

Rabbi Shlomo Luria (Maharshal)

Yahrzeit date: 12th of Kislev, 1574

Rabbi Shlomo was one of the greatest Talmudic masters of his age.

He was born in 1510 and died in Lublin, Poland 1574. He himself cites a family tradition that Rashi was his ancestor.

He originally taught in the Yeshiva of Rabbi Sholom Shachne, who was the teacher of the Rama (the co-author of the Shulchan Oruch). But within a short period an estrangement cropped up between the two. As Rabbi Haim Chernovitz (Rav Za'ir) in his monumental work "Toldot Ha-Poskim", (volume three, pp. 85-87) explains, Rabbi Sholom Shachne's Torah study method was based on hair splitting Pilpul, based on writings of the Tosafists and latter day commentaries.

However, Rabbi Shlomo emphasized again and again that we were not ever authorized to swerve from the dictums of the Talmud, even if latter day Minhag abetted it. (This opinion is so too corroborated by the Maharal, "Netivot O'lam", Torah, end of chapter 15. So too by the Wilna Ga'on, Comments to Shulchan Oruch, Choshen mishpat, chapter 25 comment six). So too Rabbi Shlomo strongly discouraged far fetched explanations which were "sharp, but not true". However most yeshiva people in his period, especially in Poland, took Rabbi Shachne's stand. Many disciples forsook Rabbi Shlomo, which hurt him deeply (See Hebrew Encyclopdia, volume 21, page 565).

Not only that, but Rabbi Shlomo amassed many Talmudic manuscripts and attempted to rearrange the proper wording of the Talmudic texts. As well known, the first publishers of the Talmud (about the year 1520) were not precise and didn't examine thoroughly the manuscripts that they used. See the remarks of the Bach on every page of the Talmud. Due to this, Rabbi Shlomo wrote his gloss "**Chochmat Shlomo**", printed at the end of every volume of the Talmud (under the Maharsha). His words there are a joy for every keen analyst.

Rabbi Shlomo was also dissatisfied with the Halachic work of the Rambam. Although he appreciated fully the tremendous genius of the Rambam, nevertheless he thought it to be a great shortcoming that the Rambam did not cite his Talmudic sources. There Rabbi Shlomo composed his "**Yam shel Shlomo**" (which he only succeeded in authoring for seven tractates) where he placed a short

paragraph summing up the law involved, and elaborated to prove the backing for this law, from Talmudic sources onwards. This work is considered one of the classics, since it is lucid, clear and competent.

In the foreword to this book, he elaborated on a very important theme (this introduction is published there twice, preceding Baba Kamma and so too Tractate Betza).

Rabbi Shlomo is against accepting blindly the rulings of the famous Shulchan Oruch. This is astonishing, how could this be?

The answer is that Rabbi Shlomo believes that the authors involved trespassed the law of "Lo Titgo-dedu" (not to split the nation of Israel into sects and sub-sects (as written in Yevamot 14a and so too in Rambam, Hilchot Avoda Zara, chapter 12 paragraph 14).

- When Rabbi Joseph Karo based his Halachic decisions upon the majority decision between the Big Three (Rif, Rambam, Rosh) he thereby placed the decision amongst the Sefardic rulings.
- So too when the Rama based his decisions on the sophists: Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg, Maharil etc. He decided according to ethnic Ashkenazi rulings.

Declared Rabbi Shlomo hotly: is the Torah to be decided according to family lines? Sefardies will do only according to Sefardis, and Ashkenazies only according to Ashkenazim? Is this not transgressing a Biblical commandment? We must see and verify who is in the right, sometimes it will be the Sefardi, sometimes it will be the Ashkenazi.

Another great opponent to reliance on the Shulchan oruch, and not harking back to the ancient Talmudic sources, was the **Maharal** (abovequoted, "Netivot O'lam", Torah, end of chapter 15, and so too in his work on Avot, page 305).

So too the **Maharsha** derided those who "paskened" as per the Shulchan Oruch, in his commentary to Sotah, 20a "mevalei Olam".

This quality of loving the truth more than one loves or honors any Talmid Chacham or Gadol, is repeated again by Rabbi Chaim Wolohzin ("Ruach Haim", chapter one mishna four, and again quite sharply in his responsa "Hut Hashoni" part one' chapter 9, paragraph "veha dekatav" "Lo lisa panim be-hora'ah").

It is therefore quite understandable that Rabbi Shlomo caused quite a furor in his age. He himself was piqued at the fact that many disciples deserted him.

Nevertheless he had the temperament of a lion and didn't relax his full vigor. He writes in his foreword that many passages in his commentary took him weeks to compose, and he had scant sleep at nights, until he verified the truth. Even the great Rama, who was his brother in law (according to the Encyclopedia) he chastised for his studying the philosophy of the Moreh Nevuchim!

- Added to the above works, he also authored "**Amudei Shlomo**", commentaries to the Book of Commandments composed by the Semag;
- so too "**Yeriot Shlomo**", explanations to Rashi's words on the Torah, and rebuttals to Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi's criticisms of Rashi;
- so too "**Ateret Shlomo**" halachic kashrut decisions added to "Sha'arei Dura".
- So too he wrote a commentary to Birchat ha-mazpon and Zemirot Shabbat (published in Venice, 1603).

Most important is his response (published in Lublin, 1574). In this work, he displays complete independence.

It is well known that according to the Zohar, one should not wear Tefillin during Hol ha-moed, since it is a holiday. Although Rabbi Shlomo was quite proficient in kabbalistic lore, he clearly states that since the Talmud doesn't mention this prohibition, even if Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would appear before us and exhort us, we wouldn't obey him, since he is only a minority opinion, against all the rest of the Talmudic sages (Responsa, chapter 98). This manner of expression is certainly extraordinary and indicates a man of character who is absolutely certain of his convictions.

Due to his tempestuous character, his language was fiery (see several quotes by Rabbi Chernovitz, pp. 85-86) and caused his words and opinions to be disputed. Nevertheless, those who have a keen sense of scholarship and can objectively appreciate truth for its own sake, divested of any flowery or murky language; these can understand the great value of Rabbi Shlomo's contribution.

May his merit stand to our stead.