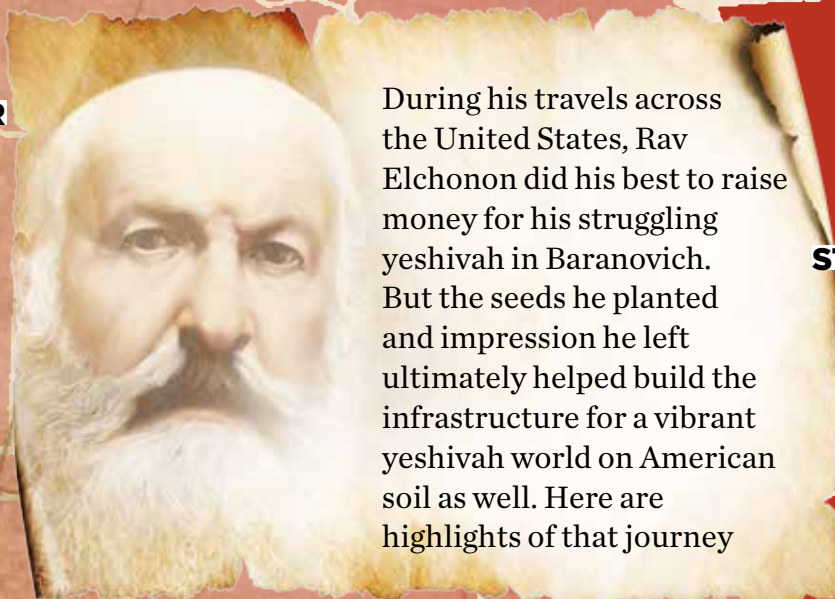


Mapping Out the Future

Researched and
written by Dovi Safier
with assistance from
Nachum S Zajac

Rav Elchonon's Journey across Jewish America

DENVER



During his travels across the United States, Rav Elchonon did his best to raise money for his struggling yeshivah in Baranovich. But the seeds he planted and impression he left ultimately helped build the infrastructure for a vibrant yeshivah world on American soil as well. Here are highlights of that journey

CHICAGO



FLINT



DETROIT



TOLEDO



CLEVELAND

CINCINNATI



ST. LOUIS



MEMPHIS



ATLANTA



DALLAS



High Rabbinical College
YESHIVOH "OHEL TORAH"
of BARANOWITZ

Address: Chief Rabbi Shimon Wasserman
Baranowicz, Success 194, Poland
U.S. Address: 29 Morton St., Bklyn.

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Amount: \$5.00

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A Most Memorable Siyum

City: New York

Date: February 1938

While Rav Elchonon followed the practice of many other visiting European roshei yeshivah and delivered *shiurim* in several different American yeshivos, he diverged from Rav Meir Shapiro, Rav Avraham Yitzchok Bloch, Rav Boruch Ber, the Ponevezher Rav, Rav Aharon Kotler, and other esteemed visiting roshei yeshivah in his refusal of the invitation of the Agudath Harabonim and Rabbi Dr. Bernard Revel to deliver a *shiur* at RIETS.

It was somewhat of a consolation for the rabbinic alumni of the yeshivah (the organization known as the Rabbinical Council of America) when on February 13, Rav Elchonon honored them by speaking at a *siyum* held for those who completed *Masheches Yoma* in *daf yomi*. In his address, Rav Elchonon expressed his joy that in America there existed a cadre of young rabbis who were exceptional Torah scholars, and he exhorted the younger rabbis who held various positions not to neglect their Torah study, for Torah study is the most vital aspect of their lives — and in the eyes of their communities, they represent the Torah.

Focus on the Future

City: The Rockaways

Date: February 1938

On February 6, representatives of Far Rockaway and Arverne took part in a large reception for Rav Elchonon at the Shaarei Tzedek shul in Arverne. Rabbi Mordechai Shuchatowitz opened the event and introduced Rav Elchonon, and the popular *darshan* and rabbi of Congregation Kneseth Israel ("The White Shul"), Rabbi Zelig Fortman, delivered an address. The event raised \$200.

The following year, just months after Rav Elchonon's departure for Europe, the first convention of Agudath Israel of America was held in Far Rockaway. Rav Elchonon, who played an important role in raising the nascent organization's prestige in America, was asked to write a letter of greeting. Instead, he chose to write a letter to the organizers reminding them to focus not on "politics and economic affairs," but rather the education of young Jewish boys and girls on whose shoulders rests the future of American Jewry.

Rabbi Wasserman Of Poland Welcomed By Shaare Zedek

Last Sunday evening, Congregation Shaare Zedek of Edgemere welcomed one of the living Jewish sages of our day, Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, who came for a visit to the States from Beranowitz, Poland, in the interests of the scholars of the seminary which he is heading. Representatives from Arverne and Far Rockaway took part in the reception.

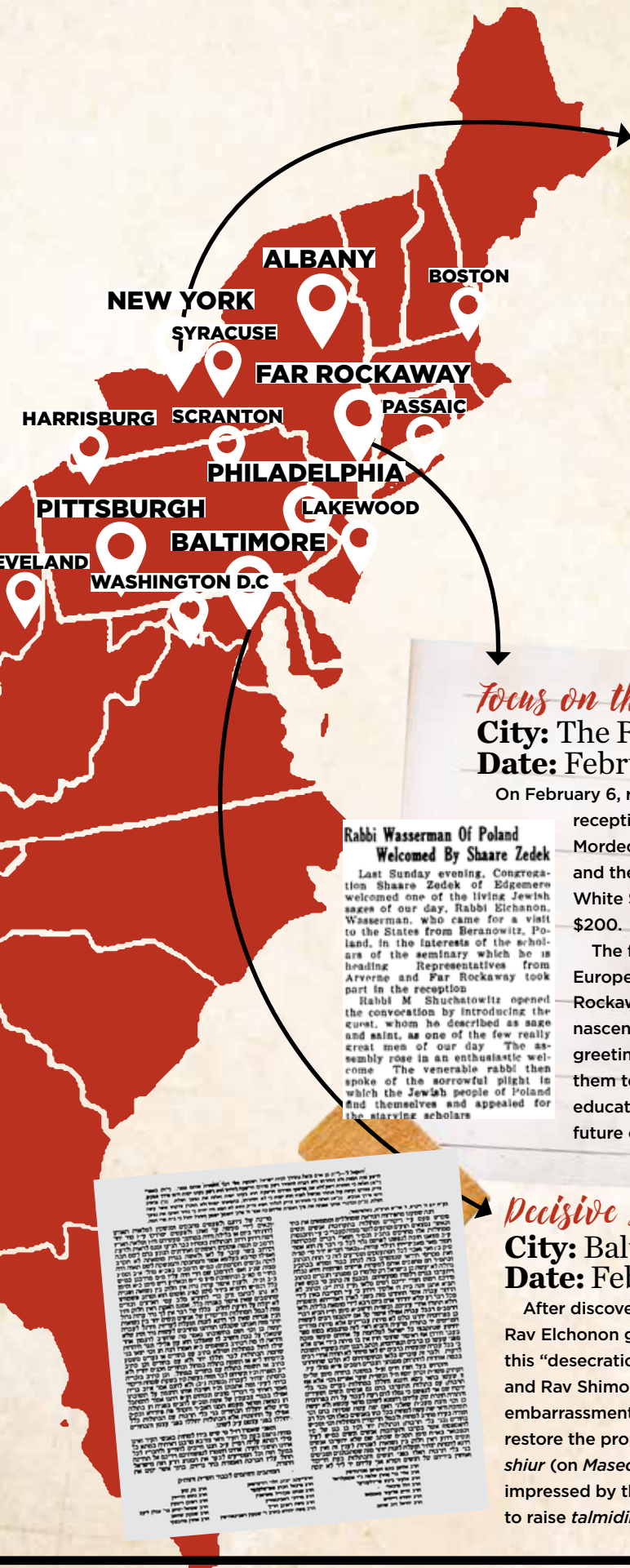
Rabbi M. Shuchatowitz opened the convocation by introducing the guest, whom he described as sage and saint, as one of the few really great men of our day. The assembly rose in an enthusiastic welcome. The venerable rabbi then spoke of the sorrowful plight in which the Jewish people of Poland find themselves and appealed for the starving scholars.

Decisive Action

City: Baltimore

Date: February–March 1938

After discovering during his visit to Baltimore that local shuls were hosting dances, Rav Elchonon galvanized local rabbanim to issue a seething proclamation against this "desecration of holiness," which he signed as well. Rav Yitzchok Ruderman and Rav Shimon Schwab assisted his fundraising efforts, and were pained by the embarrassment that Rav Elchonon had to endure in the process. In an effort to restore the proper respect to Rav Elchonon, Rav Ruderman invited him to deliver a *shiur* (on *Maseches Gittin*) to his students in the yeshivah. Rav Elchonon was very impressed by the level of the students, and told Rav Ruderman that he had merited to raise *talmidim* in America equivalent to those in the yeshivos of Lithuania.



ATLANTA

Southern Hospitality

City: Atlanta

Date: February 1938

Following Baltimore, Rav Elchonon made it as far south as Atlanta, spending a few days in Atlanta at the homes of Rabbi Tuviah Geffen and Rabbi Harry Epstein, local rabbanim (and Slabodka alumni) who regularly raised funds for European yeshivos. He spent Shabbos *parshas Tetzaveh* speaking at the Shearith Israel shul and at the Anshei Sfard shul. On his trip to the South, Rav Elchonon was accompanied by Rabbi Yaakov Kahana-Shapiro of Boro Park's Yavne Congregation.



Rabbi Tuvia Geffen

CHICAGO

Pesach in the Windy City

City: Chicago

Date: April 1938

Rav Elchonon spent Pesach in Chicago at the home of Rav Ephraim Epstein, the brother of Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein and the longtime chairman of the Vaad Hayeshivos. During Rav Elchonon's stay in the Windy City, Rav Epstein worked nonstop on his behalf, raising approximately \$2,500, making it the most successful stop of the entire trip. Prior to Yom Tov, the Merkaz Harabanim of Chicago arranged a mass rabbinic gathering at which Rav Elchonon delivered an *iyun shiur* and Rav Ezriel Epstein and Rav Chaim Yitzchok Korb delivered words of *chizuk*. More than \$400 was raised at this event alone.

One of his hosts during the Chicago trip noted that Rav Elchonon kept the nickels for his personal phone calls separate from the ones he used for yeshivah calls — even though the only reason for his visit was to help the yeshivah.

CINCINNATI

Shavuot with the Silvers

City: Cincinnati

Date: June 1938

Following a stay in St. Louis where he was hosted by his old acquaintance from Telshe, Rav Chaim Fishel Epstein, Rav Elchonon traveled to Cincinnati, where he spent Shavuot with the leader of American Orthodoxy, Rav Eliezer Silver. A year earlier, Rav Silver had represented American Jewry at the Knessiah Gedolah of Agudas Yisroel in Marienbad and witnessed the outpouring of respect that *gedolei Yisrael* had shown for the venerable Baranovich rosh yeshivah. In welcoming Rav Elchonon to Cincinnati, he referred to Rav Elchonon's *geonus*, *tzidkus*, and his *yiras Hashem*. His next stop was Cleveland.

ALBANY

Echoes of the Malach

City: Albany

Date: August 1938



Rav Elchonon took a short visit to Albany, staying with Reb Zalman Levine, the son of the famed ascetic tzaddik "the Malach," Rav Chaim Avraham Dov Ber Levine. The Malach had passed away a few weeks prior, while Rav Elchonon was traveling in the Midwest. While few details are known about the relationship between Rav Elchonon and the Malach, the Chofetz Chaim once met a daughter of the Malach and when she told him who she was, he told her, "Some people are great in Torah, some in *maasim tovim*, and others in *yiras Hashem*. Your father is great in them all."

BOSTON

Only with Chinuch

City: Boston

Date: September 1938

In 1937, New York and Baltimore were the only two American cities home to full-time yeshivah day schools. While in Boston, Rav Elchonon addressed the local Baranovich sisterhood, where he was introduced by Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik.

During his stay, Rav Elchonon strongly encouraged Rav Soloveitchik in his efforts on behalf of the recently opened Maimonides School. Little did he know that more than a half-century later, his only great-grandson, the grandson of his son Dovid, would attend the school.

Rabbi Henoch Cohen, famed for his role as longtime executive director of Chinuch Atzmai in America, met Rav Elchonon in Torah Vodaath a short while later and recalled him saying how he visited Rav Yoshe Ber in Boston and saw how he ate, slept and dreamt Torah. Rav Elchonon motivated Rabbi Cohen to go study together with an elite group of bochurim in a short-lived *kibbutz* called Yeshivas Heichal Rabbeinu Chaim Halevi, run by Rav Soloveitchik and his cousin Rav Michel Feinstein in Boston. Later on, he would join Rav Elchonon's son Rav Simcha and Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky to found a branch of Torah Vodaath in Los Angeles, the yeshivah that would eventually be known as Ohr Elchonon.

The Holiest Hakafos

City: Detroit
Date: October 1938



Rabbi Wasserman's Thanks
Editor, Detroit Jewish Chronicle:
Allow me to express my thanks and blessings to all the rabbis, presidents of the synagogues and communal workers in Detroit, for the aid shown to me during my stay in Detroit to get support for my Yeshiva in Baranowitz, Poland. Let all the co-workers and donors be blessed with the blessings of the Torah and Zion.
Uncollected pledges should be sent to Rabbi I. Eisenman, 1955 Taylor Ave., Detroit, for which they will get receipts.
Respectfully yours,
Rabbi Chonah Wasserman,
Dean of Baranowitz Yeshiva.

Accompanied by Rav Shmuel Greineman, Rav Elchonon spent Succos in Detroit, where they were hosted by Rabbi Yitzchok Stollman and Rabbi Yosef Eisenman. Rav Elchonon spoke at a dozen shuls and at Yeshiva Beth Yehuda (which was then still an afternoon Talmud Torah). On Simchas Torah, he attended *hakafos* at the Beis Aharon V'Yisroel Shul (Stolin) at night, and at the local Young Israel on Joy Road during the day.

This was a very different sort of *hakafos* for Rav Elchonon. In prior years, he had spent the exalted days of Elul through Simchas Torah in Radin, and he danced the *hakafos* with unbelievable joy and reverence before his rebbi, the Chofetz Chaim, holiness and mutual reverence emanating from their very beings. For the Jews of Detroit, this was a chance to tap some of that lofty joy close to home.

PITTSBURGH



A Rare Image

City: Pittsburgh
Date: December 1938

During his visit to Pittsburgh, the *Post-Telegraph* obtained one of the only photos taken of Rav Elchonon during his trip. In an earlier interview in the *Denver Post*, Rav Elchonon explained his reasoning for avoiding photos:

"He would not permit his picture to be taken, explaining that it would be a religious violation. He based his opinion on the assertion that since man is made in the image of G-d, and G-d has forbidden man to make images of Him, a photograph would be contrary to the injunction. He obtained special permission to travel without a passport photograph."

Perhaps the reason that the *Pittsburgh Post-Telegraph* succeeded in obtaining a photograph is because the pose itself was a compromise: a side profile that didn't show his face in full. (Whether he actually traveled without a passport photo is hard to verify.)



Steel Town Stops

City: Scranton and Harrisburg
Date: December 1938

On his way back from the Midwest, Rav Elchonon spent Shabbos at Keshet Israel in Harrisburg, where Rav Eliezer Silver had served as the rav from 1907 to 1925. It was now his son Rabbi David Silver who was the beloved rav. Several months earlier, Rav Elchonon had attended Rabbi Silver's wedding at the St. Moritz Hotel in New York. His host in Harrisburg was Rabbi Nathan Fox.

The following week he traveled to Scranton, where he was hosted by Torah Vodaath *musmach* Rabbi Elias Karp. On Motzaei Shabbos he was feted at a fundraising Melaveh Malkah led by local rabbanim, including Rabbi Meilech Schachter (father of Rav Hershel Schachter), as well as Rabbi Henry Guterman.

HARRISBURG SCRANTON



Prominent Rabbi To Visit Scranton
Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, who is internationally known for his scholarly attainments, will be the guest of Scranton Jewry this week-end. Rabbi Wasserman is considered an outstanding leader of Orthodox Jewry. He is now visiting America in behalf of the Polish Yeshiva and he plans to return to Poland next April.
A committee consisting of Rabbi Henry Guterman, Rabbi M. Schachter and Rabbi Elias Karp and prominent Orthodox Jews of the city will welcome him upon his arrival.
A reception will be held tonight in his honor at the Y. M. H. A. Tomorrow morning he will be the guest of the Congregation B'nei Israel, South Washington Avenue, where he will deliver an address. Tomorrow night a *milva malka* has been arranged in his honor by Congregational Anshe Sfard, South Wyoming Avenue. He is to be accompanied here by Rabbi Kahane Shapiro, New York.

A Display of Rabbinic Honor

City: Philadelphia
Date: February 1939

Rav Elchonon's final out-of-town stop was in Philadelphia, where he was honored at several different receptions by the city's rabbanim, including Rabbi Bernard Levinthal, Rabbi Ephraim Yolles, Rabbi Reuven Poupko, Rabbi David Novoseller, Rabbi Dov Ber Shapiro, and nearby Camden's Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Riff. A report on the Ohel Torah yeshiva's difficult economic status was made by his former student Rabbi Avraham Aryeh Poupko.

As was customary for visiting roshai yeshiva, Rav Elchonon delivered a *shiur* at Philadelphia's advanced Talmud Torah, Yeshivas Mishkan Yisroel. In attendance was one of the local rabbinic leaders, Rabbi Moshele Lipschitz, known as the "Philadelphia Rebbe." The results of that encounter became clear a little more than a decade later, when Rabbi Lipschitz urged Rav

Aharon Kotler to send two of his students, Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky and (his son-in-law) Rav Dov Schwartzman to found Philadelphia's first yeshiva of higher learning. The yeshiva was housed at a former branch of Mishkan Yisroel in Strawberry Mansion.

It was also in Philadelphia that Rav Elchonon met the great Torah philanthropist Mrs. Jennie Miller-Faggen and thanked her for her many years of support for the Baranovich yeshiva.

