



Rabbi Chaim Zvi HaLevi Rubenstein

was born in Buten in today's Belarus in 1872. After his Bar Mitzvah he attended the famed Volozhin Yeshiva and was a devoted disciple of its Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin. While there Rabbi Rubenstein received semicha from many leading Lithuanian rabbis including Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berlin and Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik. In 1892 the yeshiva was closed by the Russian government, and Rabbi Berlin began to immigrate to the land of Israel. A number of his students, including Rabbi Rubenstein, accompanied him. When

they stopped in Warsaw on the way, Rabbi Berlin suffered a stroke and passed away a year later.

While in Warsaw, Rabbi Rubenstein married a young widow, Chaya Sarah, who was a niece of Rabbi Zadok HaKohen of Lublin, the great Chasidic rebbe and one of the most seminal thinkers in the Jewish world. The Rubensteins continued to the land of Israel and settled in Jaffa, where Rabbi Rubenstein's friend from Volozhin, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, served as the Rabbi.

Rabbi Rubenstein founded and headed a small yeshiva in Jaffa known as Yeshiva Shaarei Torah, and in 1900 he moved to Jerusalem, where he was a member of one of the rabbinical courts under the aegis of Rabbi Shmuel Salant, the Rabbi of Jerusalem. Sent on a mission to America to raise funds for the destitute Jewish community in Jerusalem, he was "captured" by the Jewish community of South Chicago, Illinois to serve as its Rabbi.

In 1917, Rabbi Rubenstein moved to the Lawndale district of Chicago's West Side and served as the Rabbi of Congregation Bnei Reuven, which was located in that area. Two years later, in 1919, he founded a small yeshiva that met in his home on Douglas Boulevard. Among his first students were Rabbis Louis Lehrfield, Shepard Baum, and Rabbi Kramer, who served much later as president of Hebrew Theological College.

In 1921, in conjunction with Rabbis Efrayim Epstein and Saul Silber, he helped found the Beis Medrash Latorah/Hebrew Theological College and remained as one of its roshei yeshiva for over twenty years. He was active in the Merkaz Harabonim and was also involved in kashrut supervision and standards.

A person of sterling character and warm love of people he was immensely respected and beloved by his students and congregants and the entire Jewish community. He was a member and leader of the Agudas Bnei Eretz Yisrael, an organization that helped immigrants to Chicago from the land of Israel. A positive person who saw only the good in others he visited the land of Israel and saw Rav Kook just before his death, and he rejoiced in the rebuilding of the country by the Jewish pioneers. He had great confidence that Torah and Orthodoxy would yet flourish in America, and in Chicago particularly, and did not despair even though the next generation was already estranged from Jewish tradition and observance.

Rabbi Rubenstein's acts of charity and generosity were legendary. He developed cataracts and for a year was unable to see but was still able to deliver his Talmud

classes, relying on his memory of the text of the Talmud and its commentators. He was aware of the new and peculiar circumstances of American Jewish life and helped guide the many young rabbis that were the products of HTC in their battle for tradition and Torah.

Rabbi Rubenstein had a melodious voice and had a tradition of leading the Neilah service in his synagogue. After Yom Kippur 1944, he tragically took ill with a heart attack and passed away soon after, on 8 MarCheshvan, 1944. After a greatly-attended and emotional funeral, he was interred in Waldheim Cemetery in Oak Lawn, Illinois. Among his descendants are his grandsons, Rabbi Berel Wein and Elijah Schochet, and the well-known Jewish community leader Gary Torgow of Detroit, Michigan. A leader of the transitional immigrant generation, his faith in yeshivot and tradition has been amply rewarded.

By Rabbi Berel Wein