

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### Rabbi David Lifshitz

A revered teacher, world-recognized authority on *Halakhah* (Jewish law), elder statesmen among rabbinic leaders, and beloved community leader, Rabbi David Lifshitz holds the I. Meier and Henrietta Segals Chair in Talmud at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), an affiliate of Yeshiva University. Known as the Suwalker Rav, he served as rabbi of that Polish city for four-and-a-half years until 1939, when he was forced to flee from the Nazis.

Rabbi Lifshitz has served as *Rosh Yeshiva* (professor of Talmud) at RIETS for 45 years, having been recruited by the late Dr. Samuel Belkin, RIETS' second president, after fleeing from Poland with his wife and child during World War II. Rabbi Lifshitz is considered a *gadol* (exceptional Torah scholar) and has long been involved in all aspects of communal life.

He has been a colleague and friend of some of the greatest rabbinic authorities of this century, including Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, spiritual mentor and senior professor at RIETS; the late Rabbi Moses Feinstein; and the late Rabbi Jacob Kamenetzky.

He has served as president of the Ezras Torah Fund, which helps poor scholars, on the presidium of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the U.S. and Canada, and president of the Suwalki Benevolent Society in the U.S.

Rabbi Lifshitz was born three days before Yom Kippur in 1906, in Minsk, Russia. His father, Yaakov Aryeh, a department-store owner and Talmudic scholar, was the son of Shlomo Zalman, a businessman and author of *Olat Shlomo*, a classic commentary on *Kodshim*, the most obscure of the six sections of the Talmud.

As a child, he was recognized as an *illui* (child prodigy) after displaying an early mastery of Talmud. The depth and breadth of his knowledge included the Hebrew language and Bible as well as Talmud. At the age of 12, he co-authored a commentary on the Biblical books of *Mishlei* (*Proverbs*) and *Daniel*.

In 1919, his family moved to nearby Grodna, where he was a student of the famed Rabbi Shimon Shkop in the Grodna yeshiva (traditional school of Jewish learning). He later studied in the Mirrer yeshiva, where he stayed until 1932 and received *semikhah* (ordination).

In 1933, he married Ciporah Joselovitz, the daughter of the renowned rabbi of Suwalk, a provincial capital, Rabbi Joseph Joselovitz, author of *Minchat Yoseph*, a volume of commentaries and insights on the Talmud, which was posthumously edited and published by Rabbi Lifshitz. Upon the demise of his father-in-law, in 1935, Rabbi Lifshitz became chief rabbi of the city and 27 congregations.

Rabbi Lifshitz became active in communal life and helped Rabbi Hayyim Ozer Grodzinski of Vilna in safeguarding to interest of Orthodoxy.

As rabbi of the city, Rabbi Lifshitz developed the reputation of being a warm, involved spiritual leader, concerned about not only his congregants, but all Jews and non-Jews as well. To this day he remains president of Suwalki Benevolent Society in the U.S.

He was greatly involved with the Jewish education of thousands of children in the city. He also arranged kosher food for the hundreds of Jewish soldiers stationed there.

During Passover, 1939, with the Polish army in emergency preparedness for the Nazi offensive, the army command refused to provide for Jewish soldiers. Rabbi Lifshitz personally approached the commanding general of troops in the city and worked out an arrangement to feed them.

On Rabbi Lifshitz's personal guarantee that they would return to their barracks each night at a certain hour, the soldiers were permitted to go to the main synagogue twice each day, and from there to the kitchen to eat for the Passover seder.

In the autumn of 1939, when war broke out, and Jews being rounded up for deportation to concentration camps, Rabbi Lifshitz chose to stay with his community even though he had opportunities to leave. In November, when word of the German scheme to expel all Jews from the city became known, Rabbi Lifshitz sent off his wife and their two daughters to try and flee across the Lithuanian border. Tragically, in their first, failed attempt the infant, Avivit Rishel, was killed. When she was returned to Suwalk for burial alongside her grandfather, the city's Jews compelled Rabbi Lifshitz to join his bereaved wife and their surviving child in another attempt to escape across the border. Their flight came not a moment too soon; the Nazis were already searching for him and planning to use him as a hostage.

Rabbi Lifshitz and his wife secured a U.S. visa, traveling through the Soviet Union, to Honolulu, then to the U.S. mainland.

From 1941 to 1942, he and his family lived in New York, then moved to Chicago, where he was a rosh yeshiva at the Hebrew Theological College until 1944. During World War II, he was active in Vaad Hatzalah, the official Jewish rescue organization.

Dr. Belkin actively sought to have Rabbi Lifshitz join the RIETS faculty and bring the highly-regarded training he had received in European yeshivas. In 1944, Rabbi Lifshitz came to RIETS as a rosh yeshiva, occupying a post which his mentor, Rabbi Shimon Shkop of Grodno, had filled twelve years earlier as a visiting rosh yeshiva.

After Israel won independence, Rabbi Lifshitz was active in guiding Orthodox Judaism in its relationship to the State of Israel. In the early 1950s, he helped create the movement in Israel for a coalition of all religious elements, both Zionist and non-Zionist. The high esteem which he enjoyed in all religious circles enabled him to establish the *Hazit Datit* (United Religious Front) which ran on a single slate for the Israeli parliamentary elections.

Rabbi Lifshitz has three children: Mrs. Shulamith Kamenetsky, wife of Rabbi Noson Kamenetsky, of Jerusalem, son of the late Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky; Mrs. Chaya Waxman, of

Far Rockaway, N.Y., wife of Dr. Chaim I. Waxman, professor of sociology at Rutgers University in New Jersey and visiting associate professor at the University's David J. Azrieli Graduate Institute of Jewish Education and Administration, and son of the late Rabbi Nissan Waxman; and Mrs. Sara Ittel Stein, of Cleveland, wife of Rabbi Binyamin Moshe Stein, son of the Dean of the Telshe Yeshiva, Rabbi Chaim Stein; and 14 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

~~himself a student of yeshiva~~  
~~and the son of <sup>the late</sup> Rabbi Nissan~~  
~~Waxman~~ ~~both of them from father and~~  
~~mother~~ ~~received Semicha from~~  
~~the Assumachim of Nets~~