

R' Elazar Mayer Preil z"l, Week of January 21, 2006

R' Elazar Mayer Preil was born in Lithuania in 1878, and was orphaned at a young age. At age 13, the future R' Preil ran away from his foster parents' home when they insisted that he stop learning and devote his full time to farming. He fled to Telz, where he was taken in R' Yosef Leib Bloch and his wife, the daughter and son-in-law of the rosh hayeshiva, R' Eliezer Gordon.

When R' Preil was 17, R' Bloch left Telz for the town of Shadova, and R' Preil, newly married, went with him. In addition to teaching at the yeshiva there, R' Preil worked as a pharmacist and as a photographer.

Following the death of his first wife and their only child, R' Preil moved to England. There he served first as a fundraiser for the Telz Yeshiva, and, beginning in 1907, as rabbi in Manchester. In 1911, he moved to the United States, where his brother-in-law, R' Avraham Nachman Schwartz (1871-1937) was a prominent rabbi in Baltimore.

In the U.S., R' Preil taught at Yeshivat Etz Chaim, the precursor to Yeshiva Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan and Yeshiva University, from 1912-1924. He also served as rabbi in Trenton, New Jersey, and then in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He also was an officer of the Central Relief Fund (to help Jews devastated by World War I) and was a founder and secretary of the charity Ezras Torah.

In 1920 R' Preil authored A Handbook for the Jewish Woman, devoted to the mitzvot that are incumbent upon women. In this book, he became one of the first rabbis to call for organized Jewish education for girls, arguing that the home could no longer be trusted to provide the education that girls needed. In that same year he turned his words into action, founding a day school in Elizabeth which taught Jewish studies in the morning and secular studies in the afternoon. The school lasted only three years. R' Preil also tried to establish a mikvah in Elizabeth, but the community insisted that the one in Newark was close enough.

R' Preil also authored two volumes entitled Hamaor. The first volume collects his responsa on halachic/legal and Hashkafic Jewish-philosophers topics. The second volume includes Torah commentary and sermons.

R' Preil died on Erev Sukkot 5694/October 3, 1922. His second wife, Freida Mann (1890-1972), bore him four children. In his will, R' Preil asked that his rabbinic position in Elizabeth be reserved for whomever his oldest daughter would marry, if he proved worthy. That man was R' Mordechai Pinchas Teitz z"l, who was to serve as rabbi of Elizabeth for six decades. (Source: Learn Torah, Love Torah, Live Torah, ch. 6).