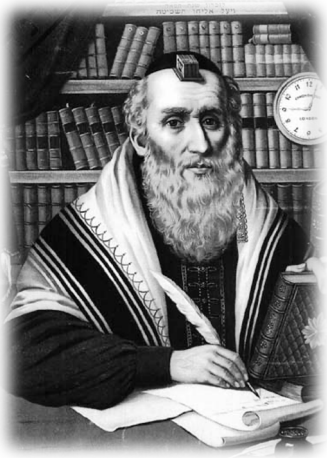
SAGE ADVICE

THE VILNA GAON (The "Gra")

– *R' Elijah ben Solomon Zalman*



Life: 1720-1797
Home: Vilnius, Lithuania
Works: Commentaries on Tanach & Talmud
Buried: Vilnius, Lithuania

- Had the entire Tanach memorized
- By age 10, he no longer had teachers. None could be found who could teach him!
- By age 11, he had memorized the entire Talmud.
    - 2,711 double-sided pages
    - This equals almost 2,000,000 words
- Encouraged study of the sciences
- Encouraged Torah study over Talmud study
- Wrote commentaries on the entire Tanach
- Annotated almost all ancient Jewish texts, including Talmud
- Was fascinated by the story of Joseph – "I am Joseph…" (Genesis 45:3)

From *Kol HaTor* ("Voice of the Turtledove"):

"Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not re-cognize him." (Gen. 42:8) – *This is one of the traits of Yosef not only in his own generation, but in every generation, i.e., that Mashiach ben Yosef recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him. This is the work of Satan, who hides the characteristics of Mashiach ben Yosef so that the foot-steps of the Mashiach are not recognized and are even belittled because of our many sins. Otherwise, our troubles would already have ended. Were Israel to recognize Yosef… then we would already have been redeemed with a complete redemption."*

The Vilna Gaon