Conservatism under Schechter. Rabbi Silver was dismayed when Schechter sat for the interview without a *yarmulke*, and he decided against the post.

Rav Dov Levinthal, Rabbi Silver's friend, who revitalized Philadelphia's Orthodox community during his tenure as chief rabbi there, recommended him as Rav in nearby Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The small Jewish community of two thousand included an eclectic mix of outstanding *talmidei chachamim* and unlearned *baalei batim*. Rabbi Silver later said that he accomplished the bulk of his learning in



Rabbi Silver reads his emotional plea to Vice President Henry A. Wallace during the Rabbis' March in October 1943.



(Left) Rabbi Silver (center) during the Rabbis' March from Union Station on October 6, 1943. The man in uniform is Dr. J. H. Gordon, national commander of the Jewish Legion of Veterans. At Gordon's left in the front row are (L-R) Rabbis Eliezer Silver, Israel Rosenberg, and Bernard Levinthal. In the front row at far left is Rabbi Nathan Baruch. Rav Avrohom Kalmanovitz, *Rosh Yeshivah* of the Mir in America, is second to left of Rabbi Silver.

### From Kovno to Rabbanus

Born in Shevat 1882 in Kovno, Lithuania, to Reb Bunim Tzemach and Malka Silver, Eliezer learned in nearby Dvinsk, where he enjoyed hours of Torah discussions with the Rogatchover and Harav Meir Simcha, *zt"l*, the Ohr Samei'ach.



Rabbi Silver at one of the DP camps in Europe, wearing a U.S. Army uniform.

Harrisburg, where the small community allowed him ample time to study and write.

But not all the people looked kindly on the *hasmadah* of their rabbi, whom they had hired because of his scholarship. “If he is so learned,” asked one simpleton, “then why must he continue studying?”

The biggest scholar in Harrisburg was a former *talmid* of Volozhin who had learned under the Netziv. Although he was *makpid* on and was *moser nefesh* to keep many *halachos*, at that time he was a *mechallel Shabbos* who rarely came to shul. The simple folk of Rabbi Silver’s *kehillah* looked up to him as a role model for how to remain Jewish in America.

But Rabbi Silver found that the way to his flock’s heart was through their heads. When they completed their first *masechta*, he arranged for a lavish *siyum* in the shul, where he delivered a masterful *pilpul*. The Volozhiner *talmid* came for the *siyum*, was mesmerized by the city’s new rabbi, and remained at Rabbi Silver’s side for the rest of his life.

### ‘Guardian of the *Mitzvah*’

In Harrisburg, Rabbi Silver began the effort to shore up the American rabbinate, an agenda that he would later replicate on a national scale. He acquainted himself with the sorry state of *shechitah* and *mikva’os*, the latter in particular. He said that since a Rav is considered the father of orphans and the *mitzvah* of *mikveh* was orphaned in the United States at the time, “I deem myself the guardian of this *mitzvah*.”

A defining image of the American Jewish scene in the 1920s were the thousands of transient European Jews who arrived in New York through Ellis Island, with the intent to move on to other cities where they were sure that family or *landsleit* would help them. They would travel from city to city, raising funds in one Jewish community to enable them to travel further.

Harrisburg, then home to one of the largest train depots in the Northeast, saw its fair share of Jewish itinerants. Rabbi Silver established a *hachnasas orchim* center for them, where he provided them

with lodging, meals, and money.

An episode that occurred during Rabbi Silver’s years in Harrisburg prompted him to go all out in developing his brand of rabbinical authority. A childless man was lying on his deathbed, his only hope an experimental surgery. Rabbi Silver knew that if he died, the man’s young wife would require *chalitzah* from her brother-in-law, who was in Europe.

Since young Rabbanim customarily did not get involved in such weighty matters, Rabbi Silver asked an older Rav to come to Harrisburg and administer a *get* so that the woman would be able to remarry. The husband was extremely uncomfortable with the idea of divorcing his wife — albeit on the condition that it would not take effect until immediately before his passing — but he reluctantly agreed.

However, Rabbi Silver realized that the Rav had made a serious error in the document, which invalidated the *get*. The husband then refused to redo the contract, but Rabbi Silver pleaded with him until he finally agreed — for the then-enormous sum of \$500.

After that near-debacle, Rabbi Silver decided that he must involve himself fully in all aspects of the American rabbinic arena, not only in life-cycle events in his hometown but also in cities outside his territory. Harrisburg, the state capital, was in central Pennsylvania; between it and Pittsburgh in the west, there was no other qualified Rav. He therefore considered it his responsibility to ensure that the kashrus of the entire state's food and *mikva'os* was up to par.

And not too long afterward, one of the most high-profile moments of his career occurred.

### Historic Meeting With A U.S. President

The American State Department was then accommodating the anti-Semitic Russian czarist government by not issuing passports to any Jew planning on visiting Russia. The organized secular U.S. Jewish groups had protested to the Taft administration, but as leaders of the burgeoning Orthodox movement, Rabbi

Silver and his colleagues in the Agudas Harabanim wanted to show their independence by issuing their own condemnation.

The Rabbanim also wished to request that the U.S. cancel a trade agreement with Russia until they stopped the government-sanctioned anti-Semitism.

A delegation of seven Rabbanim met in Washington on June 12, 1912, and headed for the White House to see President William Howard Taft, the first meeting ever between an Orthodox rabbinic delegation and a U.S. president.

On the way from Washington, D.C.'s Union Station train depot to the presidential mansion, they debated whether to remove their hats out of respect for the commander in chief. Rabbi Silver convinced them to keep their hats on so that they would be able to recite the *brachah* upon seeing a head of state. They were relieved to see that upon beholding his distinguished guests, Taft donned his own hat out of respect.

That meeting between the president,

who was to lose his re-election bid several months later, and Rabbi Silver spawned a close, decades-long friendship between the Taft and Silver families, both of whom lived in Ohio. It was a friendship that proved pivotal years later.

### Moving on to Larger Flocks

Over the next decade, Rabbi Silver's energetic leadership succeeded in making a firm mark in the Pennsylvania Jewish community and on the broader American scene. In 1925, he decided that it was time to move on. While he had had to apply for his Harrisburg post, the much larger Jewish community in Springfield, Massachusetts, appealed to him to come serve as its Rav.

Rabbi Silver's intuition that he could do more for *Yiddishkeit* in Massachusetts was prescient. Within a few years of his arrival, he was instrumental in promoting a state court ruling that upheld the right of Rabbanim to set kashrus standards. Rabbi Silver's victory in the two-year legal battle was recognized by Jewish publications

Rabbi Silver (second from right) at the *kabbalas panim* of the Vaad Hayeshivos during a visit to Eretz Yisrael. To his left is Harav Isser Zalman Meltzer, *zt"l*.





across the country, and calls came in from cities as far away as Sioux City, Iowa, for help in similar situations.

In 1929, Rabbi Silver was elevated to the presidency of the Agudas Harabanim. At that point, he felt he was ready to begin his next project, the toughest yet. He wanted to build a network of *chadarim* to educate Springfield's young. It was partly due to the strong opposition he encountered from the community that convinced him in 1931 to accept an offer from Cincinnati's prestigious Jewish community.

Cincinnati, the oldest Jewish community outside the East Coast and a much larger one than Springfield, presented a unique challenge to Rabbi Silver: it was home to the Hebrew Union College, the flagship seminary of the Reform movement. Then the largest and fastest-growing movement in the Jewish world, Cincinnati was Reform's virtual capital.

As president of the Agudas Harabanim, Rabbi Silver was sent in 1931 to Cincinnati to see what could be done to fortify the city's Jewish character. The community was torn apart by quarrels that had driven the city's last chief rabbi out two years earlier.

Rabbi Silver discovered that the city's problem was not that it lacked *talmidei chachamim* or Torah study; what was missing was a strong leader to unify them.



Rabbi Silver is seated at left, surrounded by *bachurim* listening intently.

Rabbi Silver offered a list of suggestions for how to engender more respect for Rabbanim and insisted that they hire a strong Rav or the Agudas Harabanim would "place a rabbi."

But the selection committee had difficulty considering another candidate after seeing Rabbi Silver's dedication and passion. Candidate after candidate was turned down, until, following a meeting, the community Rabbanim officially offered the position to Rabbi Silver. After brief reflection, he accepted.

The Agudas Harabanim honored the new Rav by holding its semi-annual convention in Cincinnati, the first time the city enjoyed this sort of limelight. Rabbi

Silver's son, Rabbi Dovid Silver, was appointed Rav in Harrisburg two years later, giving his father great personal satisfaction.

Rabbi Silver's first major challenge in Cincinnati was to erect a new *mikveh* to replace the aging facility. Because the best venue was on a side street adjacent to the main Reform temple, an avalanche of complaints was submitted to the city's zoning authority. The temple's basic grievance was that a *mikveh* was not a "religious building" and was therefore not permitted in a residential neighborhood.

But it was the complainants' choice of attorney, Murray Seasongood, the city's former Jewish mayor, who was popular for

At an Agudath Israel Convention in the 1950s. (L-R) Rav Nochum Perlow, the Novominsker Rebbe; Rav Moshe Feinstein; the Boyaner Rebbe, Rav Mordechai Shlomo Friedman; Rav Eliezer Silver; the Kopycznitzer Rebbe, Rav Avrohom Yehoshua Heschel; and Rav Mordechai Sholom Yosef Friedman, the Sadigura Rebbe, *zecher tzaddikim l'vrachah*.



his successful reform of Cincinnati politics, that convinced the zoning board to rule in their favor.

It was then that Rav Silver decided to call on an old family friend from Cincinnati to help him in this important venture. He convinced Senator Robert Taft (R-Ohio), the son of the former president who had shown such great respect for the Jewish delegates decades earlier, that this was a matter of religious

until the end and “among our youngest and most active members,” according to Harav Simcha Elberg, z”l, writing in *Hapardes*.

Among his most well-known achievements were helping to organize the Vaad Hatzalah and being among the first to visit war-torn Europe to assess the needs of survivors. He was one of the main organizers of the Rabbis’ March on Washington on October 6, 1943, three days before Yom Kippur, to protest the Roosevelt administration’s silence about the Holocaust, and he delivered the group’s message to Vice President Henry Wallace.

When Rabbi Silver made his famous trip to Europe after World War II to help survivors, he brought along the astronomical sum of \$100,000 to distribute. During the months he spent in Europe, he

incurred massive debts in order to deliver as much aid as possible — debts which he was never able to repay.

Shortly after Rabbi Silver moved to the United States in 1907, he visited Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (Yeshiva University). A student there was so impressed with the young rabbi’s proficiency in all areas of Torah that he bemoaned the loss to *Klal Yisrael*.

“What a shame that such a fine scholar chose to emigrate here,” the student said. “America will destroy him, while in Europe he would have become a Torah sage.”

But America did not destroy him; on the contrary, despite the formidable challenges it presented, Rabbi Silver prevailed. □

*Readers are invited to submit information about anyone in this feature's photographs who were not identified.*



(Above) The cover of Rabbi Silver’s *sefer* on concepts in *Shas*.  
(Right) His *matzeivah*.

freedom rather than a simple zoning-code violation.

After mulling over the matter, Taft agreed that the lawsuit rested on the legal definition of a “house of worship.” He requested a scholarly opinion from Rabbi Silver on the importance of *tevilah* in Jewish life.

But the entry of such a high-profile name into the litigation caused Seasongood to drop out, and the suit was eventually withdrawn.

Taft sent Rabbi Silver a bill for \$4,000 — along with a receipt marked “paid in full.”

### Who Conquered Whom?

Rabbi Silver was *niftar* at the age of eighty-six on 9 Shevat 1968, fully active



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