

Fascinating INSIGHTS

ט' אלול תשפ"ו
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[R' Chaim Vital's Father](#)

We have heard of the well-known student of the Arizal, R' Chaim Vital.¹ But who was his father?

¹ R' Chaim Vital (Likutim in Sefer Hagilgulim, Chapter 66) wrote that since his brother R' Moshe Vital had

committed a certain sin (he noted that he did not know in which incarnation this occurred), he was therefore

It is well known how great R' Yosef Vital, the father of R' Chaim Vital was. He was an outstanding and expert sofer, scribe, of tefillin. R' Chaim Vital² wrote that even R' Yosef Karo, through the Maggid who spoke with him, would say that half the world is sustained in the merit of R' Yosef Vital because of the magnificent tefillin he wrote.

R' Yosef Vital's grandson, R' Shmuel Vital³ records, in the name of the Arizal himself, that he said this concerning his father.

His stature and the quality of the tefillin he wrote were exceedingly renowned. As the Maharikash⁴ writes: R' Yosef Vital was considered the leading authority among the scribes of tefillin in his generation.

The Maharash Narvuni⁵ describes him as a complete scholar, a pious man, and an outstanding scribe who wrote tefillin with holy kavanos. More than a thousand pairs of tefillin had emerged from his hand and were sent to distant lands.



R' Yosef Sambari⁶ states that R' Yosef Vital was a great kabbalist as well as a rapid and accomplished scribe of tefillin. "Fortunate is the person who possessed even one pair of tefillin written by his hand; such tefillin is found in Egypt and are sold there for high prices and they call them 'the tefillin of Rabbi Calabris.'"⁷

R' Shmuel Vital⁸ wrote that the soul of R' Meir Baal Haneis was reincarnated in his grandfather R' Yosef Vital. Since R' Meir Baal Haneis had been a great scribe in his generation, R' Yosef Vital likewise became an outstanding scribe, an expert and unparalleled in his craft. R' Chaim Vital himself writes similarly in Sefer Hagilgulim⁹ as well as the Chida in Shem Hagedolim.¹⁰

still unable to attain the same level of comprehension he was otherwise capable of attaining. Were it not for this, he would have been greater than R' Chaim Vital himself, since both their souls came from the same root, but his brother's root was greater than his own (Otzar Hagilgulim, Amoraim, p. 95).

² In the beginning of Sefer Hachezyonos.

³ Shaar Hagilgulim, Hakdama 38. He was born to his father's (R' Chaim Vital) second wife. His father was 54 and his mother was 24 at the time of his birth.

⁴ Shu"t Ahalei Yaakov, 113.

⁵ Cited in the Teshuvos of the Maharam Galanti, 124.

⁶ Divrei Yosef, 161.

R' Chaim Vital further writes that his father was fitting to become a great and incisive Torah scholar like R' Meir, were it not for a sin from a previous incarnation. He had heard a scholar being disgraced and did not protest. He adds that he does not remember whether the Arizal told him that the reason was connected to a trace of arrogance in wisdom.

R' Chaim Vital also records, in his list of reincarnations among the people of his generation,¹¹ that within his father R' Yosef Vital was vested the soul of R' Yeshaivav Hasofer.¹² For this reason he was an extraordinary expert in writing tefillin. The Chida likewise cites this.¹³

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[Jolting Joke](#)

R' Avraham Genichovsky would say that a person can solve all the world's problems with a good joke. Whenever he sensed tension between people, he would lighten the mood with a well-timed joke, transforming the atmosphere and helping everyone relax.

He would cite the pasuk, **כי בשמחה תצאו**, in joy you shall go out,¹⁴ explaining that joy has the power to free a person from life's troubles. A cheerful spirit can dissolve tension, lift burdens, and open the way to overcoming difficulties.



R' Nachum Shadiker was negotiating with someone on a business deal when suddenly the man began to shout at him. R' Nachum calmy

⁷ This is what R' Yosef Vital was called because he came to Tzefas from Calabria which is in southern Italy.

⁸ Shaar Hagilgulim, Hakdama 38.

⁹ Chapter 65, Likutim.

¹⁰ Erech R' Chaim Vital.

¹¹ Printed in Sefer Hagilgulim in the Likutim to Chapter 65.

¹² He was one of the *asarah harugei malchus* (the ten royal martyrs), which is mentioned in Mussaf of Yom Kippur in Eileh Ezkera.

¹³ Shem Hagedolim, Erech R' Chaim Vital. Otzar Hagilgulim, Volume 1, pp. 363-364.

¹⁴ Yeshaya 55:12.

said, "Don't shout. Someone might think that you are angry with me." With this joke the squabble faded.

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Activated by the Hour

We know there are mitzvos that are מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא, mitzvos which a certain time period activates the obligation.¹⁵ Examples include a Sukkah which is only done for Sukkos or a shofar which is blown on Rosh Hashana. These mitzvos among others are bound by time.

On a deeper level, we can understand מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא in another way. Instead of merely meaning "time-bound mitzvos," it can be understood as "a mitzvah generated by the time itself." Certain moments create unique spiritual responsibilities. We need to understand the unique calling and demand of a particular time. There are moments when Heaven seems to say: This is what is being asked of you now.

After October 7, many Jews felt such a call. People who had never before involved themselves in kiruv, Jewish identity, tefillin campaigns, spreading Torah learning, creating unity, chesed, or support for fellow Jews suddenly felt awakened. This period created a new "zman," and with it, a new mitzvah. A mitzvah born from the urgency of the hour.

Another example was in times of mass immigration to America, many rabbanim felt the urgent need to build yeshivos and preserve Shabbos observance in an environment where both were collapsing. One last example is after the Six-Day War, there was a tremendous awakening among Jews worldwide. Many became involved in Torah outreach and reconnected estranged Jews to their heritage.

The Unnamed City

At a goodbye party at Ohr Somayach for R' Mordechai Becher, when he was leaving Eretz Yisrael for Toronto for kiruv purposes, R' Moshe Shapiro addressed the gathering. R' Becher was

not happy about leaving Eretz Yisrael, and R' Shapiro sought to encourage him.



R' Shapiro noted that the Rambam¹⁶ in Moreh Nevuchim¹⁷ asks why Yerushalayim is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the Chumash (in Tanach it's mentioned many times). Instead, the Torah repeatedly refers to it as המקום אשר יבחר ה', the place that Hashem will choose.¹⁸ The Rambam provides three answers.

But R' Shapiro offered an additional insight. For you, "The place that Hashem will choose" may not always mean the geographical Yerushalayim. A person's "Yerushalayim"—the place where Hashem wants him to fulfill his mission—may turn out to be New York, London, a small town or somewhere else entirely. This is precisely why the Torah doesn't mention Yerushalayim.

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Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of Rabbi Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years and received semichah from Rabbi Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written thousands of Torah articles on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of thirteen fascinating and popular books. His writings, many of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Spanish and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. His shiurim can be found on various websites including Kol Halashon's. Rabbi Alt lectures, writes and teaches, and is passionate about inspiring Jews of all levels of observance. He can be reached at yalt3285@gmail.com or on WhatsApp at +972 54 849 5217.

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¹⁵ See Kiddushin 29a.

¹⁶ R' Chaim Vital related that the soul of the author of the *Magid Mishnah* had a close connection with the soul of the Rambam and therefore he authored the *Magid Mishnah* on the Rambam (Cited in Otzar Hagilgulim, Rishonim and Achronim, p. 42).

¹⁷ The Rambam wrote his *Moreh Nevuchim*, *Sefer Hamitzvos* and his Commentary on the Mishnah in Judeo-Arabic. The Hebrew editions that have been

studied for centuries are translations of these original Judeo-Arabic texts. *Moreh Nevuchim*, *Sefer Hamitzvos* and parts of his *Mishnah commentary* were translated by R' Shmuel ibn Tibbon, a contemporary of the Rambam. Although the two never met in person, they wrote to each other and the Rambam advised him on how to do the translation.

¹⁸ See, for example, Devarim 12:5.