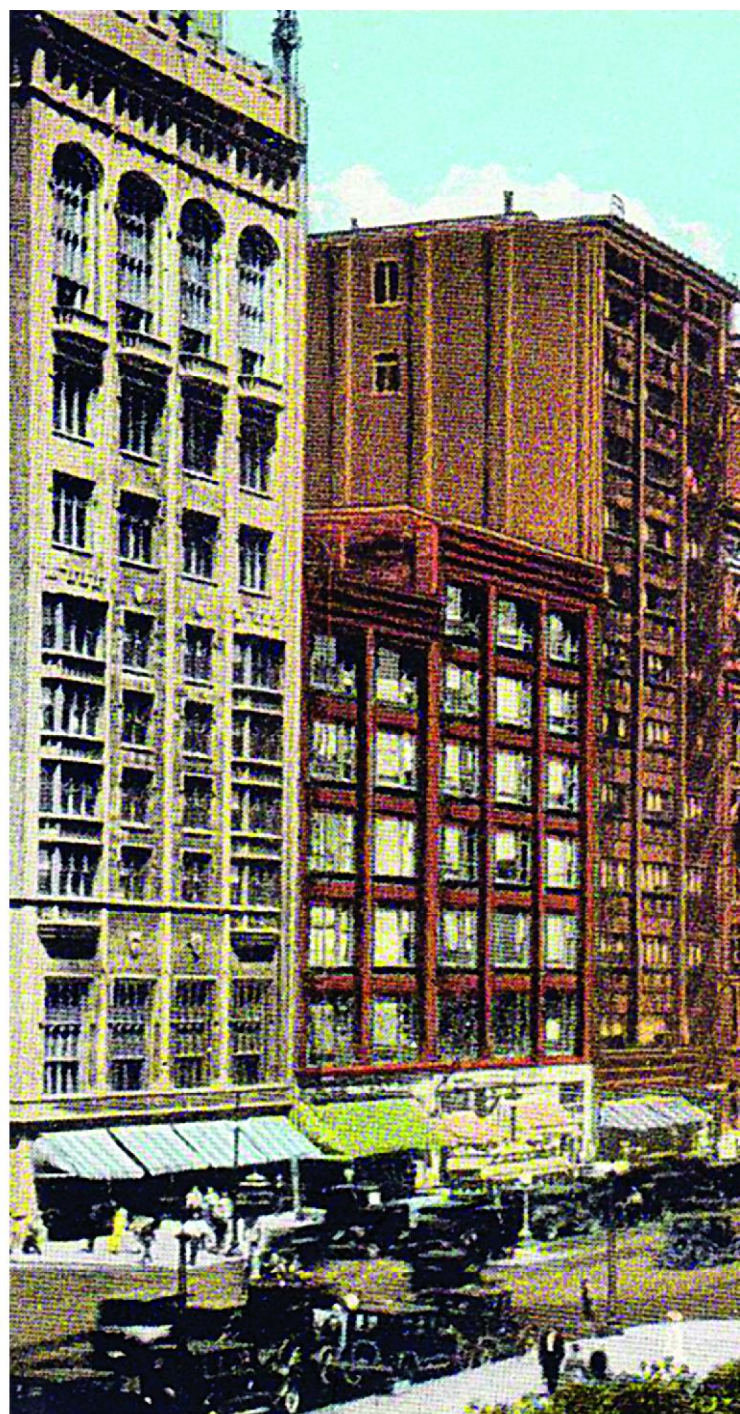


AMERICA'S NOBLE TORAH FAMILIES

# To Do What is Right



*The Story of  
Reb Pesach  
Stein of  
Chicago*

BY DEVORAH KLEIN





A postcard showing Chicago's Michigan Blvd. and Grant Park, in the 1920s.

*It was Leil Shabbos in Chicago, 1940. Aharon Greenberg was in no rush to leave shul. He had just lost another job because he refused to work on Shabbos, and he had exhausted all possibilities for finding work. Money was scarce; why should he rush home to an empty table?*

*When he finally arrived home with his son, Mendel, his wife and daughters were waiting. Mrs. Greenberg led the family out the door to Zion Kosher Restaurant, where one could get delicious Shabbos food and pay after Shabbos. Mrs. Greenberg sat down and ordered one portion of food. Reb Pesach Stein, the restaurant owner, looked at the seven hungry faces in front of him, quickly assessed the*

*situation and returned with ample, delicious food befitting a heimish Shabbos seudah.*

*Mr. Greenberg was filled with simchah that he would have a proper Shabbos seudah after all, and burst into joyous zemiros. Others were caught up in his enthusiasm, and before long, the entire restaurant was filled with the melodious ruach of Shabbos.*

*After Shabbos, Mrs. Greenberg returned to the restaurant to ask how much she owed. Reb Pesach told her a ridiculously low amount, stating, "I should pay you. Your husband's singing brought me many satisfied customers." (As related in this magazine in a previous article.)*



## The Early Years: Arrival in America

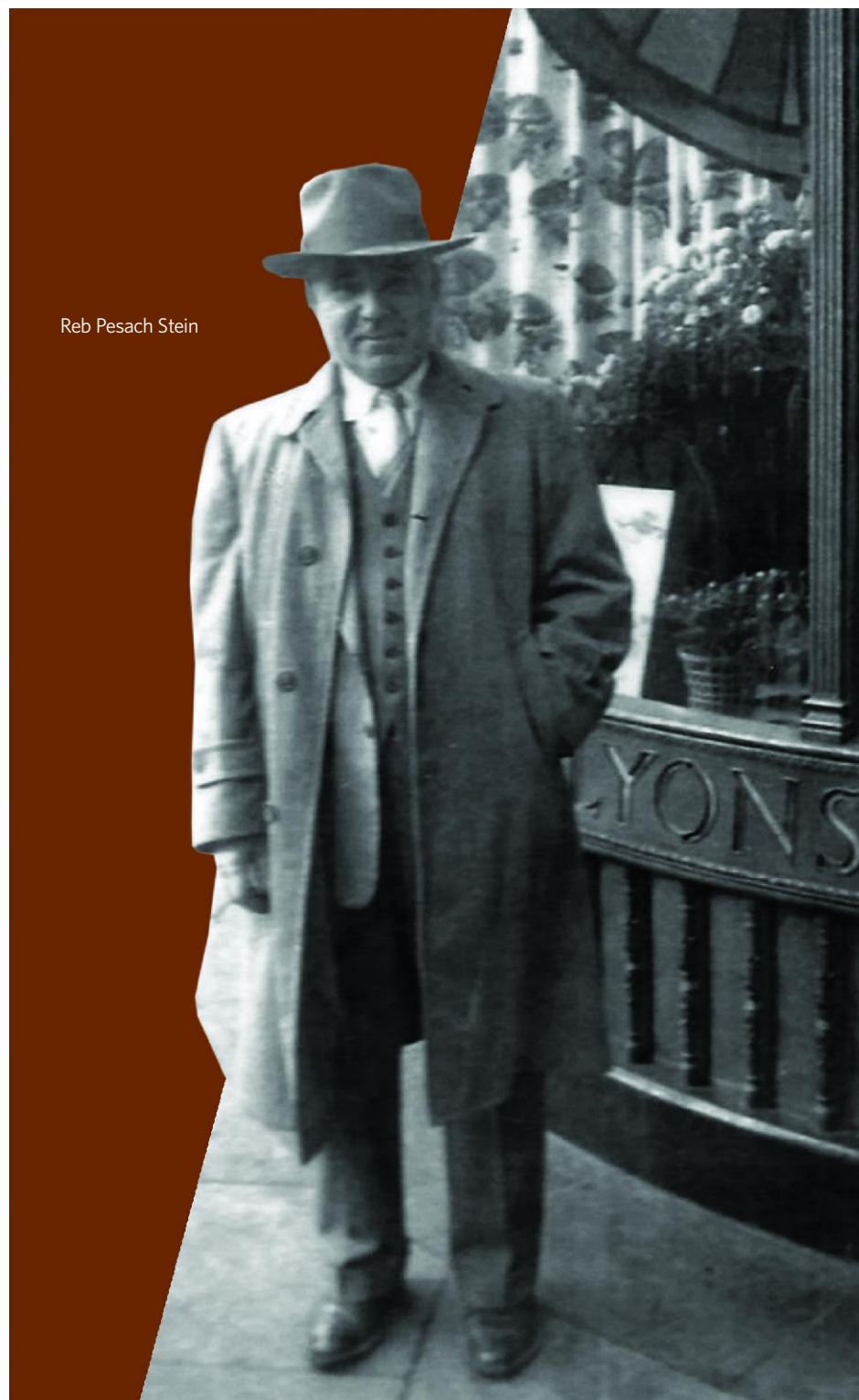
Pesach Stein was born in 1895 in a small village near Ponevezh, Lithuania, where his father, Reb Shlomo Yitzchak Stein, served as Rav. At the age of twelve Reb Pesach began to learn in the Ponevezh Yeshivah, and he later studied for three years in the famous yeshivah in Kelm. The *limudim* and *mussar* that he imbibed in Kelm remained with him for the rest of his life.

In 1913, when Pesach was seventeen years old, his mother's brother Reb Zelig Cohen, who was living in Chicago, wrote him a letter warning that if he stayed in Europe, he would be drafted into the Russian army, which was "*Gehinnom*," and begged him to come to America. With his parents' blessing, Pesach followed his uncle's advice and immigrated to the United States.

Soon after arriving in America, Pesach settled in Chicago where his older brother had previously settled. Unfortunately, this brother was no longer living a life of Torah and *mitzvos*. He invited his younger brother to come live with him on condition that he would no longer wear his *yarmulke*. Pesach, always a stubborn and independent person, refused to be swayed and remained strongly committed to *Yiddishkeit*. He often cited the *chinuch* he received in Kelm as having given him guidance for his entire life, which enabled him to retain his beliefs, despite being virtually alone in a strange land.

Pesach connected with his three uncles who were living in Chicago, the oldest of whom was Reb Zelig Cohen, who helped him secure employment in a dry-goods store. He soon realized that many Jewish youths in Chicago faced difficulties in maintaining their observance of Shabbos, and therefore became actively involved in founding the Adas Bnei Yisrael, an organization devoted to strengthening *shemiras hamitzvos* and Jewish education.

In 1924, sensing that the situation in Europe was deteriorating and would no longer be safe for Jews, he traveled back



Reb Pesach Stein

to Europe to visit his family and try to convince them to come to America. However, his family knew of the assimilation that was rampant in America and refused to go. Sadly, nearly all his relatives were later killed by the Nazis.

## Establishing Family, Business, and Chessed

In 1927 Pesach Stein married Baila Smardinsky, a Chicago resident whose

family were Lubavitcher chassidim. The Steins soon were blessed with two sons. Shlomo Yitzchak, named after Pesach's father, was born in 1931, and Chaim was born two years later.

Pesach was devoted to his children, and sacrificed much to ensure them the best possible *chinuch*. When his sons became bar mitzvah, he sent them to Telshe Yeshivah in Cleveland, even though that was not commonly done in



those years.

Pesach became involved in the Mishna Gemora shul, and served as its president for many years, first under the leadership of Rabbi Hirsch Olshwang, z"l, and later under the leadership of Rabbi Chaim Sachnowitz, z"l.

He always displayed tremendous strength of character and did what was right no matter what others thought. Once in shul on a Motzoei Yom Kippur, as sometimes happens after the fast, the *mispallelim* sped through the *davening* to finish up and go home. Reb Pesach stood up and admonished the congregation, "You just spent a whole day *davening*, and this is how you now *daven Maariv*?"

In 1939 Reb Pesach established Zion Koshers Restaurant. Much more than a restaurant, Zion was the place where many Chicago residents ate their weekday meals, Shabbos *seudos*, and even held their weddings and their Pesach *Sedarim*.



Rabbi Sachnowitz, Rav of Mishna Gemora shul, together with Mr. Charles Rabinowitz (left) and Mr. Broide (right), c. 1957.

Photo credit: Congregation Mishna Gemora

**ציון כשר רעסטאראנט**  
רוזוולט און לאנדעל

דער בע"כ פון „ציון כשר רעסטאראנט“  
מר. פסח שטיין איז באוואוסט צו אלע  
רבנים פאר א מוחזק בהדרור הכשרות — צו  
נעבען די בעסטע מאכלים און אלעס בהדרור  
הכשרות אף למחרת מן המחרת.

יעצט ווערט דארט געמאכט אלע הכנות פאר  
פסח, און יעדער זאך ווערט געמאכט מיט  
דעם גרעסטען הדרור הכשרות.

אלע אידען וואס קומען אין שיקאגא קענען  
קומען אין „ציון כשר רעסטאראנט“ און ווי  
וועלען הנאה האבען פון די נוסע געשמאקע  
מאכלים פאר פסח און א נאנץ יאָר.

מען קען דארט מאכען חתונות, באגאקעסען, בר  
מצוה פארטיים.

**Zion Koshers Restaurant**  
3708 Roosevelt Road Chicago, Ill.  
Tel. Nevada 10541

Zion quickly became a center of *chessed* in Chicago. Through the business, Reb Pesach extended tremendously generous *tzedakah* to many impoverished individuals — especially new immigrants who settled in Chicago, many of whom later became pillars of the community.

Reb Eliezer Eisenberg, ybl"e, son of Reb Aron Eisenberg, z"l, of Chicago, relates: "When my parents came to Chicago in 1947, my mother was expecting her first child. At that time, apartments were rent controlled and scarce, and the city made it very

Reb Pesach's advertisement for his Zion Koshers Restaurant (left) and his business card (below).

*Catering at its Best. City Wide Service For All Functions*



**ציון כשר רעסטאראנט**  
**ZION KOSHER RESTAURANT**  
AND  
BANQUET HALLS  
THE BEST IN STEAK, CHICKEN and BEEF DINNERS  
PESACH STEIN, PROP.  
3708 W. ROOSEVELT RD. PHONE SACRAMENTO 2-9814



difficult to evict someone, even if he had not signed a lease. They certainly would not allow a couple that was expecting or had a young child to be evicted, even if they did not pay rent. Consequently, no one wanted to let my parents into their home, because they were afraid they would simply never leave. No one, except for Reb Pesach. Reb Pesach owned a restaurant and had an apartment above it, and he let my parents move in and stay as long as they needed. Without him, they would have had nowhere to live. He not only gave them lodgings, but looked after them as well. My mother recalls that Mrs. Stein would come upstairs every morning with a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice, and stand there until [my mother] drank the whole glass.

"Of course, my parents soon found other accommodations and moved, but Reb Pesach made sure that they had what to eat and were comfortable. We always remained close with him. We used to call him Uncle Pinchy; 'Uncle' because he made us feel like a member of his family, and 'Pinchy,' because of his habit of pinching our cheeks."

A Stein granddaughter was once visiting a nursing home in Chicago and mentioned to one of the residents that her grandfather was Pesach Stein. "He did so much for us!" the resident exclaimed, gratefully. "When my husband and I got married, he hosted our *sheva brachos* — for free. He told us that we could pay him if and when we ever get the money."

In addition to his *chessed*, Reb Pesach was a staunch fighter for Shabbos observance. He and Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz, *zt"l*, would approach shopkeepers on Friday afternoon and ask how much they earned in a seven-day week. "If you close on Shabbos, we guarantee you will make the



L-R: Reb Shlomo Yitzchak and Reb Chaim Stein, sons of Reb Pesach.

same amount in a six-day week," they would tell the shopkeepers. "If not, come to us and we will pay the difference." Over one hundred shopkeepers agreed, and not one came to ask for reimbursement.

### With Harav Chaim Stein

Reb Pesach Stein was a first cousin of the father of Harav Chaim Stein, *zt"l*, renowned *Rosh Yeshivah* of Telshe-Cleveland. When Harav Chaim arrived in America in 1947, Reb Pesach was his



At the wedding of Moshe and Chaya Rena Weinberg in 1983.

L-R: Harav Chaim Stein, Harav Chaim Schmeltzer, and Reb Pesach Stein (at microphone).



only *frum* relative in this country. Harav Chaim soon traveled to Chicago to meet his cousin, and the two became very close. Reb Pesach assisted his illustrious relative in any way that he could, and Harav Chaim also thought very highly of his cousin and referred to him as a *tzaddik nistar*. The extended Stein families remain very close until today.

Rebbetzin Tzipora Weinberg of Yerushalayim, Harav Chaim's daughter, recalls, "He was wonderful to us. We always called him Uncle Pesach because he was so warm, loving and caring to us, and our only *frum* relative in America. We have many warm memories of his visits to Cleveland, and our visits to him in Chicago, especially when he invited us to join him for Sukkos at his restaurant."

### **A Devoted Uncle: Saving the Cook Family**

During his trip to Europe in 1924, Reb Pesach met the family of his sister, Chaya Baila Cook, who had passed away a few years earlier, leaving behind two small children. Reb Pesach tried to convince these young orphans to come with him to America, promising to care for them. The younger son, twelve-year-old Chaim Cook, agreed. However, it was not simple, as immigration regulations were very tight, and at first the ship's captain refused to allow Chaim to board. After much convincing, and some bribery, Chaim was granted permission. However, Chaim was detained for six months on Ellis Island, during which time he celebrated his bar mitzvah. Reb Pesach worked feverishly to secure his nephew's freedom; Chaim was finally released on a six-month student visa.

Reb Pesach brought Chaim to Chicago, and enrolled him in Beis Medrash LaTorah. However, every six months Reb Pesach and Chaim would have to reapply to renew the visa. Federal regulations stated that if a student had been in the United States for over five years, he could not be sent back to his country of origin. Consequently,

after four-and-a-half years, the government refused to renew Chaim's visa, and he was forced to consider other options. Reb Pesach chose to send his nephew to England, to learn at Yeshivas Etz Chaim in London under Harav Elya Lopian, *zt"l*.

Reb Pesach kept in touch with his nephew, and many years later, in 1964, he traveled to London to attend the wedding of Reb Chaim Cook's daughter, Helene (Chaya Baila, currently of London). While in London he met his two great-nephews, Simcha and Yitzchak, and was determined to bring them to America and enroll them in yeshivah. Reb Chaim was persuaded to allow his older son, Simcha, to travel to America with his devoted uncle and attended Yeshivas Ner Yisroel. A few years later, Yitzchak Cook also traveled to America; he attended Telshe Yeshivah in Cleveland.

Today, Rabbi Simcha Cook is the *menahel* of Mechinas Ner Yisroel, and over the years he has had a tremendous influence on hundreds of *talmidim*,



Reb Chaim with Rabbi Simcha Cook and his baby.

*"He was wonderful to us. We always called him Uncle Pesach because he was so warm, loving and caring to us, and our only frum relative in America."*

much to the credit of Reb Pesach. Yitzchak Cook later moved to Eretz Yisrael, where he established a program for boys at risk. (A third brother, Shalom Zundel, is learning in *kollel* in Kiryat Sefer). The Cook brothers are deeply grateful to Reb Pesach for saving their father, and later, for helping them attend yeshivah, setting their paths toward becoming leaders in *Klal Yisrael*.

### Love of Eretz Yisrael

Reb Pesach possessed a deep love of Eretz Yisrael and dreamed of living there many years before it was popular to do so. In 1924, on his way back from Europe, he stopped off in Eretz Yisrael with the intention of possibly settling there. However, he could not find any feasible way of supporting his family. Later, in 1955, he sold his restaurant and moved to Eretz Yisrael, but his wife missed their children deeply, and they returned to Chicago.

### Reb Pesach's Later Years

After returning to Chicago, Reb Pesach needed a source of income, and took a job as a *mashgiach* in a local nursing home. After his wife's *petirah* in 1967, he was given his own private room in the nursing home, but he would spend Shabbosos with his son, Chaim, and his family.

Reb Pesach's grandchildren have many fond memories of his love and devotion, both to his family and to the *Ribbono shel Olam*. Mrs. Chaya Rena (Stein) Weinberg, currently of Minneapolis, recalls lovingly, "He lived a simple life; money was not important to him. The only thing that was important was what you do with your money, how you spend it to do *mitzvos*."

He was extremely punctilious in observing *mitzvos*, not only in the details, but also in the spirit of the *Halachah*. A grandchild recalls that once, on Tisha B'Av in the afternoon, to help pass time she was listening to a ball

*"He lived a simple life; money was not important to him. The only thing that was important was what you do with your money, how you spend it to do mitzvos."*



Reb Pesach at the Kosel in 1924.





At the wedding of his son Reb Chaim, 1958.

game on the radio. Reb Pesach noticed and admonished her, saying, "I will buy you whatever you want — just promise me that you will never again listen to the radio on Tishah B'Av."

"He was full of *emunah* and *bitachon* in the *Ribbono shel Olam*," relates Reb Yitzchak Cook. "When he opened his restaurant, it was known that his *kashrus* was 100 percent; he would not compromise *Halachah*. He kept little for himself; he was *kulo chessed* and always giving and helping others."

Reb Pesach gave a lot of *tzedakah* relative to his income. A granddaughter, Nechama (Stein) Margulies, currently of Eretz Yisrael, recalls sitting with him every few weeks while he held the pile of *tzedakah* envelopes he had received, and helping him write out checks of \$3 or \$5 for each one. He preferred to give small amounts to more institutions, rather than larger amounts to a select few.

He also tried to help his relatives in Eretz Yisrael, *talmidei chachamim* learning Torah amidst hardship, and

asked his son to take over this practice when it became too difficult for him.

A grandson recalls, "I used to follow sports on the radio. Zaidy could not stand this and told me, 'The head has room for just so much. If you fill it with sports, there won't be room for Torah. If you want to be like Harav Chaim, you have to fill it only with Torah.'" This made a lasting impression on the young boy and proved to be a turning point in his learning.

When Reb Pesach was eighty-one, Reb Yitzchak Cook hosted a *bris* for his son, Micha Yehudah, in Cleveland. Reb Pesach, as always, refused to accept money to pay for a plane ride, and instead rode the train, in order to attend. Upon arrival, Reb Pesach was asked to serve as the *sandek*. He refused, maintaining that he was not worthy of being *sandek* and the *kavod* should be given to a true *talmid chacham* — to the *Rosh Yeshivah*, Harav Chaim Stein. Harav Chaim replied, "If he says that, he is worthy of being the *sandek*!"

*"I will buy  
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to the radio  
on Tishah  
B'Av."*





### ***A Yeshivah Bachur Once Again***

As he grew older, and could no longer perform his duties in the nursing home, it was time to fulfill a lifelong dream — he became a *yeshivah bachur* once again. Although he had not attended yeshivah since his arrival in America at the age of seventeen, his love for learning never waned. Now, at the age of eighty-five, he moved into the dormitory of the Telshe Yeshivah, and spent all day in the *beis medrash*, learning on his own. He was fiercely independent, yet took the yeshivah schedule very seriously. Throughout his life, he had always been *kovei'a itim* (had set a fixed time for learning), but his *hasmadah* (dedication to learning) during this period was truly amazing.

In 1983, when his granddaughter Chaya Rena (Stein) Weinberg was married in Baltimore, Reb Pesach approached the *Rosh Yeshivah* and asked permission to attend the wedding, even though it would mean missing learning. The *bachurim* commented that this must be the only time that someone ever asked a *Rosh Yeshivah's* permission to attend a granddaughter's wedding!

His great-nephew Yitzchak Cook recalls that before he left Cleveland to move with his family to Eretz Yisrael, he had traveled to Chicago to say good-bye to his beloved uncle. He arrived in Telshe during breakfast, and spent some time with Reb Pesach. Promptly at 9:00 a.m., Reb Pesach turned to his nephew and said, "I have to go now — it's time for *sefer*."

As he weakened in his later years, Reb Pesach was moved to a nursing home, and it was necessary to insert a feeding tube into his weakened body. Although speech was difficult, he never expressed complaints and could almost always be found with a *sefer* open in front of him. Whenever someone offered to take him to the social area for an activity, he would respond incredulously, "Activity? I have my *sefer* — why do I need an activity?"

At a grandchild's wedding, 1982.

R-L: Reb Pesach Stein, with his *mechutan*, Reb Nosson Nota Arnold.





Harav Chaim Stein with Reb Pesach Stein at the wedding of Reb Pesach's grandchild.

*At the age of eighty-five, he moved into the dormitory of the Telshe Yeshivah, and spent all day in the beis medrash, learning on his own.*

### Leaving a Legacy

Reb Pesach Stein was *niftar* on 22 Cheshvan 5770/November 20, 1989, ending a life of stubborn dedication to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He merited having all his descendants *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*. His oldest son, Reb Shlomo Yitzchak, z"l, was involved in *chinuch* for many years and worked as a *mashgiach* for Empire Kosher Poultry. Reb Chaim, ybl"e, learned in Beis Medrash Govoha in Lakewood for many years, and then moved back to Chicago where he worked as a bookkeeper and a *mashgiach* for the OU. He now lives in Lakewood.

Reb Pesach's legacy truly lives on through his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren, who are *talmidei chachamim*, *marbitzei Torah*, and active in *chesed* and community affairs in *kehillos* around the world. ■



Reb Pesach Stein (seated) at the wedding of a grandchild, shortly before his *petirah*. Standing (L-R) are his sons, Reb Chaim Stein and Reb Shlomo Stein.

**Editor's Note:** Information in this Noble Families series is based on accounts of various family members. Since people may remember facts differently, it is often difficult to verify the accurate version of a particular story. However, in most cases, the theme remains the same — these people made great personal sacrifices for *Yiddishkeit* at a time when few did so. Alternate versions or additional information may be submitted in letters to the editor at [Magazine@hamodia.com](mailto:Magazine@hamodia.com).