

RABBI JACOB (from city of) **EMDEN**

Also called: **Ya'avez** (acrostic: Ya'akov ben Zvi)

Born 1697, Yahrzeit date: 30th Nissan, 1,776

This great Rabbi was a genius in nearly every field of Torah study. He was fully proficient in Talmudic lore, knew many Midrashim by heart, had a wide knowledge of Zohar and Arizal abstrusities, was a master of Hebrew grammar (dikduk) and of course was a Master of Biblical knowledge, and so too had broad knowledge of history and allied fields. Beyond all that, he was a great polemicist, battling valiantly against anyone alleged to be an adherent of the pseudo Messiah, Shabbatai Zvi. It is possible that due to his perceiving the great gap between his knowledge of the Torah (bik'tav and ba'al peh) and that of his contemporaries, he recognized the great responsibility resting on his shoulders so that he do all possible so to save the generation. (See on this point the Hebrew Encyclopedia, volume 26, p. 874).

It is important to know that the many quarrels and disputes amongst the Rabbis during the past two thousand years of our Exile amongst the nations, most of these were pre-ordained by G-d. So writes Maharal ("Netzach Israel", chapter 25) that if not for that, if Klall Israel would be unified with one heart, they would certainly bring about the Redemption immediately, before its time. Of course there is free-will, and each person sinning with unjustified hatred towards his fellow Jew will eventually be punished for that. Nevertheless there is the Intervening Hand of G-d which in a universal way brings about the goals that He desires (So writes the great sage Rebbe Zadok ha-Kohen, and so too Rabbi Kook).

Therefore, although there certainly is individual personal responsibility for all quarrels and disputes, and people will be judged if to be punished therefore; nevertheless in a broad scope it is all under the purvey of Divine Planning, so to bring about the goals that He plans. Therefore the Rabbis involved in feuds are not entirely at fault.



In order to have a true picture of the wide expanses of his knowledge, let us copy here a list of the publications that he penned and published, and this will show us amply his wide command of Torah study.

1. **Em le-Binah** – Comments on the twenty four books of the Bible, basically concerning the repetitions, so too the many synonyms and explaining the need for each one.
2. **Em le-massoret** – Remarks on the alleged mistakes of many of the commentators to the Bible.
3. **Gal ed** – concerning proper punctuation.
4. **Machanayim** – a commentary to the Bible based on Sodot Ha-Torah
5. **Gilyon** (glosses) to the Talmud- this has been published by the Wilna Shass (print of 1842), and is standard at the end of every Tractate of the (photo-copied) Talmud
6. Siddur Tefillah, called **Beit Ya'akov** – the first edition was printed by the author, but subsequent editions were marred by incompetents who altered or added at will. In our period the Eshkol Publishing Co. (Jerusalem) has put out a competent edition.
7. **Amudei Shomayim** – Prayers to be said upon different days of the week (including Ma'amadot)
8. **Sha'arei Shomayim** – An almanac concerning the intrinsic values of each of the twelve months of the year.
9. **Birchot Shomayim** – concerning truth and faith
10. **Lechem Shomayim** – a four volume work, commenting on the six orders of Mishna
11. **Midrash Seder Olam Rabba and Zutah**, edited and annotated by our author
12. **Ezer Or** (mentioned in "Lechem Shomayim" p. 16)
13. **Etz Avot** – a lengthy commentary to Pirkei Avot
14. **Lu'ach Eresh** – concerning proper grammar of the Siddur T'filot
15. **Halacha P'suka** – concerning Shulchan O'ruch Orach Haim
16. **Mor u'Ketzia** – concerning Shulchan O'ruch, Orach Haim
17. **Sh'lall Beitzim** – concerning Tractate Beitzta
18. Kuntress **Syag le-Torah** – about Ta'am Le-pgam
19. **She'elot u'Tshuvot Shei'lat Ya'avetz**
20. Kuntress **Tzitzat Zvi Novell** – against the Sabbatean custom of Birchat Kohanim on every Shabbat even in the diaspora
21. **Iggeret Bi-koret** – concerning the P'sak of Rabbi Yechezkel Katzneilbogen (of Altona) about a eunuch
22. **Kishurim le-Ya'akov** – This book has several sections:
 - A: Drashot by our author,
 - B: Yatzev Pitgam, (a eulogy on his father, the Hacham Zvi);
 - C: Michtav Ollo (re: eating on Erev Yom Kippur);
 - D: Michtav le-Hizkia (re Pesach, the gemarra on page 66a concerning Hillel);
 - E: Sha'agat Aryeh (a eulogy on his brother in law);
 - F: Shemesh Tzedaka (a Drasha on the occasion of the marriage of his nephew);
 - G: Sha'arei Ezra;
 - H: T'fillat Yesharim (re: the suggya in Berachot 27b, whether Arvit is obligatory or voluntary);
 - I: Holi Ketem, 28 pages of Mussar.
23. **Hilchata le-Meshicha** – concerning the Geula

24. **Tzitzim u'Perachim** – Gematriot pertaining to the secrets of the Zohar and Arizal (this has been reprinted recently).
25. Kolan Shel Sofrim – this is a five volume work, concerning several Tractates of the Talmud, at present in manuscript form in the Oxford Library
26. Mitpachat Sofrim – a critical work dealing with the authenticity of the Zohar literature. He claims that altho the gist is true, many have been the additional inserts which following generations have added to the original text, and not all is genuine
27. **Tza'akat Damim** – concerning a touchy problem (see Mor u'ketzia, chap. 307)
28. **Mishpat Shalom** – mediating peace between bickering communities
29. **Migdal Oz** – a compilation of Halacha and Mussar
30. **Megillat Sefer** (published in Warsaw, 1897) – an autobiography (very rare to be written by a Gadol be-Torah) which has great value to reveal to the reader the workings of his thoughts, and what were the major sources (human beings, or written sources) that made their impression or impact upon Rebbe Ya'akov.

Add to the above another 24 booklets and pamphlets dealing with the terrible feud with Rabbi Yonatan Eibshutz (who has by now been proven innocent of the alleged charges against him). The most important of these is:

- "**Torat ha-Kana'ut**" (1752),
- "**Edut bi'Yaakov**" (1756)
- "**Shvirat Luchot Ha'Aven**" (1756)
- "**Hit'avkut Ish**" (1762).

Aside from all the above we have 61 books of different authors, with Rabbi Yaakov's comments written on their margins (Mishnayot, Ramban to the Torah, the Rambam, the Zohar, Hovot Halvovot, Sefer Hasiddim, Moreh Nevuchim etc.) All are yet in the libraries of the Oxford and London Universities. See a complete list in the Preface to "Lechem Shomayim", pub. year 1958.

All this proves that he was most prolific.



Now let us touch upon his personal character.

We know that he had direct personal contact with the Head of the Rationalist philosophers in Germany, Moses Mendelsohn (with the passage of time, the Assimilations utilized his good name, as if he was the Father of their anti-Halacha trends. **Nothing could be further from the truth**, since he personally was a devout Jew).

There is a 12 volume series of books called "Mendelsohn", collecting hundreds of letters of correspondence to him and from him. Some of these were from Rabbi Ya'akov Emden and show his high regard for him. See the one dated Nov. 1773, item 55. See too "Shi'lat Ya'avetz", part two, item 156.

The article concerning Rabbi Emden in the Hebrew Encyclopedia (vol. 26 p. 874) writes as follows (loosely translated from the Hebrew): "[A] His rich and literary style, so too his attitude of tolerance towards Christians, [B] so too his biting criticism against some backward habits of Polish Jewry, these brought about some rapprochement between him and the first of the Maskilim. [C] Although Rabbi Emden opposed and resisted the study of philosophy, so too the critical approach to Torah sources, yet he permitted the studies of the Natural Sciences".



Let us now scan some of his most interesting innovations.

[1] The abovementioned point, not to hate or curse the Christians, is mentioned in his explanation to the blessing of "Birkat ha-Minim" (Eshkol ed. p. 262) and so too in his "Lu'ach Eresh" (Birkat ha-Minim). It is interesting that Maharal (end of "Be'er ha-Golah") takes a similar approach. Rebbe Ya'akov also adjures that it is prohibited to lie to a Gentile (Siddur, p. 399) or to delude him in any way (p. 402).

[2] Rabbi Ya'akov teaches a novel approach that it is unwise of a Boor, a person lacking the proper Intelligence Quotient, to attempt to become a Talmid Hacham. Instead of even attempting to sit in the Beit ha-Midrash, he should go out and earn his livelihood (ibid. pp. 369, 371). He teaches that even a Talmid Hacham should deal with Derech Eretz (worldly matters) and not be supported by others (ibid. Pp. 69, 394) and he advises to bolt from taking loans (p. 397).

[3] So too he strongly advises to do physical exercise (calisthenics) (Etz Avot, chap. one, Ehav et ha-Melacha; so too chap. 6 "u-beTorah ata Amell") and claims that since Talmidei Hahamim are lax in doing physical exercise therefore they are weak and nearly constantly sick. It is interesting that the Rambam too emphasizes this point (Guide to the Perplexed, part 3 chap. 25).



We shall conclude with his great advocacy of coming to live in Eretz Israel (Siddur, Eskol edition, pp. 43-50). It impossible to synapse his words properly, not doing them damage by citing hem in brief. Nevertheless we shall cite two or three points:

- He says that it is impossible to be close to the G-dly Presence, if not there. He who forsakes the country, automatically forsakes the Torah too (p. 44).
- Those who turn their bodies towards the direction of Eretz Israel before Tefillat Amidah (as Hazzal in Berachot 30a directed us to do) this Segulah only avails he who finds it impossible to make personal Aliya. But he who can, the substitute device of turning the human body is not enough (p. 48).
- He also writes there (page 44) that all of the Talmud, Midrashim and Zohar are replete with mentions of the great mitzva of Yishuv Eretz Israel.
- Rebbe Ya'akov writes that one should not comply with a minhag if it counters that what is written in the Talmud (Siddur, p. 228).
- He also gets enthused at the greatest miracles of all history, the success of Am Israel to stay alive and vibrant despite all the persecutions of the Gentiles (Siddur, p. 12).

He who wishes to see more pearls of wisdom, should hark back to the sources, the books aforementioned.