

KEVER OF R' CHAIM BRISKER



Basic facts about Rav Chaim Soloveitchik

- ▶ Also known as **Reb Chaim Brisker**.
- ▶ He was born in **Volozhin**, where his father, **Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik** served as a lecturer in a the famous Volozhiner Yeshiva.
- ▶ He is considered the founder of the popular **Brisker approach to Talmudic study**, a method of highly exacting and analytical Talmudical study that focuses on precise definitions and cauterization of Jewish law as commanded in the Torah with particular emphasis on the legal writings of Maimonides.
- ▶ His primary work was **Chidushei Rav Chaim haLevi**.

Quote from Rav Chaim Brisker about Chessed

A person who closes his Gemara because he must perform a Chessed, his Gemara is still open.
A person who opens his Gemara to avoid doing a Chessed, his Gemara is still closed.

Rav Chaim Brisker changed Torah learning all over the world. Yet, at the time he was niftar, this was not what was remembered the most. What everyone remembered was his chessed. On his matzeiva was written the title "Rav HaChessed."

Rav Chaim's house was open to all. In Rav Chaim's living room, beggars would put notices up on the wall. They would sleep on his couches. He would always be careful not to disturb them. Sometimes, his wife or children would walk into the bedroom and find that Rav Chaim had invited some poor people to sleep there and no one in the family had beds.

There was a huge fire in the town and many homes were destroyed. Rav Chaim devoted himself to helping the penniless survivors. Rav Chaim insisted on sleeping in the hallway of the shul. He asked how he could sleep in his bed if there were so many who didn't even have a roof over their heads.

Rav Chaim was once having an important meeting with the Bais Din in Brisk. A pauper came into the room, ate Rav Chaim's lunch, and fell asleep on his couch. Rav Chaim warned everyone there not to disturb the poor man.

Mothers would leave their babies on his doorstep if they were unable to take care of them or if the babies were too sick. Rav Chaim hired women to feed the babies and cared for them in his home.

The people of the town paid Rav Chaim to be their Rav. However, whenever he got a pay check, he immediately gave it away to tzeddaka. They had to give the money to his wife to insure that they would have food.

Rav Chaim had a rule: Anyone could ask for something and the family would need to give it without a complaint. Once someone asked Rav Velvel for his pen. Rav Velvel was in the middle of writing some of the chiddushei Torah of Rav Chaim. Rav Velvel asked him to wait a minute. Rav Chaim got very upset and said, "What is going on here that we don't lend our pens..." (from Holchei Nesivos - Middos Tovos)

Rav Chaim changed the world of Torah. We are all talmidim of his because of the Brisker method, the yeshivos that were founded by his talmidim and from learning about his chessed.

The Chofetz Chaim Speaking About Rav Chaim Brisk

In Brisk, the Chofetz Chaim was asked what he thought was the overarching characteristic of Rav Chaim Brisker. To us, Reb Chaim is considered the father of the Yeshiva world. He taught the world how to learn. He was the founder of the Brisker method of learning, he was the analyst and educator par excellence.

Interestingly, the Chofetz Chaim responded, “Reb Chaim is a gevaldige [tremendous] baal chesed.” It is well known that Reb Chaim’s home was always open. At a time and place where starving parents could not take care of their children, Reb Chaim would find babies on his doorstep and raise them as his own. The Chofetz Chaim pointed out that this aspect of Reb Chaim wasn’t a wrinkle in his personality. Reb Chaim, like Avrohom Avinu, was defined by his kindness.

About the Brisker Method (often referred to simply as “Lomdus”) - (from “What” Hath Brisk Wrought: The Brisker Derekh Revisited by Mosheh Lichtenstein)

The net result of R. Hayyim’s approach is the creation of “thought constructs,” which are far removed from the practical concerns of the posek seeking the practical implications and application of a particular sugya, thereby shifting the emphasis of the beit midrash from a practical halakhic orientation to an ideal theoretical one.