



Isaac Elhanan Spektor

"Reb Yitzhak Elhanan" (1817 – 1896), the eminent rabbi of Kovno, Lithuania, was one of the most beloved of leaders in modern times. A ranking authority on the Law, he did much to alleviate the tragic plight of agunot. He was tireless in organizing help for stricken European communities, providing religious aid and guidance to Jews in Argentina, the United States, and elsewhere, and strove always to better the lot of Jewish soldiers in the Russian army. An early supporter of Hovevei Zion, he publicly advocated settlement in Eretz Yisrael as a religious duty. Reb Yitzhak Elhanan was universally recognized for his great erudition and he was beloved for his open-mindedness and genial manner. Institutions have been named for him in Europe and in America, including the Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary in New York.

With the help of God, blessed be He,
Heshvan 9, 5649 [October 14, 1888], Kovno

To my esteemed, sacred congregation of Kovno, may you flourish.

... As it is the duty of each individual to enjoin his sons and all who are close and obedient to him to keep to the way of God, that is, His Torah ... and because of my great love, the love of a father for his children, which I feel for the members of my sacred congregation in whose midst I have dwelled and served as rabbi these twenty-six years, I see it as my responsibility to leave my will as a benefit and benediction for all the members of the sacred congregation.

1. From the depths of my heart I give thanks and appreciation and blessings for all things good to the entire holy congregation as one, to the various groups, collectively and individually, for all the benefits they bestowed upon me, for maintaining a center for Torah. For it was here in your distinguished community I was privileged to promulgate most of my Torah studies, and I was treated with honor in your midst. May God reward you for your deeds, and may your reward be complete at His hand, blessed be He.

2. I entreat the beloved members of my community to be strong in God's Torah and in the observance of His precepts, in particular to be careful about Sabbath observance and to avoid desecrating the Sabbath

... to train up your children depart, God forbid, from the principles and foundations of the Law, educate them morally and

3. I implore you to preserve peace and to pursue peace, as it is written [Leviticus 19:15, 34:15]. It is well known to you for the sake of peace.

4. Similarly, you know so well with the help of God, even in my waning strength during my years, and to increase the number of you to stand firmly on behalf of the public, and to be publicly espoused, with God's help, my waning strength during my years for the multitudes stand you

5. Strenuous were the labors of food for our Jewish brethren, you in the strongest terms, your efforts and increased vigor

6. According to Jewish law, I am entitled to my rabbinic position in matters. But besides the honor and worthy of this position, I install him in the rabbinic position with full pardon and forgiveness for deed or word, and bless him in my heart and soul; and I forgo my own feelings for the sake of peace on occasions over a variety of kindness and compassion. The Rabbinate of the Rabbinic Court, may your opposition, in deference to peace will serve as an irreparable excellencies alike. Similar

Mr. Spektor

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... to train up your children in the paths of Torah, never letting them depart, God forbid, from the study of Mishnah and Gemara, the principles and foundations of the holy Torah. Similarly, to rear them and educate them morally and ethically according to the ways of Torah.

3. I implore you to preserve peace among yourselves, to seek peace and to pursue peace, as it is written, "seek peace and pursue it" [Ps. 34:15]. It is well known to you how much I strove with all my might for the sake of peace.

4. Similarly, you know something of the great efforts I have put forth, with the help of God, even in the most difficult times, to enhance Torah and to increase the numbers of those who study it. And you have merited becoming a center of Torah with a multitude of scholars. I beg of you to stand firmly on behalf of Torah scholars in the manner I myself publicly espoused, with God's help, by self-sacrifice and without heed to my waning strength during my older years; and may the merit of Torah for the multitudes stand you and your descendants in good stead forever.

5. Strenuous were the labors I expended in efforts to provide kosher food for our Jewish brethren serving in the armed forces. I plead with you in the strongest terms, excellencies, to put forth ever-stronger efforts and increased vigor, with God's help, toward this precious cause.

6. According to Jewish law, my son Zvi Hirsh, may he flourish, is entitled to my rabbinic post, and indeed he has represented me in all matters. But besides the right he has by law, he is also highly qualified and worthy of this position; I therefore have confidence that you will install him in the rabbinical post. . . . and I hereby forgive and pardon with full pardon and forgiveness all who provoked or vexed me with deed or word, and bless this entire holy community out of the depths of my heart and soul; and I beg that, just as I forgive and pardon them and forgo my own feelings for the sufferings of love I experienced on many occasions over a variety of matters, so may they, from their side, act with kindness and compassion toward my son, rabbi and presiding judge of the Rabbinic Court, may he flourish; and by virtue of setting aside their opposition, in deference to his knowledge of Torah and his piety, this peace will serve as an instrumentality of blessing for him and for your excellencies alike. Similarly, I ask of the entire holy community, may

they flourish, if perchance I injured any among them monetarily or through some slight or other involvement, that they forgive me just as I forgive all of them.

7. My closing words I end with a prayer and a benediction offered to the Almighty, blessed be He, in behalf of the entire sacred congregation to which I ministered in the office of the rabbinate these many years, and I bless you: Blessed are you to God; may God guard you from every calamity and affliction; may He bestow upon you abundant blessing and deliverance and grant you a life of peace, prosperity, and honor, reverence for heaven and love of Torah; and may He fulfill all the desires of your heart for good.

I am your faithful friend and servant who writes tearfully and who hopes that you will fulfill all the cherished matters stated above, that it may be counted to your great merit forever, and that you may be blessed many times over because of it. Amen, so may it be.

My signature herewith,
Yitzhak Elhanan ben Harav Hatzadik
Rabbi Israel Isser, of blessed memory
Residing here, Kovno

Isaac K

Ethical wills frequently allude to key events in Jewish history to illustrate or emphasize an instruction of the traditional testament as it is found in the Torah. The will of Isaac Komiansky (1828 – 1900, who lived here) is not related to his children but to the medium in which were cultivated their virtues. Of further interest is the fact that in 1911, as a small book containing l

To my beloved children: I see a memorial.

Fixed are man's years on earth, no man knows his span, like fire decided to search my heart to understand under the sun to this day; to describe the troubles that have overtaken me over time, each of the troubles delivered to me now, with the passage of time, they are all gone now, like a dream.

Indeed, a contemplative man is often overwhelmed by human failure and may experience. For time eras pass and all is borne away on the wind, the Almighty, Who sustains us, stands before our feet, Whom we praise and thank on us and for the ills which befall us, we have survived.

Let me enumerate for you, I have had strewn in my path at various times in relation to my circumstances.

In the summer of 1847 I journeyed to Romen, and in my first transac