

CBT Highlights: A Tzaddik in Our Time 9/09

A Tzaddik In Our Time: The Life of Rabbi Aryeh Levin by Simcha Raz

Translated by Charles Wengrov

With a foreword by Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits and an introduction by Chaim Herzog

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This classic book remains one of the great stories of one of the greatest men of our time.

Born in Poland in 1885, he was orphaned of his father at an early age. He spent his youth in poverty and deprivation in order to learn Torah, learning with great scholars in Slutsk, Slonim, Volozhin and Brisk. He undertook the long and uncertain journey to Eretz Yisrael and arrived in 1905. During his lifetime he forged a deep friendship with Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (later the first Chief Rabbi of Israel) and was in close contact with nearly all the important spiritual greats of the *yishuv* and early State. Ordained as Rabbi in 1909, Reb Aryeh, as he was known to all, served as 'spiritual advisor' to Yeshiva Etz Chaim in Jerusalem (the building is still standing near the Mahane Yehuda market). There he watched over the pupils in the school, often quietly paying for their needs from his own pocket. He was also known as 'the prisoner's rabbi' because of his unflagging visits and support for imprisoned Jews, both political and criminal. In this capacity, he carried messages between prisoners and their families and tirelessly intervened on their behalf to the British establishment. He was also a regular visitor to the hospital wards in Jerusalem. Reb Aryeh lived an extremely simple life in the material sense (impoverished by anyone's standards) and was known to all for his sincere humility and willingness to help all supplicants to the best of his ability. Though physically frail, he continued to do his good work until his death in 1969. Many considered him one of the Lamed Vavniks.

This book is not told in strictly chronological order but more by thematic material. The translation is easy to read and the episodes recounted are

touching and inspiring. It is worth taking your time to digest this book in small bites rather than trying to plow through it like a novel. (I read a chapter or less every Shabbat for months.) There is a lot to admire and a lot to think about; Reb Aryeh's gentle greatness shines like a brilliant jewel against the turmoil of Israel's turbulent early history and politics.