

Rabbi Yitzchak Shilat

The Prize Committee found Rav Yitzchak Shilat worthy of the 2021 Katz Prize for his wide-ranging activities implementing halacha in modern life - for the works he wrote, translated and edited; for the many fields of interest which his works focus on; for how his compositions connect learners' diverse worlds to their practical needs; and for the literary projects that he initiated and heads.

Rav Yitzchak Shilat is a unique figure in the field of Torah literature. On the one hand, he is an outstanding, well known talmid chacham, from among the founders and heads of Yeshivat Ma'aleh Adumim. On the other hand, he holds a BA in mathematics and a master's degree in scientific philosophy from the Hebrew University. He also is expert in the Medieval Ages Jewish-Arabic vernacular.

Rav Shilat has enriched Torah literature over forty-five years, creating classics in various fields. His first book, '**Bei'urin D'Esá**' (Jerusalem 1974) -- "An Anthology of Annotations on the Tractate of Brachot Written While Doing Army Service During the the Yom Kippur War", was dedicated to the author's friend who fell in the war. His most recent achievement is the completion of his magnum opus - **HaRambam HaMeduyak** -- the Definitive Rambam.

His broad and multi-faceted literary initiatives stand on the pillar of a deep commitment to education and to the public, impressive language skills and outstanding diligence. These splendid fruits have brought it about that there is not one educated Jew today, whether from the world of the Torah or the world of science, who doesn't utilize his compositions in the three main fields he deals with: a) Elucidating Talmudic topics; b) The writings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook; c) The Rambam's works. What is common in all these is Rav Shilat's commitment to the precise original versions of their authors. He meticulously focuses on every word, whether

it seems important or trivial, and elucidates it in clear and concise terms. Here is a short list of his works:

Birurei Sugyot

He has written two kinds of compositions to clarify Talmudic topics: The first type focuses on analyzing the topic and how the Rishonim understand it. The first of these compositions was '**Zichron Teruah**' on topics involving blowing the shofar (published in Jerusalem in 1975, with a second edition in 1994). This composition established a new standard for systematic, precise and lucid clarification of halacha. The topics in the book are flawlessly arranged and encompassing in their reach. The author followed this approach in his books '**Rosh Devorcha**' on topics in Kriyat Shema (published in Ma'aleh Adumim in 1996) and '**Harerim HaTeluyim**' - rules concerning work on Shabbat (published in Ma'aleh Adumim in 2003).

To understand the background to Rav Shilat's second type of halacha work, we have to first diverge and discuss an unusual composition by the author: The book '**B'Toroto shel Rav Gedalia**' (published in Ma'aleh Adumim in 2004 with a second and expanded edition in 2012). The composition came into being due to the truth-seeking that characterizes Rav Shilat: He heard of the fame of Rav Gedalia Nadel, and sought to learn Torah from him despite being a renowned Torah scholar himself. After Rav Nadel's death, Rav Shilat prepared Rav Nadel's chiddushim displaying his original and innovative thinking and his persistent search for the truth.

Under the influence of Rav Nadal's teachings, Rav Shilat elucidated how to derive the halacha from our sages' writings. This led to the publication during over a decade of his '**B'Mesila Ha'Olah**' series of books on Talmudic tractates, with volumes published so far on 9 tractates.

Another of Rav Shilat's initiatives in recent years which is based on Rav Nadal's method, is a comprehensive clarification of current halachic

issues which go to the heart of each Torah subject's profound intent, and deriving from them a practical connection to the halacha. To date, he has published '**Refuah, Halacha v'Kavanot haTorah**' (published in Jerusalem in 2014) which won the Ministry of Health Prize for 2019. This work deals with questions of critical importance (such as determining the moment of death, organ transplantation, abortion, etc.). Another volume '**Ishut, Halacha v'Kavanot haTorah**' (published in Jerusalem in 2018), includes discussions on personal and family matters, while offering new solutions to the complex problems that arise when a person refuses to give a divorce to a spouse and release him or her from their married status.

The author's commitment to Torani education gave rise to the two-volume composition '**Al HaRishonim**' and '**Al HaAchronim**'. These educational books assist learners in understanding the history of the Rishonim and Achronim and what their compositions contributed to Torah literature. (An updated second edition was published in Jerusalem in 2017.)

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook's teachings

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook's teachings are the pristine mountain peak air breathed by our author. Rav Kook's philosophical writings were collected and arranged according to subjects by his great students, who also instituted several changes in them. In 1999, Rav Shilat published '**Shemoneh Kovetzim**', which contain eight notebooks of Rav Kook's manuscripts exactly as they were written, without editing or touching the text, thereby enabling everyone to study Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook's teachings in his exact words.

Rambam's writings

The magnum opus of our author's literary works is his publication of the Rambam's writings. Rav Shilat acquired astonishing mastery of the Medieval Ages Jewish-Arabic dialect, and built on this foundation his first initiatives in this area:

1) **Igrot Rambam** - two volumes of the Rambam's letters, published in Jerusalem in 1987 and 1988 (with two editions published since then). Here, Rav Shilat built a structure from the foundation: He first determined what should be included in the corpus of letters; then he examined the manuscripts of all the Rambam's extant letters in libraries worldwide and determined their preferred formulation. Then, if necessary, he translated the material from Arabic, while carefully utilizing the Hebrew nearest to the spirit of the period and while first presenting the Arabic source. On top of that, he added annotations showing where parallel ideas appear in the Rambam's writings as well as his own incisive commentary. This outstanding Torani and scientific edition shines an authentic spotlight on the Rambam's monumental figure.

2) **Hakdamot HaRambam L'Mishnah**, the Rambam's Introduction to the Mishnah (published in Jerusalem in 1992, with another two editions published since). Here, Rav Shilat collected the Rambam's famous introductions from his commentary on the Mishnah and translated it in his usual manner, with prefaces and detailed commentary. One can see his mastery of commentary as well as his skill in painstaking research and proofreading. He combined these two skills to produce outstanding results.

3) Over the years from 1954 to 2005, he published four tractates from the **Mishnah with the Rambam's commentary**. He thereby completed Rav Kapach's enterprise enhancing the Rambam's commentary on the Mishnah, for those tractates where the Rambam's writings were not available to Rav Kapach.

4) Rav Shilat's boldest enterprise was **'HaRambam HaMeduyak'** - the Definitive Rambam. The Rambam's Mishnah Torah has maintained its place at the center of Torah study since it was written, but many errors crept in to the original text, as the Rambam himself testified. Rav Shilat was the first to establish authoritative standards for correcting these errors: first one should search for manuscripts where there is evidence that it was proofread from the (lost) work written by the author, followed by checking the wording from Oriental manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza, or from Syria and the Land of Israel, which were closest to the source. Based on these principles and the database of relevant Geniza fragments, Rav Shilat set to work and has until now published 11 out of the 14 volumes of the Mishnah Torah. The remaining three books are already in the print stages. The Rambam's masterpiece will soon be available in a critical edition as close to the original as possible - for the first time in its history.

Rav Yehuda Halevy's revelatory and vivid book, the Kuzari, stands in contrast to the teachings of Rambam, the rational philosopher. Our author was also occupied with the tension between the approaches of these spiritual giants. Hence his composition **'Bein HaKuzari l'Rambam: Limud Mashveh'** ("A comparative study of the Kuzari and the Rambam," published in Ma'aleh Adumim in 2011). This work shows the root of their perceptual differences by analyzing a range of fundamental issues. To give the Kuzari's teachings a solid basis, he prepared a new translation of the Kuzari based on the Arabic versions that we possess today. (His translation of the **'Kuzari'** was published in Ma'aleh Adumim in 2010.) Rav Shilat provided an accurate and reliable translation of this classic of Jewish philosophy almost parenthetically.

Rav Shilat's outstanding initiative around the Rambam's writings was enough to confer the Katz Prize on him. But this enterprise joins his large range of Torah literature initiatives which has established him as a trailblazer to his students, to Torah learners, to those seeking guidance and to authors who seek to bridge the world of halacha of the past with our lives today. Rav Shilat's contribution in all the fields we described is decisive and unique. There is no one more deserving than him for the 2021 Katz Prize.

In consideration of all the above, the selection committee has decided to award Yitzchak Shilat the Katz Prize for 2021.

Professor Menahem Ben-Sasson

Rabbi Shlomo Dichovski

Rabbi Haim Sabato

