



Inspiring Stories and Biographies of Sepharadi Kachamim









YEHUDA AZOULAY























אים בער להיות של מינו מוסיים וליים וליים

פיה ליוורנו יני

בשת קול התחנה לכק





















# JEGACY DEGACY DEADERS!!











Inspiring Stories and Biographies of Sepharadi Kachamim

YEHUDA AZOULAY



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#### OVADIA YOSSEF

RISHON LEZION AND PRESIDENT OF TORAH SACES COUNSIL

#### נובדיה יוסף

הראשון לציון נשיא פונצת חכפי התורה

JERUSALEM AND GH A BYDDYY

#### מכתב ברכה

הובאו לפני גליונות הספר יחבמי ספרדי תולדות חייהם והגהגותיהם של חכמי הספרדים ברורות הקודמים בשפה האנגלית, מעשה ידי אומן, נמע נאמן היקר והגכבד, כשית רי יחודה אזולאי שלימיא, אשר קיבץ כעמיר גורנה ואסף איש מהור מעשיות וסיפורים על גדולי ישראל ערוכים ומסודרים תפוחי זהב במשכיות כסף דבר דבור על אופגיו, ולפעלא מכא אמינא איישר כחו לאורייתא.

ויהו רצון שחפץ הו כידו יצלח לברך על המונמר בקרב ימים, ועוד יפוצו מעינותיו חוצה בבריאות איתנה ונהורא מעלייא לאורך ימים ושנות חיים במוב ובנעימים שובע שמחות וכל מוב יוהיה כעץ שתול על פלני מים, אשר פריו יתן בעתו ועלהו לא יבול, וכל אשר יעשה יצליח".



#### **OVADIA YOSEF**

Rishon Lezion And President of Torah Sages Council

Yerushalayim 8 Shevat, 5768

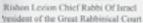
#### **Letter of Blessing**

It was brought to me a copy of the book "Hachmei Sepharad" which contains the histories and the ways of the Sephardi *Hachamim* of the previous generations, in the English language; the work of an expert, the faithful, precious, and honorable young man, R' Yehuda Azoulay *shlita*. He compiled stories on Gedolei Yisrael, organized and set in a beautiful fashion. For his distinguished work I give Torah congratulations.

May it be that the will of Hashem is for him to be *zoche* to complete this project successfully. And may his wellsprings bring forth and bear more fruit. May he continue to produce more works, with good health for many long and sweet years and may it be all good. "He will be like a tree set into the ground near streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and whose leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does he will succeed."

Ovadia Yosef

#### Shlomo Moshe Amar





#### שלמת משת עמאר

הראשון לציון הרב הראשי ליטראל נטיא בית הדין הרבני הגדול

בסיר, טין חמה, תשסיט טין 14-18-1

#### אורת ברכה

היבאו לפני גליונות מהמפר "חכמי ספרר" תולרות חייהם והנהנוחיהם של חכמי ספרד ברודות הקודמים בשפה האנגלית שערך וחיבר רי יתודה אזולאי שליט"א אשר אסף וקיבץ מעשיות והנהגות שנוכל ללמוד מדרכיהם הטובות וגלך לאורם.

וראיתי שטלאכה יפה עשה שכתב הכל בטוב טעם ודעת.

ואברכהו שחפץ הי בידו יצלח חכות רבותינו יעמוד לנו ולבני ביתו ולכל עם ישראל.



#### **Shlomo Moshe Amar**

Rishon Lezion Chief Rabbi of Israel President of the Great Rabbinical Court

B"SD

15th, Tammuz, 5769

#### **Letter of Blessing**

Papers excerpted from the book "A Legacy of Leaders - Inspiring Stories and Biographies of Sepharadi Hachamim", written in English, compiled and authored by R' Yehuda Azoualy Shelit"a who gathered and organized stories and (described) ways of life (of the Sages) so that we are able to learn from their good ways and go towards their light, were brought before me .

I saw that he did a great work and wrote everything with good taste and understanding.

And I am blessing that an object that Hashem has in his hand will succeed and the merit of our Sages should be with us and in his house and the entire Nation of Israel.

With blessing,

Shelomo Moshe Amar Rishon Lesiyon, Chief Rabbi of Israel THE BIG YESHIVAH
"HAZON OVADIA"

Under Personal Direction of the Rishon LeZion and President of Torah Sages Counsil Rabbi OVADIA YOSSEF

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#### Yeshivat HAZON OVADIA

Under Personal Direction of the Rishon LeZion and President of Torah Sages Council Rabbi OVADIA YOSEF

B"H

20 Kislev, 5768

#### Approbation

This sefer about Gedolei Hachmei Sepharad, authored by one who is immersed in the tent of Torah, enables us to fulfill the verse: "And his heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem," to strengthen the Sephardi B'nei HaYeshivot, so that they will know about our Gedolei Torah, and not only about Tzaddikim and *Mekubalim*; rather [they will know] about great Torah giants who had an all-encompassing embrace of and expertise in *Shas Bavli and Yerushalmi*, and the *Poskim*. This will encourage the youth to strive for greatness, for we have patriarchs and elders from whom to learn.

With Torah blessings,

Yitzhak Yosef

50er 7/6 / 5/6

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BS"D

#### Yeshivat Mikdash Melech

Hodesh Adar, 5767 Febuary, 25th, '07

Dear R' Yehuda

I was very pleased to hear of your plans to publish biographies of Sephardi Gedolim and subsequently to see the actual work information.

This project addresses a pressing need in our Sephardi world to know who our Gedolim were. Of course, it will be well received in the general Jewish community, but I believe its major contribution will be for our Sephardim, helping to connect them to a glorious heritage.

Seeing your determination to accomplish this goal, I predict that the present volume will be the first of many to come. May your efforts be crowned with success. It is a special *nahat* to see an alumnus of Mikdash Melech the *mehaber* (Author) of such a work. *Bechol Asher Tifna Taskil Ve 'tazliah*.

With Blessings and Friendship, Haim Benoliel בס"ד

שסראל קנבצקי Rabbi S. Kamenetsky

2018 Upland Way Philadelphia, Pa 19131



Home: 215-473-2798 Study: 215-473-1212

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#### Rabbi S. Kamenetsky

Talmudic Yeshiva of Philadelphia

BS"D

6th Tammuz, 5769

To the honorable R' Yehuda Azoulay, who toils in Torah, may G-d protect and save him.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude for your book, which I received from R' Yaakov Moshe Wilner *shlita* who informed me of your intention to print a second volume. I trust that your compilations will make a deep impression on the Holy nation and be a good influence on them for a number of Sephardic *Hachamim* were from the most outstanding and brilliant *Tzaddikim* of the world and everyone will enjoy reading about them.

May you be counted amongst those who bring merit to the public, their righteousness stands by them forever.

With many blessings,

Shmuel Kamenetsky

300

בלים אלפור בחורה

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B"SD

#### **Beth Medrash Govoha**

Rabbi Aaron Kotler Institute for Advanced Learning

20 Shevat, 5768

I've come with these short lines to laud and to tell the praise of the *Sefer Hachmei Sepharad*, the book about the history of the giants who were great in Torah and spirit, leaders of the Sephardi communities from one hundred and fifty years ago until today. As is well known, studying the deeds and stories of the *hachamim* of the [previous] generation is considered *Shimush talmidei hachamim* and especially when they are written by an expert writer, a *talmid hacham* who understands how to inspire, especially the youth of our generation, who need to draw from the well of fresh waters; and in particular, the Sephardic families, in order that they recognize the well from which they were carved, and the springs of water which were their source. Therefore my appreciation is in honor of HRH"G Yehuda Azoulay *shlita* for producing a pleasing work, which will be accepted by all.

One who writes and signs in honor of the Torah, Mattisyahu Chaim Salomon

# Acknowledgments

would like to start off with humble and immeasurable appreciation to *Hashem Yitbarach*. I thank Hashem for giving me the strength and time to come out with a second volume on our revered *hachamim*. I feel that writing about such a topic is an honor I do not deserve; nonetheless, I feel that Hashem has directed me in this precious task. May Hashem merit Klal Yisrael with recognition of our precious leaders, past and present, and with the ability to utilize the lessons they teach us.

To my extraordinary parents, Joe and Esther Azoulay: You are the pillars and foundation of my life. Your inspirational values are mimicked by all your children, and you are the reason behind my appreciation of Torah and our beautiful and rich Sephardic heritage. Neither volume would exist today if not for your great influences in my personal life. My deepest gratitude for this and all you have given me.

I would like to thank my eldest brother Michael (Messod), a great Torah figure, and an older brother I can look up to. My young siblings, Jamie and Sarah: May you continue to follow in the ways of our dear beloved parents, and to sincerely appreciate all Hashem has given us.

I would like to express my appreciation to all the *hachamim*, *rabbanim*, and teachers who guided me throughout my life. Both volumes stemmed from the cumulative impact of teachers who guided me through the years, teaching me the

ways of our sacred Torah, and appreciation for our beloved ancestors.

I owe sincere and humble gratitude to those who helped me carry this second volume from concept to reality:

Mrs. Atara Snowbell, the phenomenal editor for this project. I thank you for your meticulous attention to every detail, and an excellent job.

Much appreciation goes to Mrs. Rivki Greenspan and my dearest friend Adam Ohayon, whose translations helped get this project off the ground. A special thanks to Mrs. Glenna Daniel, the talented graphic designer, who worked diligently on both the interior design and the eye-catching cover.

I thank Mr. Jack Cohen of Community Magazine. It is a true honor to have a monthly section in your magazine. The magazine is loved in the Sephardic community, and is found to be inspirational by all.

I thank Rabbi Moshe Kaufman and Mrs. Liron Delmar for their organization and professionalism in both volumes. The staff of Israel Bookshop Publications is a phenomenal group, which works hard to serve Torah Jewry.

A great deal of appreciation goes to Hacham Amram Assayag, who guided me through sections of this volume, and to my teacher Rabbi Eliyahu Yanay author of *Sefer Banim Havivim*, who looked over much material in this volume.

My deepest appreciation goes to the Abraham family, who dedicated both volumes in memory of their beloved grandfather. The Abraham family should have much *berachah* and *shemirah* from all the *hachamim*. Each and every sponsor who contributed to this book shares a branch in this tree of

life. Your support of the Sephardic Legacy Series creates inspiration for the lives of thousands.

I thank my dear in-laws, who entrusted me with my *eishet hayil*, Rena. And to Rena: my deepest appreciation for encouraging me to do what I love best. All I achieve is to your credit.

I bless my precious daughter Esther Mazal, who was named for my wonderful mother, may she follow in her grandmother's ways, and in the footsteps of Esther Hamalkah.

A Legacy of Leaders, Volume Two includes a great deal of information gathered from around the world. Descendants of hachamim from all over the world shared insightful and valuable information with me. I was fortunate to receive documentation, sketches, pictures, old manuscripts, letters, and inspirational stories about these great Sephardic leaders. I thank you all for taking the time to share this information.

May this volume inspire all of Klal Yisrael to follow in the ways of our treasured Sephardic *hachamim*.

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## Introduction

hroughout Jewish history, Sephardic *hachamim* have been considered some of Klal Yisrael's greatest leaders and luminaries. However, not much has been written about them in an organized fashion in the English language.

Our very own ancestors lived among these great Torah figures. These ancestors had extraordinary *emunat hachamim* — they trusted the judgment of those blessed with the wisdom of Torah. This *emunat hachamim* was apparent in the daily lives and conduct of Sephardic Jews for centuries.

R' Eliezer Papo (*Pele Yoetz*, 1785-1826) stressed that one must have faith in the words of all the Sages, adhering to their authority, and indeed, practicing intellectual subservience to anyone greater than oneself.

Sephardic heritage includes a rich spiritual and cultural legacy, which encompasses every aspect of individual and communal life. The wonderful Sephardic traditions have been well maintained for centuries, and are observed by many communities to this day.

Traditionally, *hachamim* have stressed the importance of studying the lives and stories of our sacred leaders. These scholars were pillars of the Jewish world, leading great communities and guiding thousands in the path of the holy Torah. *Hachamim* inspired previous generations, their inspiration strongly affecting generations to come. They were walking examples of *middot*, *ahavat Yisrael*, and *yirat Shamayim*.

The Hida (R' Haim Yosef David Azoulay, 1724–1806) writes in *sefer Moreh B'etzbah*, "Those who do not waste time will always have time for everything." *Hachamim* of the past truly fulfilled the inspiring words of the Hida in their daily activities, their conduct, and in the legacy they have inherited through their *sefarim*. They knew how precious little time we have on this good earth, and filled it with the study of Torah and adherence to its *mitzvot*. They spent all their time perfecting their service to *Hashem Yitbarach*.

Someone once approached the Hazon Ish (R' Abraham Yeshaya Karelitz, 1878–1953) and asked him, "How should we raise our children?" The Hazon Ish, replied, "In the old days there were great rabbis. There are great rabbis today as well, but they do not compare with rabbis of the past. You need to give your children an opportunity to read about *hachamim* in previous generations. Reading stories about *saddikim* is the surest way of educating them toward *yirat Shamayim*."

It is my belief that we can achieve a strong connection with the history of Klal Yisrael by telling the stories of Am Yisrael's great scholars. The stories and outlines brought in this book provide a source of inspiration for those who want to emulate the Sages of the past.

When I completed the first volume of *A Legacy of Leaders*, it became apparent to me that the first volume was not enough. There was a dire need for more material on such an essential topic. I realized that the first volume was just a starting point for many forthcoming projects, intended to fulfill the void in contemporary Sephardic Torah literature.

I humbly present my second volume of *A Legacy of Leaders* to all readers, Sephardic and Ashkenazi, young and old. The

book has over one hundred inspirational stories and over twenty historical biographical profiles on recent Sephardic *hachamim*. Additionally, a unique final chapter relates a brief history of Sephardic *yeshivot*, past and present.

A Legacy of Leaders, Volume Two explores numerous historic communities, dating back to the time of the first Bet Hamikdash. The hachamim of Bavel have been spreading Torah since the time of the Talmud Bavli. Saddikim from the holy city of Aram Soba pass on their Torah and mesorah from generation to generation until this very day. The distinguished community of Djerba preserves the traditions of its ancestors. Moroccan Jewry celebrate ancient hillulot, and maintain the great bitachon in emunat hachamim. Many other Sephardic ethnic groups carry their heritage with them throughout the generations.

This book delves into the history and stories of our distinguished Chief Rabbis, *mekubalim*, roshei yeshivot, *dayanim, saddikim*, and leaders, who paved the path to a brighter future for Sephardic communities.

I hope this book will inspire all Jews alike, and bring forth recognition of the true greatness of Hashem's master plan. It is my sincere hope that Klal Yisrael will forever set the images of these great *saddikim* before their eyes.

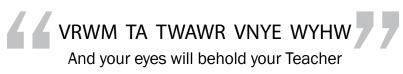
By Hashem's Will, may we merit to live by the lessons taught by our Sages and rabbis. May we merit to witness the arrival of Mashiah Sidkeinu *bimheirah biyameinu* — hastily, in our days.

13th of Elul 5769

Yehuda Azoulay

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(Yishai 30:20)

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R' YITZHAK BEN-GUALID	Tetuan, Morocco	Yerushalayim, Eretz Yisrael	1778 - 1870	5538 - 5630	92
R' ABDALLAH SOMECH	Bagdad, Iraq	Bagdad, Iraq	1813 - 1889	5573 - 5649	76
R' ELIEZER PAPO	Sarajevo, Bosnia	Sarajevo, Bosnia	1785 - 1826	5545-5586	41
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R' R' REPHAEL ENCAOUA	Sale, Morocco	Sale, Morocco	1848 - 1935	5608 - 5695	87
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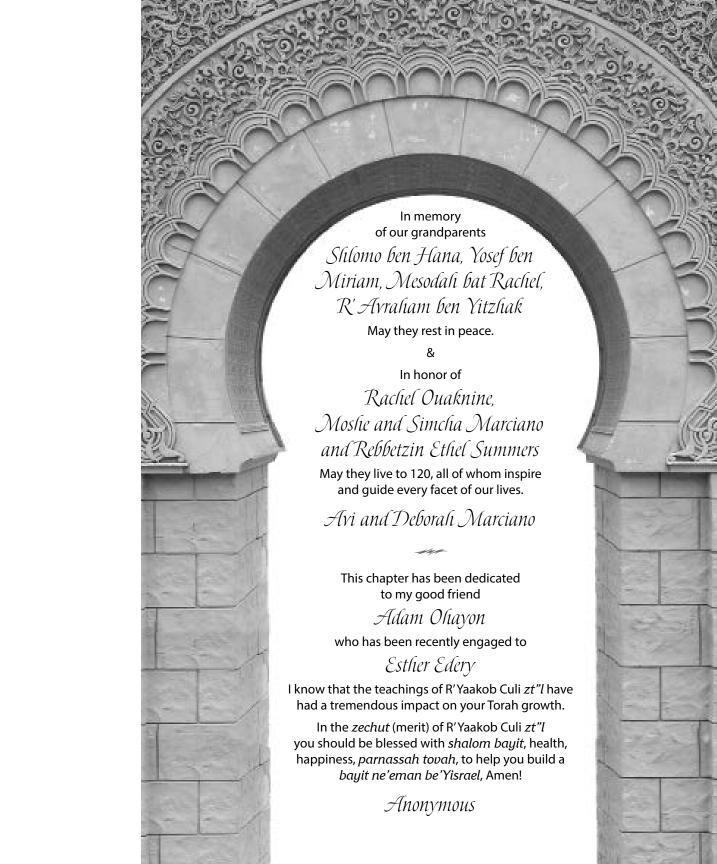
NAMES OF HACHAMIM	BORN	DIED	ENGLISH DATE	HEBREW DATE	LIVED
R' YAAKOB KASSIN	Yerushalayim, Eretz Yisrael	Yerushalayim, Eretz Yisrael	1900 - 1994	5660 - 5754	94
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# HACHAM YAAKOB CULI

(ME'AM LO'EZ)

Yerushalayım, Eretz Yisrael 5449 - 5492 / 1689 - 1732



# HACHAM YAAKOB CULI (ME'AM LO'EZ)

acham Yaakob Culi *zt"l* was born in Yerushalayim in 5449/1689. His father was R' Machir Culi (1638–1728), a brilliant *talmid hacham* and *saddik*, and one of the leaders of the Jewish community of Crete, Greece. R' Machir settled in Yerushalayim before his son's birth. He founded a city of scholars, luminaries such as R' Hezekiah da Silva (1659–1698), the *Peri Hadash*, and Hacham Bashi R' Ephraim Navon (1677–1735), the *Machaneh Ephraim*. Leading the community was Hacham Moshe Galanti, who had been appointed as the first *Rishon LeSion*, Chief Rabbi, of the Sephardic Jews, in 1668. R' Machir was drawn to another prominent sage, R' Moshe Ibn Habib (1654–1696), and soon married his daughter.

R' Yaakob descended from a famed family which originated in Spain. Among his ancestors were R' Yosef Habiba (circa 1400), the *Nimmukei Yosef*, and R' Yaakob Ibn Habib (1460–1516), the *Ein Yaakob*.

A year after R' Yaakob's illustrious grandfather passed away, tragedy struck the family again and his mother died. His father soon remarried and the family moved to Hebron, and then to Sefat. Here the young scholar advanced rapidly in his studies, and began the major task of editing his grandfather's writings. He later edited numerous important works. R' Yaakob eventually left Sefat and relocated to Constantinople.

In 1714, he became close with the Chief Rabbi of Constantinople, Hagaon R' Yehuda Rosanes (1658–1727), the *Mishneh Lamelech*. R' Yehuda appointed R' Yaakob to become a *dayan* in the *bet din* of Constantinople. R' Yaakob worked

together with R' Yehuda, who felt that R' Yaakob, despite his young age, was destined to have a bright future.

In 1727 R' Yaakob published his grandfather's work, Shammot ba-Aretz, a sefer of notes on various portions of Gemara. R' Yehuda Rosanes passed away that year, leaving behind many volumes of his writings. R' Yaakob took over the great task of editing and publishing R' Yehuda's work. In 1728, he edited his teacher's sefer, Parashat Derakim. Three years later he published his teacher's famous work, Mishneh Lamelech, one of the most famous commentaries on the Rambam's Mishneh Torah.

R' Yaakob became the leader and main halachic authority of the Constantinople community. Constantinople had many great talmidei hachamim, who studied in the Hesger Kollel. However the general community was spiritually declining. Constantinople had been the center for Shabbetai Tzvi's false messianic movement, and Constantinople suffered greatly from the heretic. Shabbetai Tzvi (1626-1676) was a false messianic leader who claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish messiah, and later converted to Islam. He was the founder of the Jewish Sabbatical movement and inspired the founding of a number of other similar sects, such as the Donmeh in Turkey. Much of the Jewish community of Constantinople had no religious guidance, and many people were barely literate in lashon hakodesh. Many Jews looked to the new movement for the hope it offered, and there was fear that they would be lost to Iudaism forever.

R' Yaakob took upon himself the great task of filling the void of a spiritual leader in his community, and inspiring his fellow Jews. He decided to write a commentary on the Tanach

in Ladino<sup>1</sup>. His commentary was called *Me'am Lo'ez* and is known to date as an outstanding work of Ladino literature. R' Yaakob chose to write in Ladino, the common language spoken by Sephardic Jews. The work is an elaborate encyclopedic commentary in Ladino, dealing with all aspects of Jewish life.

The Hida<sup>2</sup> (R' Haim Yosef David Azoulay, 1724–1806) wrote about R' Yaakob Culi: "He was an expert in the field of Gemara study, *gematria* (numerical values), and commentaries, as we can readily see from his outstanding *sefer Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez*, which he wrote to bring merit to *Am Yisrael*. Fortunate is he and fortunate is his portion."

R' Yaakob specified that all the profits from the sale of *Me'am Lo'ez* were to be distributed to the local *yeshivot* in Yerushalayim, as well as the Hesger Kollel in Constantinople.

R' Yaakob died at the very young age of forty-two, on the 19th of Av, 5492/1732 leaving behind unfinished work. Contemporary Sephardic *talmidei hachamim* saw the strong positive effect his work had on many communities, and they encouraged others to complete the task. R' Yaakob had left behind many notes, which would be incorporated into his complete writings. The first to take on the task of editing and publishing R' Yaakob's writings was R' Yitzhak Magriso, who completed *Sefer Shemot* in 1746, *Sefer Vayikra* in 1753, and *Sefer Bamidbar* in 1764. *Sefer Devarim* was finished by R' Yitzhak Bechor Agruiti in 1772. These scholars followed R' Yaakob's style so precisely, that the entire series seems like it was written by one person.

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<sup>1</sup> Ladino (Judaeo-Spanish) is a language which was developed by the Jews of Spain. Ladino was written with the Spanish alphabet, with a liberal sprinkling of Hebrew thrown in. After the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, they gradually stopped using the Spanish alphabet, and began writing Ladino with Hebrew letters, which they knew from their prayers. At first there was no literature in this language; it was used primarily in correspondence and business records. Ladino is to Spanish as Yiddish is to German.

<sup>2</sup> Sefer Shem Hagedolim (R' Hida - R' Haim Yosef David Azoulay, known as the Hida) - Section Sefarim (29:70).

In 1967, a Hebrew translation of *Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez* was published by R' Shemuel Yerushalmi. The first English translation, the *Torah Anthology*, was written (primarily) by R' Aryeh Kaplan (1934–1983); this translation introduced *Me'am Lo'ez* to the English-speaking world. Although the original name of the *sefer* was *Me'am Loez*, the word "*Yalkut*" (anthology) was later added to the Hebrew edition.

Me'am Lo'ez impacted thousands throughout the generations. To this very day, Me'am Lo'ez is recognized as one of the greatest and most unique works in Torah literature. Me'am Lo'ez has been translated into numerous languages, and is a source of pride for Ladino literature.

# True Meaning of Piety

ur hachamim teach us that only things hidden from public view are endowed with Heaven's blessings.<sup>3</sup> The Hida once said, "I heard a story about the great R' Yaakob Culi, author of Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez, who once accepted upon himself to fast for three full days without interruption.<sup>4</sup> On the third day, late in the afternoon, he knocked on the door of someone's home to get something, and the homeowner naturally invited him to sit down and he served him a cup of coffee. In order to avoid revealing the fact that he was fasting, he accepted the coffee and drank it! He later had to fast another three days to make up for having broken his fast with the coffee. His family members (who were aware that he was supposed to be fasting) later discovered what had happened. We see that one has much to learn about the true meaning of piety."

<sup>3</sup> Masechet Taanit (8:B)

<sup>4</sup> This story is recited in Sefer Simhat Haregel (R' Hida) - Section Haggadah.



# HACHAM AMRAM BEN-DIWAN

YERUSHALAYIM, ERETZ YISRAEL 5460s - 5542 / 1700s - 1782



# HACHAM AMRAM BEN-DIWAN

acham Amram Ben-Diwan was born in Yerushalayim at the beginning of the 18th century. Later in his life he moved to Hebron and was among the leading *sadikkim* of the city. In 5523/1743, when famine threatened the community, he was sent to Morocco on an emergency fundraising mission. He returned after three years with a respectable sum of money, which saved the community from their crisis.

He settled in the city of Ouazzane, Morocco, where he introduced the idea of a Yeshivah to the community. He taught students who yearned to learn Torah from such a great Torah scholar. R' Amram provided everything the students needed to enable continuous Torah learning. By doing so, he nurtured the love for Torah and Torah learning in all of Morocco. From all corners of Morocco, Jews gathered to be blessed by R' Amram and be saved in his merit. He cared for each and every Jew in his community, and cared equally for anyone who showed up at his doorstep.

Nearly ten years later, R' Amram returned to Hebron to explore the teachings of Kabbalah, but his stay in Hebron did not last long, as his son R' Haim fell ill. In order to pray on his son's behalf, R' Amram violated the decree issued by the Moslems forbidding the Jews access to *Me'arat HaMachpelah* (Tomb of the Patriarchs). When they found that he had violated the edict, they wanted to kill him, compelling him to flee Hebron with his son.

Once again R' Amram made his way back to Morocco, where he founded a renowned Yeshivah in the city of Meknes, a city bustling with many great scholars. He wanted to embark

on another fundraising tour on behalf of the city of Hebron, but the roads had become too dangerous to travel as a result of organized rebellions in Hebron. After seven years, when things quieted down, R' Amram decided it was time to embark on his mission. He was joined by his host, R' Zichri Messas zt"l of Meknes. Upon their arrival in the city of Fez, his escort took ill, forcing R' Amram to stay there for a year to tend to the patient, who eventually died and was buried in Fez.

R' Amram decided to continue on his mission to collect money on behalf of the settlement in Hebron, and then return to Eretz Yisrael. R' Amram left with his son, R' Haim, to travel through different Moroccan cities, spreading Torah learning everywhere he went. In every city he visited, R' Amram taught Torah enthusiastically and passionately, and blessed many Jews, who were saved in his merit.

When they arrived in the city of Ouazzane, R' Amram became ill. When his sickness intensified, he sent for the *Hebra Kadisha*. They asked him where he wished to be buried, and he replied, "In the entrance to your cemetery [in Ouazzane] there is a large olive tree. Bury me underneath the olive tree, and place a simple stone on my grave." R' Amram Ben-Diwan departed from this world and from Moroccan Jewry on the ninth of Av<sup>5</sup> (Tisha Be'Av) 1782/5542. His day of remembrance is observed on the fifteenth of Av, seven days after his death.

At the time, Moroccan Jews would travel by donkey to pray at the *kever* of R' Amram Ben-Diwan. The *kever* of R' Amram became a place of pilgrimage, and thousands of Jews came to Ouazzane each year to the *kever* of the *saddik*. Even Arabs would come to sell merchandise and show their respect for the Jews. The great poet R' David Ben-Hassin composed a special poem in honor of R' Amram, which is sung by Moroccan Jews on the day of his *hillula*.

Moroccan Jewry presently celebrates a great event at the actual gravesite, praying and singing until sunrise in honor of the *saddik*. To this very day, nearly fifteen hundred people travel each year from across the world to participate in the great spiritual event of the *hillula* in Ouazzane. Under the olive tree there is a large bonfire, which is maintained by coal and thousands of candles thrown into the fire by the attendants. The fire is several feet high and miraculously the tree has never been burnt. This custom has been kept since the death of R' Amram, and is maintained to this very day.

It is said that many miracles have been performed on R' Amram's kever. Once there was a French sergeant who had a son who was paralyzed after a serious illness. The sergeant had a Jewish friend, who advised him to take his son to the tomb of R' Amram Ben-Diwan in Ouazzane. Initially, the sergeant was skeptical, but he promised that if a miracle occurred and

his son would be healed, he would build a road that would facilitate proper access to the tomb of the saddik. As soon as his son went to the tomb of R' Amram, the miracle was accomplished. The happy father kept his promise, and built a road to the kever of the noble R' Amram Ben-Diwan.



Tomb of R' Amram Ben-Diwan

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<sup>5</sup> Why is R' Amram Ben-Diwan's hillula commemorated on the fifteenth of Av, if he passed away on the ninth of Av? Being that the hillula can not be celebrated on Tisha Be'Av the hachamim at the time instituted the hillula marking the end of the shivah.

# Hillula of R' Amram Ben-Diwan

r. Yosef Azoulay<sup>6</sup> was a righteous man, who was known for his *hessed* in helping out many needy families of his town in Ouezzane, Morocco. In time of *hillulot* (celebration of a *hacham's* death) he would go out of his way in preparation, weeks before, in order to help out the festivity arrangements for the town. Mr. Azoulay was involved in community events to ensure that even the poor Jews would have an enjoyable time.

One year, Mr. Yosef Azoulay was so involved in his daily activities that he forgot to contribute his share and time to the *hillula* of R' Amram Ben-Diwan. At the time, he was working in the countryside, far from the main town of Ouezzane. One week before the *hillula*, while far from his home, he got extremely sick, and had to stay in house of an Arab. The night of the *hillula* he was gravely ill, lying on the floor in great pain. According to local Arabs, a white-bearded man was walking around him that night, and the Arabs weren't sure who he was. It seemed as if the elderly rabbi was protecting Mr. Azoulay.

By morning Mr. Azoulay was feeling better and was able to travel. The Arabs told Mr. Azoulay, "Last night, there was an elderly white-bearded man who looked very sacred, and was constantly watching over you, circling around you while you were lying in bed. Can you tell us who he was?" Mr. Azoulay was in shock, realizing immediately that it was R' Amram Ben-Diwan. R' Amram had come to him in a dream the night he was sick, and told him: "I am watching over you. In *zechut* of you taking care of the poor of Ouezzane and taking care of the day of my *hillula*, you shall live a long life. The angels wanted to take you up to *Shamayim* that same night, but I told the

6 Mr. Yosef Azoulay is the great grandfather of the author, Yehuda Azoulay.

angels, 'He's not ready to leave this world. He has great merit in this world and the people need him here."

Mr. Azoulay believed he was saved by the *saddik*. He told one of the Arabs servants "Get the horses ready! We must go right away to Ouezzane, I have a festival to attend to, and from now I will celebrate the *hillulot* with all my heart, and help the needy at any expense".

Many years later, in Mr. Azoulay's dying moments, he called his four sons over to his deathbed. He said, "Do not abandon the holy festive day of the *hillula* of our great *saddik*, Hacham Amram Ben-Diwan. Hashem will assist you all in all of life's challenges."

# Hashem Listens & Fulfills

Amram and his son were visiting the town of Taza, where they stayed with a friend called Mr. Benchimol.<sup>7</sup> R' Amram's son became gravely ill, but R' Amram prayed for his son and he improved immediately. Upon gaining consciousness, he asked his father for some figs. R' Amram asked Mr. Benchimol to buy figs for his son, but Mr. Benchimol replied: "Hacham, where would I get figs? It is not fig season, not a single fig is to be found!" R' Amram answered: "Just go out and buy the figs."

The man left, convinced that he would return empty-handed. When he entered the market, an Arab approached him and in a whisper, offered him figs. The man accused him of making fun

<sup>7</sup> The following story is brought down from R' Yosef Benaim, author of the "Sefer Malchei Rabanan" edited in 5691/1931. The sefer includes short biographies of hundreds of the hachamim of Morocco.

of him, until the Arab took five beautiful figs from under his clothing. He bought them and took them to the *hacham*. They realized he was a holy and righteous man, for whom Hashem fulfilled even the smallest of desires.

# Tombs of the Holy Patriarchs

Amram's son was very ill, and R' Amram fasted for three consecutive days hoping that he would get better. After the fast, the son came to him in a dream and said, "If you pray at the *Me'arat Hamachpela* (Tomb of the Patriarchs) your prayers will be accepted." R' Amram got up and realized he had to devise a way of getting into *Me'arat Hamachpela*, which at the time was off-limits to Jews by Muslim law.

R' Amram thought up a daring plan. Dressed up as an Arab, he entered *Me'arat Hamachpela* along with all the Moslems. With overflowing emotion he made his way to the gravesite of our holy forefathers and poured out his heart in prayer. Tears streaming from his eyes, he begged Hashem to hasten the *Geula* and to heal his ailing son. No one suspected that the "Moslem" who stood deep in prayer was actually a Jew.

As R' Amram made his way out, one of the Arabs suddenly noticed him and recognized him as the leader of the Jewish people in Hebron. The Arab quickly went and informed the Pasha. R' Amram was guaranteed a severe punishment. One of the Pasha's servants knew R' Amram and had tremendous respect for him. He quickly informed R' Amram of his forthcoming imprisonment.

R' Amram decided to escape with his young son R' Haim, in the middle of the night, but was not sure where he would go. He did not want to run to Yerushalayim, his birthplace, for fear that the Pasha's men would capture him there — at that time the Turk rule was widespread. Should the Sultan command the capture of R' Amram, his command would be received from the Balkan Mountains to Yemen and from Persia to Algeria. R' Amram would have to wander even further away. He immediately thought of Morocco, which at that time was not under Turkish rule. R' Amram and his son wandered discreetly from country to country, and after many tribulations, finally arrived safely in Morocco.

## True Hessed

To the city of Fez a poor man from a well-respected family was marrying off his son. The bride was a penniless orphan and the man had no money for wedding expenses, or to help his son set up his home. The poor man was ashamed to knock on people's doors to ask for charity. He decided to confide in R' Amram, who was passing through the city. The saddik R' Amram was also in dire financial trouble at the time, and could not assist him monetarily. His heart went out to the man and the Jewish home he was trying to build. He gave the man his special Shabbat garment to sell at an auction, which would surely fetch a handsome price from some wealthy member of the community.

Sure enough, the news spread rapidly and the Torah-loving wealthy Jews offered large sums of money for the privilege of buying the *hacham's* holy coat. Eventually the coat was sold for an amount that sufficed for the man to make a respectable wedding for the happy couple. R' Amram was an honoured



guest at wedding and his joy for having been able to fulfill such tremendous hessed was boundless.

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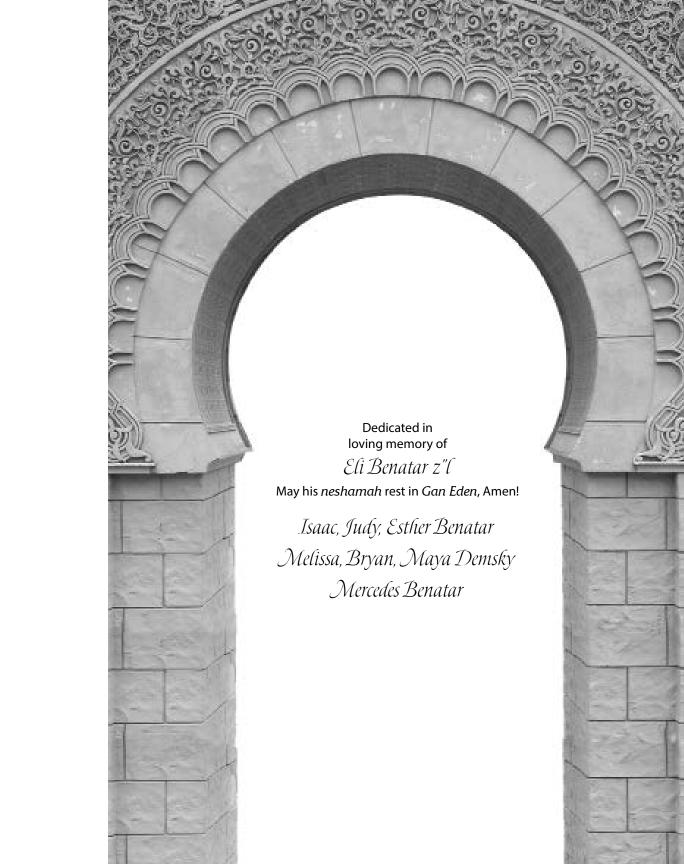
Sketch portrait of R' Amram Ben-Diwan



# HACHAM YITZHAK BEN-GUALID

TETUAN, MOROCCO

5538 - 5630 / 1778 - 1870



# HACHAM YITZHAK BEN-GUALID acham Yitzhak Ben-Gualid was born in 5538/1778 in Morocco, His father, R' Shem Tob, was descended.

acham Yitzhak Ben-Gualid was born in 5538/1778 in Tetuan, Morocco. His father, R' Shem Tob, was descended from a line of great *hachamim* who were exiled from Castilia, Spain, and settled in Tetuan, Morocco after the Spanish Inquisition. R' Yitzhak was named after his grandfather, the *Gaon* R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid, who was famous for his greatness in Torah, as the wise men of his time attested.

As a young boy, R' Yitzhak showed signs of greatness in Torah and pure fear of Hashem. He learned Torah with two great *hachamim* R' Menachem Nahon, and R' Moshe Halevi. R' Menachem was head of the *bet din* through 1824, with his associate R' Moshe Halevi.

It was obvious that the young R' Yitzhak was destined for greatness. He distanced himself from the playfulness of children, and had wonderful qualities even as a child. He was quick to understand everything he had learned, with unique depth. His youth was devoted strictly to avodat Hashem.

Along with his Torah learning, day and night, there were other signs of greatness: he avoided excess food and drink, fasted a lot, and deprived himself of the material joys of this world. He sanctified himself only with what was permissible to him. His good deeds were like a decoration to top off his keeping of the laws of the Torah.

R' Yitzhak lost his father when he was still young and his righteous mother, who was well known for her *hesed*, had to

support the household single-handedly. This was no easy task, but she put great effort into it.

The *talmidei hachamim* of Morocco at the time all recognized that R' Yitzhak possessed all the qualities necessary to become a great leader. His wisdom lit up his face. At 17, he had already mastered *Shas* and *poskim*, halachah and *aggada*, and eventually became well known throughout the country.

When he was eighteen years old, R' Yitzhak got married and had his firstborn son, who was named after his father, R' Shem Tob. His first wife died shortly after, leaving him the young infant to care for. His second marriage was to Simcha, the daughter of the famous R' Vidal Bibas. He was the first of the Bibas dynasty to come to Tetuan.

His second wife was a great assistant in his holy work, and she bore him four sons, who all became great *talmidei* hachamim: R' Vidal, R' Yaakob, R' Yosef, and R' Shelomo. She also gave birth to six daughters, who all married *talmidei* hachamim.

R' Yitzhak was very poor and sufficed with very little. He made an insignificant amount of money writing contracts, and he had to support thirteen people in his household. He also had a small income from the *bet hakneset*, which he inherited from his father.

R' Yitzhak kept to the words of masechet *Avot*: "You should live in misery and work hard to learn Torah." When his daughters reached marriageable age, and the expenses were high, he pawned his *bet hakneset* so that he could take out loans.

R' Yitzhak was an immense genius, the Chief Rabbi of Tetuan in Morocco, knowledgeable in hidden and revealed Torah. His *sefer VaYomer Yitzhak* was well known amongst

gedolei Yisrael. Despite his greatness, he acted with amazing humility, and always ran away from honor, which chased him in return...

Hacham Ovadia Yosef wrote in his foreword to the *sefer* VaYomer Yitzhak:

"A treasured light shines upon us, of turquoise, sapphire, and diamond. This is the great and beloved author of Sefer VaYomer Yitzhak on the four parts of the Shulhan Aruch, who is like the prophet from Ramatayim [Shemuel]. He is seven times brighter than the light of the sun, the best of wise men, and light of Israel. He is like a strong hammer in the ways of the Torah, and explains things with great clarity. He is an exalted judge, the elder of laws, the wonder of his generation, who is known as a holy man. This is the renowned genius, R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid, zt"l."

In addition to his greatness, modesty was a life rule for R' Yitzhak. All his good deeds were done secretly and modestly, and he was not interested in a rabbinic position. Despite the request of his *hachamim* to join them in the Jewish courts, he refused. However, he agreed to become a scribe for the court in order to appease his teachers and to be close to them. He kept this position for many years, until R' Yitzhak's teacher died in 1830.

R' Yitzhak merited the *mitzvah* of *shiluah haken* (the *mitzvah* of sending away the mother bird in order to take her eggs). He wrote a *sefer* Torah in his own handwriting, with no errors. He processed the animal skins for this purpose using a Godfearing professional. He completed and brought the Torah into the *Aron Kodesh* on *Rosh Hodesh Nissan*, with great dignity. In honor of the festive occasion he wrote a *piyut* about the greatness of Torah.

After the death of the head of the *bet din*, R' Moshe Halevi *zt"l*, in 1830, the leaders of the generation wanted R' Yitzhak

<sup>8</sup> Rambam (R' Moshe ben Maimon) Hilchot Talmud Torah (Perek 3; Halacha 6)

to fill his place. He had all of the necessary qualities — he was an excellent judge, sharp and smart, knowledgeable in all the principles of the Torah.

However, when R' Yitzhak heard that he was going to be burdened with this position, he decided to leave Tetuan and emigrate to Gibraltar, where he was confident that the wise men of his city would not disturb him with the appointment. He ran away from greatness because he was so humble. The leaders of Tetuan knew that there was no better man for the position of Chief Rabbi, so they came to his dwelling place in Gibraltar, and begged him to take the position, to instruct the people in the ways of the Torah.

R' Yitzhak realized he had no choice but to accept, and he agreed on condition that they would appoint two additional judges, so that he would not judge alone. The heads of the community agreed to this condition, and appointed R' Yom Tov Halevi, son of the previous head of the *bet din*, R' Moshe Halevi, and the *Gaon* R' Yitzhak Nahon. The appointment of R' Yitzhak was signed by no less than sixty great men and community leaders in Tetuan.

In 1863, R' Yitzhak decided to visit Eretz Yisrael with his family and several friends, and they decided to move there. They settled in Haifa, and he established a yeshivah called "Bet Halevi."

Eventually, R' Yitzhak decided to return to Tetuan, for an unknown reason. It is assumed that he felt a need to continue in the leadership of his community.

Before he lay down in his sickbed, R' Yitzhak called the *talmidei hachamim*, and asked that they not praise him too much at his funeral. They should refer to him only as *Hacham Hadayan*. He spoke to the *hebra kadisha* and instructed them

what to do after his death, according to the customs of Spanish Jewry.

Then, he called his sons and blessed them. This is what his son R' Vidal wrote that he had said: "He saw there was no one around, then he called me to say farewell. He pulled me by the hair and kissed me and hugged me. And with a heavy heart he cried: 'Blessed soul, the heavens have spoken, we need now to separate...take my blessing.' Then he blessed me."

R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid passed away on the ninth of Adar 5630/1870, erev Shabbat while saying 'Mizmor Shir Le'yom Hashabbat '9 He was ninety-two years old when he left this world.

R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid's legacy still lives on. R' Yitzhak's important and extensive library is in the *Toldot Yitzhak bet hakneset* in Har Nof, Yerushalayim, cared for by R' Shelomo Dayan. Currently most of R' Yitzhak's *sefarim*, clothes, and many belongings are stored with R' Dayan. His name is held in high esteem to this day by Moroccan and world Jewry. Many synagogues, schools and yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael bear the name 'Vayomer Yitzhak' in honor of the great R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid.

Coincidently 'Mizmor Shir Le'yom Hashabbat' is chapter 92 of Tehillim.

#### A Righteous Saddik

hen taxes were too much of a burden for R' Yitzhak's community, and many people were starving, he called a meeting with the leaders and wealthy men in the town. He told them humbly: "since I am poor, I would like to tax every kilo of meat you purchase to support my household". When they all agreed, he gave over the tax to the poor Jewish people in the town, who were starving. The head of the community of Tetuan later announced in public that 'what a zechut it is for our community to have a righteous Saddik like R' Yitzhak.'

#### A Giant of Thoughtfulness

R' Yitzhak's mother was extremely short on money and had many great expenses. She recognized that her children were starving but had nothing to offer her dear children. The mother searched desperately for any valuable belongings that she could possibly spare. Yet the only thing she had left to sell was her husband's *Shas*, in order to feed the children. She was forced to sell the *Shas*, since she had no other option. Her son, R' Yitzhak, noticed what she was doing, and saw how sad it made her to sell the Gemara which was so dear to her. This Gemara was one of the most precious items that belonged to the Ben-Gualid family. His mother ended up giving up the *Shas* (*Gemarot*) for the sake of her children.

R' Yitzhak felt his mother's pain, and couldn't handle watching his mother suffer. R' Yitzhak bravely decided to

collect money from the few wealthy people in Tetuan, and bought his father's *Shas* back to the delight of his mother.

#### The Power of a Saddik's Word

mong R' Yitzhak's students was R' Yeshayahu Benaim, the father of *Gaon* R' Rephael Haim Moshe Benaim. For many Years, R' Yeshayahu did not merit to have any children and R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid advised him to travel to the grave of the famous *Saddik* R' Amram Ben-Diwan in the city of Ouazzane, to pray on his grave. R' Yeshayahu took the *hacham's* advice and in time, his wish was fulfilled. Later that year he had a son, who he named 'Yitzhak Amram' after both R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid and R' Amram Ben-Diwan. The boy later became known as one of the more influential people of that generation and a renowned *talmid hacham* in Morocco.

#### Leaving in Peace

Yitzhak once sent the minister of Tetuan a message to arrest and imprison a certain man who physically abused his wife. When the minister went to arrest him, the man took out money to bribe the minister to leave him alone.

When R' Yitzhak heard this, he looked up to *shamayim*, his eyes filled with tears. Why was Hashem standing by allowing this to happen? His tears and prayers went up to heaven and at

midnight, the minister came once again, this time arresting the man.

In the morning, the minister got up, and waited for R' Yitzhak to finish *Shaharit*. Once he was done, he begged the *hacham* for forgiveness and handed him the bribery money that was given to him. He instructed R' Yitzhak to do as he wished with the money, and R' Yitzhak forgave him.

R' Yitzhak told him that he will always stand by and abide by the decision of the *hachamim* when they use their Torah judgments. The minister replied, "You do not need to tell me this, for it is known, because in heaven they fight so that the *hachamim* are able to continue to judge according to their religion. The heavens have frightened me on account of me accepting the bribe, and I would like to leave you in peace."

The community, who was standing around and watching this exchange, was shocked at what they were seeing. They were used to seeing haughty Arab ministers, whereas this minister was surrendering to the great R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid. From then on the congregation was in awe of the holiness of the great saddik.



Rare photograph of R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid

#### The Distinguished Guardian of Tetuan

orld War I (1914–1918) was a time of great hardship for everyone in the world. In the city of Tetuan, Morocco, everyone was told to stay in their homes for safety. At the time, most cities had nightly curfews, and the streets were completely deserted. There was once a non-Jewish guard who stood at the gate at the entrance to the city, guarding the city in the name of the king, in order to protect the people.<sup>10</sup>

One night in the middle of the winter, on a cold and rainy night, the guard was standing under an arch near the entrance to the city. He noticed an old white-bearded Jewish man, wearing traditional Moroccan Jewish clothing. The guard asked the humble Jew walking around the city, "Don't you know it's dangerous to be out here late at night?"

The elderly man said, "I am R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid and I'm protecting the Jewish people of Tetuan from danger."

The next morning the guard told the story to the *hachamim* of the town and asked them about the distinguished elderly man who was walking around the city. R' Shemuel Yisrael, one of the leading *hachamim* at the time, told the guard "that the *saddik* had already passed away over forty years ago."

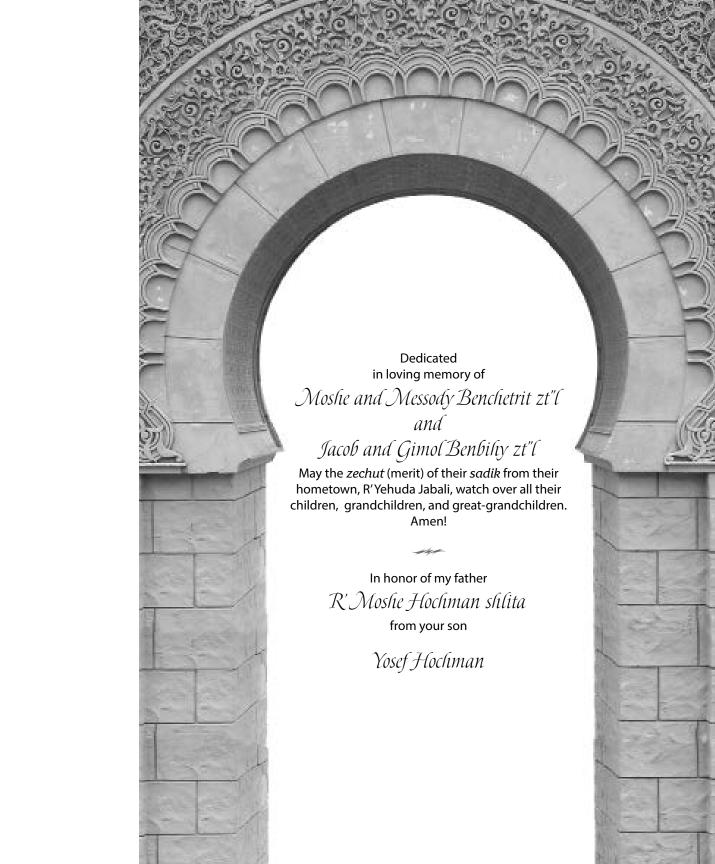
<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Donna Abecasis zt"l knew Hacham Shemuel Yisrael zt"l from Tetuan, Morocco. R' Shemuel told her this story, which she repeated to her son Mr. Moshe Abecasis, who passed it on to the author.

#### HACHAM ELIEZER YEHEZKEL PAPO

(PELE YOETZ)

Sarajevo, Bosnia

5545 - 5586 / 1785 - 1826



# HACHAM ELIEZER Torah subjects. reason he was nicknamed "Hakadosh."

YEHEZKEL PAPO (PELE YOETZ)

acham Eliezer Yehezkel Papo was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia<sup>11</sup>, in 5545/1785. His father was Hagaon R' Yitzhak Papo. At the age of eleven, R' Eliezer was recognized as a future Torah luminary, and was compiling personal notes on many

R' Eliezer became known as a talmid hacham in his community at a young age, and was ordained as hacham of the community of Selestria in Bulgaria. He held the office of Chief Rabbi in Selestria, Bulgaria, until he died. He led a life filled with kedushah, eating barely any food on a regular day, and restraining himself from every kind of pleasure. This is the

R' Eliezer married a saddeket known for her personal piety, and they had two sons, Menahem and Yehuda, who later became great halachic authorities. R' Eliezer also had two daughters who married respected talmidei hachamim.

R' Eliezer pointed out that the study of mussar (Jewish ethical discipline) was intended to lead to proper action. He followed the tradition of the Hida (R' Haim Yosef David Azoulay, 1724-1806), and his work was greatly influenced by the Hida. R' Eliezer wrote in his renowned sefer, Pele Yoetz: "It is appropriate to learn all the sefarim of mussar one by one, and to repeat them regularly without fail, day by day and night by night. And when the reader is rereading the mussar sefer once again, it should be as if it is new to him. He should constantly find new inspiration for the state of his neshamah."

<sup>11</sup> Sarajevo, Bosnia, was part of the Ottoman Turkish Empire since it was founded in the 1450s and only became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878.

R' Eliezer's book, *Pele Yoetz*, provides advice on how to behave as a Jew in different aspects of life. R' Eliezer was a major advocate of the *mussar* tradition. He became an outstanding rabbinic scholar, deeply devoted to piety and spirituality. He authored *sefarim* of halachah, *homiletics*, and *mussar*, and was profoundly committed to *Kabbalah*.

In spite of the brevity of his life, R' Eliezer achieved remarkable depth in his rabbinic work, and left to posterity a significant literary inheritance. R' Eliezer also recommended that Sephardic students who devote most of their day learning Torah should devote much time to halachah, as is customary in the Sephardic style of learning.

R' Eliezer Papo passed away at the young age of forty-one in 5586/1826. He left behind many significant writings, and his *sefer*, *Pele Yoetz*, is one that circulates today in Jewish communities worldwide.



R' Yehuda ben Shlomo Alkalai (Alkali) (1798–1878)

#### A Jewish Soul is More Precious Than a Sefer Torah

agaon R' Yehuda Alkalai,<sup>12</sup> one of R' Eliezer Papo's students, tells a story that attests to R' Eliezer's *mesirut* nefesh (willingness to sacrifice) for each Jewish soul.

"I heard from the holy mouth of my teacher and *gaon* R' Eliezer Papo *zt"l*, that when he was a Torah teacher in the city of Selestria, Bulgaria, a Jewish man was convicted for crimes of heresy, and they wanted to hang him unless a ransom was paid.

"The community did not want to raise the money, but R' Eliezer gathered the entire congregation in the *bet hakneset* and said, 'It is true that it is not in my hands to force you to bring forth your jewelry from your wives and daughters. But I can demand that you sell every *sefer Torah* or holy item found in the houses of Hashem, and bring me all of the money. The Torah was only given to the Jewish People and without the Jewish People, there is no Torah! Nothing stands in the way of *pikuach nefesh* [saving of human life].' By the time he was done, his powerful and righteous words penetrated the hearts of the people and they wanted to give money to redeem their Jewish brother."

<sup>12</sup> Sefer Minhat Yehuda (11:B)

#### In the Merit of the Saddik, Even After His Passing

hen Silistra, Bulgaria, was conquered by the Russians, they wanted to destroy the Jewish cemetery in order to build a church. When they were overturning the plot of land, the workers reached the grave of the *saddik* R' Eliezer Papo, but they were unable to move it. Their failed attempts made them contemplate remorse over what they were doing, and they understood that a holy man lay there. They left the grave of the *saddik* alone, and stopped the destruction of the cemetery. To this day, R' Eliezer's grave stands at the center of the cemetery.

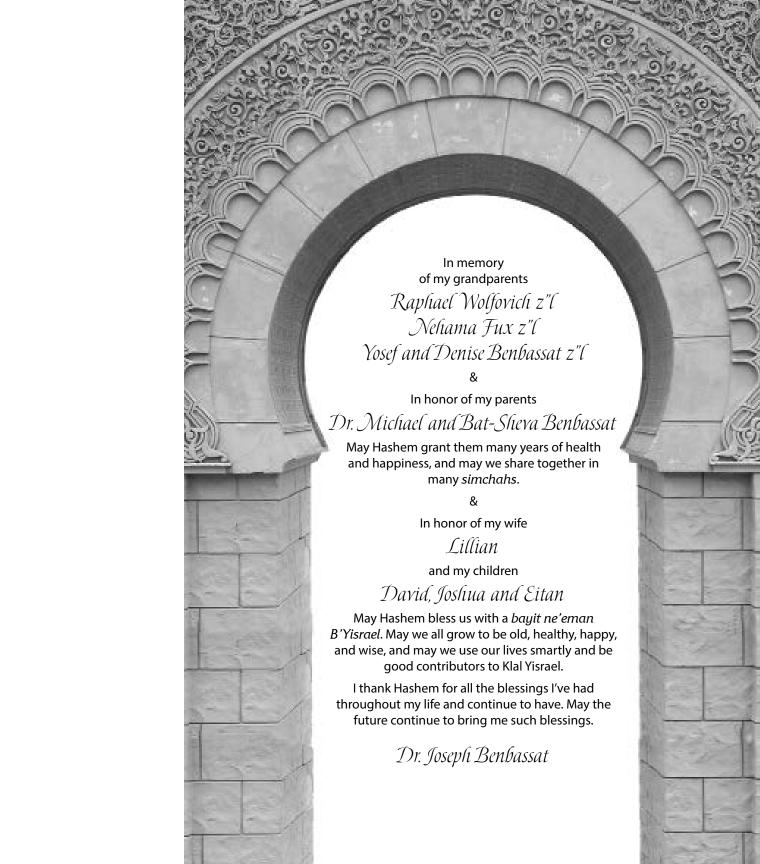
Live testimony was given by a man who lived in Silistra in the late 1940s after World War II, who found the holy *kever* of R' Eliezer Papo covered in wild plants and the tombstone had sunk into the ground. He recognized the *keber* of the *saddik* and it looked like an iron dome. The iron was the reason the workers stopped the destruction of the cemetery. On the side of the *keber* there is writing in Bulgarian: "This *keber* was made by the elder Yosef Mordechai Fankas from the city of Vidin in 5673/1913." The *shamash* of the *kehillah* of Silistra accompanied the visitor and told him, "On *Erev Yom Kippur* and *Tishah B'Av* we pray at this *keber*." The *shamash* told the visitor it was in the merit of the *saddik* R' Eliezer Papo that the cemetery was never destroyed.



#### HACHAM ABDALLAH SOMECH

Baghdad, Iraq

5573 - 5649 / 1813 - 1889



### HACHAM ABDALLAH SOMECH

acham Abdallah Somech zt"l was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 5573/1813. He was the son of the great talmid hacham R' Abraham Somech. He was the eldest of eight brothers and eight sisters. He married Sarah, and had nine great children: Saleh, Aharon, Raphael, Khatoon, Abraham, Sasson, Massouda, Rachel, and Simha. He was one of the greatest hachamim of Baghdad and one of the most important poskim (halachic authorities) of his generation. He studied under the great mekubal R' Yaakob Harofeh. He was the greatest pillar of Torah of his time in Bavel (Iraq).

R' Abdallah was the teacher of R' Yosef Haim (the Ben Ish Hai). When the Ben Ish Hai gave public speeches in the great synagogue of Baghdad, R' Abdallah would attend, whenever he could, so that he could hear his student. Another mark of this *talmid hacham* was that when the Ben Ish Hai made his entry into the *bet hakneset*, he would rise before him, along with everyone present. The teacher's manners made everyone understand the greatness of the Ben Ish Hai.

R' Abdallah was a descendant of the important family of R' Nissim Gaon (990–1062) also known as *HaMaftech*, who authored the *vidui* for Yom Kippur. He states in the introduction to his *sefer Kibbutz Hachamim*: "Servant of G-d, Abdallah son of Abraham son of Yosef son of Yehezkel HaSomech, grandson and great-grandson of R' Nissim who was the Rosh Yeshivah here in the community of *Bavel*."

The sons of R' Nissim Gaon were Yehoshua, Yosef, and Yehezkel. Yehoshua named his first two sons Abraham and Abdallah, names which are found in the family from generation

to generation, including family members today. The family name Somech means "support" in Hebrew, and its etymology comes from the fact that one member of the family, Yehezkel, was a *somech* (assistant) of the *bet hakneset's hazzan* during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

From early childhood, R' Abdallah sought to learn Torah day and night, always dwelling on his love for Torah. He became famous as a renowned scholar at an exceptionally young age.

At first, R' Abdallah was a merchant like most of his townspeople, and was a partner to the great merchant Moshe Kabassa. When he caught wind of the fact that Torah learning was fading due to the lack of a bet hamidrash for hachamim, he decided to open a bet hamidrash. He picked ten of the best young scholars he could find and taught them Torah without pay. He became Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Midrash Abu Menashe (established in 1840 by Heskel Menashe Zebaida); the yeshivah was later expanded and renamed the well-known Midrash Bet Zilka, which remained in operation until 1951.

His great sefer, Zivchei Zedek, was published in two volumes after his death. The sefer is a summary of earlier and later scholars' halachic views, and his final piskei halachah (halachic decisions) on various issues. The sefer was widely followed in India and the Far East. The end of the books includes responsa on the entire Shulhan Aruch.

He avoided honor, but it followed him, and despite the fact that he was known as a great *gaon* to whom everyone turned, he was not interested in a formal position. His simplicity and the pleasant way in which he conducted himself made him extremely popular. He returned Torah learning in *Bavel* to its initial glory. He was loved by the community and called "*Asta*" by all, which means "my teacher."

His reputation as a brilliant *talmid hacham* became widespread, and he fought the holy war of Torah with great devotion and self-sacrifice. The *gaon* R' Gershon Hanoch Henik *zt"l* from Radzin asked R' Abdallah to write a *haskamah* (approbation) for his sefer, Sidrei Taharot, about Masechet Ohalot. In an introduction to the haskamah he writes: "Following is a haskamah by the great, famous and righteous hacham, who is elderly and is in the yeshivah of Israel with its holy scholars, Sinai and Oker Harim, the head of the Jewish community of Bavel in Baghdad."

R' Shelomo Hutzin wrote about R' Abdallah as follows: "If I were to praise him, even just the slightest bit, all the pages in the world would be insufficient. What's more, this would no doubt displease him, for he was extremely humble and wanted no fame."

R' Abdallah Somech left this world on Erev Shabbat, on the eighteenth of *Elul* 5649/1889.



R' Yosef Haim (Ben Ish Hai)

84 / A Legacy Of Leaders II Hacham Abdallah Somech / 85

#### Incarnation of an Angel

ne day in Baghdad, policemen came to deliver R' Abdallah to the governor, who wished to speak with him after he had dismissed a *dayan* (rabbinic judge) who had proven to be unsuitable for his position. When the policemen entered R' Abdallah's home, they froze, seeing him seated among bearded *talmidei hachamim* who were listening to his teachings. R' Abdallah's visage appeared to them like the incarnation of an angel from Heaven, and this sight impressed them so much that they turned around and left.

When the governor had asked them why they had not brought R' Abdallah, the policemen replied: "Do you know who you sent us to get? The prophet Moshe himself!" The governor decided to send honorable representatives to persuade R' Abdallah to reverse his decision. R' Abdallah replied, "My decision was made in accordance with the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu. I therefore cannot change it."

The governor understood this point of view perfectly and accepted the righteous words of R' Abdallah.

#### The Intact Body

n Erev Shabbat, the eighteenth of Elul 5649/1889, R' Abdallah passed away. However, astonishing events took place around his *keber*, events which became known not only in Iraq, but all the way to Constantinople (Istanbul) and London. At the time, there was an outbreak of a terrible disease, cholera, in Baghdad, and R' Abdallah passed away

from this disease. For this reason, he was not buried in the regular cemetery, but in the backyard of Yehoshua the *Kohen Gadol*. This place was holy to the Muslims as well, and a great dispute broke out about burying the great *talmid hacham* in a holy place without the government's permission. Eventually the government forced the Jews to remove the *hacham* from his grave on the twelfth of Kislev, eighty four days after he was buried. The anti-Semitic mayor of Baghdad took advantage of the situation to imprison several of the leaders of the community and many *hachamim*.

The local Jewish community sent delegations to influential people in Constantinople (the Sassoon family<sup>13</sup>) and London. As a result, the anti-Semitic mayor was fired from his position, and later the *hachamim* were released when the government of Britain interfered.

Nevertheless, the Jewish community resigned itself to digging up the remains of the illustrious *hacham*. Several great *talmidei hachamim* descended into the *keber* and asked forgiveness from R' Abdallah. However, they were utterly astonished when they noticed that the body of their revered hacham had remained completely intact, exactly as on the day he was buried.

Eyewitnesses said that when R' Abdallah was removed from his grave, he looked as though he was asleep; his flesh had not rotted, his hair was not scorched, and his shrouds had not withered.

<sup>13</sup> The Sassoon family is a family of international renown, which originated in the Jewish community of Baghdad, and it is said to have originally descended from the Ibn Shoshans of Spain. Sassoon ben Salih (1750–1830) was a banker to the Wali (provincial governor) of Baghdad.

#### Hacham Abdallah's Great Honor

here was once a Jew who converted to Islam,<sup>14</sup> and told false tales about another Jew to the authorities. The Jew was tried, swore under oath that he was right, and was found to be innocent. The Muslim judges knew that an oath was important to Jews, and that a Jew would not dare lie under oath.

The convert who lost his case was outraged. He went to the *Wali* (Muslim governor), and told him that when a Jew takes an oath, he is laughing inside, since the Jews have a prayer called *Kol Nidrei* on *Yom Kippur*, in which they rid themselves of all oaths. To prove his point, he opened a *machzor* and read and translated the prayer aloud.

Upon hearing these words, the *Wali* called for the Jewish leader to come and clarify this trick the Jews were playing.

Three policemen went to *Bet Hamidrash Zilka*, R' Abdallah's *bet hamidrash*, and commanded that the *hacham* be brought to them. One of the students pointed out R' Abdallah's office, where he was studying with the advanced students. The three policemen entered the room and stopped in their tracks. They were astounded by what they saw: R' Abdallah's face was shining brightly with an unearthly light. They were afraid to even approach him, and they left.

They came to the *Wali* and told him that R' Abdallah looked like a righteous man, and that they feared approaching him. The *Wali* shouted at the policemen, and sent three different policemen to get R' Abdallah.

The second delegation was also afraid to enter the *hacham*'s office, so they passed him a note asking him to please come to the *Wali*.

R' Abdallah walked to the *Wali* accompanied by the entire yeshivah. When the Jews of the town saw their *hachamim* walking, they joined in as well. When R' Abdallah finally reached the *Wali's* office, he had a procession of thousands of people following him.

The governor looked out his window, and was amazed to see so many people. When R' Abdallah entered his office, he panicked, and apologized for making him come all that way to see him. He was embarrassed to tell R' Abdallah why he had invited him, and asked one of the other rabbis — R' Moshe Sadkah — his question instead. R' Moshe explained that the oaths being nullified are oaths to G-d, never to another human being. Such an oath would always be binding, and it is a terrible sin to take an oath insincerely.

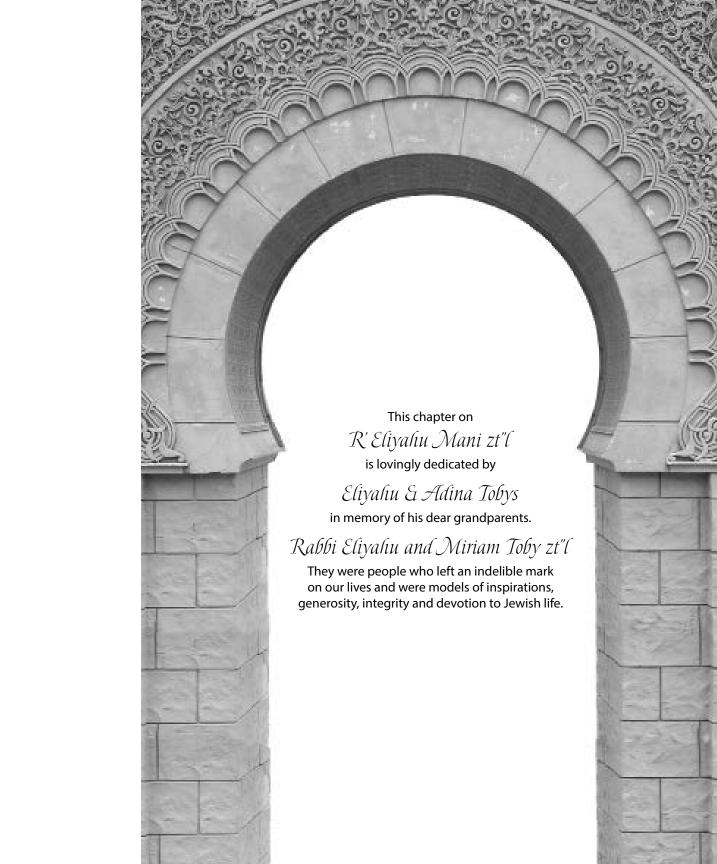
The governor was convinced, and he commanded that the convert be brought to him immediately and whipped in front of R' Abdallah and his procession. R' Abdallah didn't know why the man was being whipped, and mercifully begged the governor to stop, because he could not bear witness to the pain of another Jew...

The governor accompanied R' Abdallah to his home and granted him great honor. From that day forward, the governor became a great admirer and would often come to seek R' Abdallah's advice or blessings. R' Abdallah used his good relationship with the *Wali* for the benefit of the entire Jewish community.

<sup>14 &#</sup>x27;Yisrael af shechata Yisrael hu'

#### HACHAM ELIYAHU SALIMAN MANI

Baghdad, Iraq 5584 - 5659 / 1824 - 1899



#### HACHAM ELIYAHU SALIMAN MANI

acham Eliyahu Saliman Mani zt"l was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in the month of *Tamuz* 5584/1824. His father, *Hacham* Saliman Mani, a generous and kind *talmid hacham*, gave openhandedly of his wealth to the poor and to many Torah institutions.

R' Saliman hired the best teachers to teach his son Eliyahu, a diligent student with a sharp mind. As a young child, Eliyahu loved to do *mitzvot*. It was well known that when R' Eliyahu prayed to Hashem, his eyes filled with tears. He was the *gaon* of the generation. R' Abdallah Somech, who later became R' Eliyahu's teacher, once saw Eliyahu crying as he prayed. R' Abdallah came up to him after *tefillah* and asked him why he had been crying. With innocence, Eliyahu answered, "I cried that I should merit studying Torah diligently, and that I should understand what I learn clearly."

When R' Eliyahu was a little older, his father enrolled him in *Midrash Bet Zilka*, a well known *bet hamidrash* that had been established by R' Abdallah Somech. In the *bet hamidrash*, R' Eliyahu continued to grow in Torah and eventually he wrote many notable *sefarim*.

His teacher, R' Abdallah, was especially close to him, and influenced him with his wealth of knowledge. R' Eliyahu's great aspiration to gain more and more knowledge was limitless. Later in his life, R' Eliyahu described it himself:

"When I was fifteen years old, studying in the bet hamidrash of my teacher, I saw a man giving a book to my teacher. I asked my teacher who this person was. He answered, 'This man has written a book and asked if I would give him a haskamah.' There

are not enough words to describe the strong feelings that stirred in my heart when I heard my teacher's answer. Until that day I did not believe that there were people in our times who had the skill to write books about our holy Torah. That evening I left the bet hamidrash and ran all the way to the bet hakneset where R'Yitzhak Gaon<sup>15</sup> (Baghdad, Iraq; 636–660), a great Jewish leader of the Geonic<sup>16</sup> period, is buried. I fell to the floor, and with my tears falling on the grave of this holy man, swore, 'If Hashem will be with me and will give me the merit to write a book, I will dedicate my first writing to Hacham Yitzhak Gaon.'"

Hacham Eliyahu kept his promise. The first book he authored, at the age of twenty-seven, was entitled *Siach Yitzhak*, named after Hacham Yitzhak Gaon.

R' Eliyahu was an associate of R' Yosef Haim (the Ben Ish Hai) of Baghdad. With the *berachah* of the Ben Ish Hai, R' Eliyahu decided to go and live in Eretz Yisrael. He settled in the holy city of Hebron with his wife, and served as rabbi of the Jewish community. His three children were born in Eretz Yisrael.

R' Eliyahu married Serach Kaduri, the daughter of R' Yosef Kaduri, and they had a daughter named Rahel. Rahel Mani married R' Ezra Yehezkel Hakohen, a student of Hacham Abdallah Somech. R' Eliyahu's life was a combination of Torah, piety, and *avodat Hashem* (holy service to Hashem). He was an amazing example of a generous, kind person whose special qualities shone through for all to see.

R' Eliyahu Saliman Mani zt"l left this world in 5659/1899 in Hebron. When R' Eliyahu passed away, some conflict erupted about his burial place. R' Eliyahu was accepted and admired

by the Arabs, who called him 'Sheikh.' When he passed away, the Jews buried him in the Jewish cemetery, but the Arabs wanted him to be buried near them, so they stole the body and buried him in the Muslim cemetery. Eventually the Jewish community regained the body and stood guard over the grave.



R' Eliyahu Mani's son -R' Saliman Menahem Mani

<sup>15</sup> Hacham Yitzhak Gaon succeeded R' Hanina as a gaon of Firuz-Shabur (Nehardeo) (Bavel – Iraq). He was the last gaon of the Metivta of Firuz-Shabur.

<sup>16</sup> Geonim were the leaders of the two great yeshivot of Sura and Pumbedita, in Babylonia (modern-day Iraq). Geonim is the plural of gaon, which means "pride" or "splendor" in ancient Hebrew, and since the 1800s has come to mean "genius," as is used in modern Hebrew. The period of the Geonim began in 4339/589, and ended in 4798/1038, spanning nearly 450 years.

<sup>17</sup> Sheikh in the Arabic language literally means an elder or a revered wise man.

#### Honoring The Mekubal R' Shalom Sharaby

Right wrote in the *hakdamah* to one of his *sefarim*: "Today, on the twenty-seventh of *Shevat* 5616/1856, I took upon myself never to ask any questions on the *sefer Nahar Shalom* [written by the grandson of the Rashash - R' Shalom Sharaby - 1720/1777] because of a certain story that happened."

In sefer Pri Etz Hagan the following story is told:

R' Moshe Haim (son of the Ben Ish Hai) had the *minhag* to bring honorable *hachamim* into his house every Shabbat for *seudah shlishit*. R' Moshe would then say a *devar Torah* before them. Even R' Eliyahu was a regular guest there.

One Shabbat R' Eliyahu was saying a *devar Torah*, and in the middle of his *devar Torah* he argued against one of the explanations of one of the great *mekubalim*, R' Shalom Sharaby. R' Nissim Eni, one of R' Eliyahu's colleagues and grandson of R' Shalom Sharaby, was present at *seudah shlishit*. The two disputed an interpretation of a difficult Kabbalistic issue that his grandfather, R' Shalom Sharaby, addressed. After reading the *Nahar Shalom's* understanding of the issue, R' Eliyahu proclaimed, "This was not the Rashash's meaning!"

After finishing his *devar Torah*, R' Eliyahu felt horrific pains and he became bedridden for nearly two days. He became gravely ill, and even the doctors were unable to heal him. He began to cry, and started saying the words of *vidui*.

By the third day he started feeling better and slowly began recovering. He called his wife, Rabbanit Serach, and said, "Behold, you will give birth to a son, and we will call him Shalom, because *hamekubal* R' Shalom Sharaby appeared to

me in a dream, and rebuked me for opposing his opinion in such a harsh way. That was the cause of my sickness. He told me, 'What right do you have to say that my grandson didn't understand me! You are the one who misunderstood the great words of my grandson.' Therefore he would not forgive me nor would I survive this disease unless if I named my future son after him. I assured him that I would do it and he forgave me." His wife gave birth to a son and they called him Shalom, named after the great *mekubal* R' Shalom Sharaby.

#### A Gift from the King of Egypt

hen R' Eliyahu Mani visited Cairo, Egypt, he was welcomed into the house of a very wealthy man, the head of the Jewish community. The wealthy man happened to be very close to the king, and entered a bid to be in charge of supplying all of the uniforms to his soldiers.

While R' Eliyahu was in the home of the wealthy Jew, his host was summoned by the king to the king's council meeting regarding uniforms for the soldiers. Before leaving for the palace, R' Eliyahu told him to be very careful to make sure he prays *Minhah*. The man agreed.

On that very same day, the wealthy man won the bid to be the supplier for the uniforms! The time for *Minhah* then came and the rich man left the council in order to find a discreet place to pray. After he returned from praying, the king asked him where he had gone. The rich man answered, "I went to pray." The king said, "Why is this day different from all other days?" The wealthy man responded, "A certain *hacham* came to me and told me that today I should be careful to pray

*Minhah*. So I followed his words." The king said, "Please bring him to me."

When R' Eliyahu came to the king, he honored him greatly. At the time, the king's daughter was very sick, and the doctors could not find a cure. The king asked the *hacham* to heal her. R' Eliyahu answered politely, "I am not a doctor." The king requested that R' Eliyahu give her a *berachah* instead. R' Eliyahu agreed and took a cup of water and recited certain chapters of *Tehillim* over it. He gave the cup of water to the king's daughter to drink. When she finished drinking the water, the color of her face returned to normal and she became healthy! The king gave R' Eliyahu a large sum of money and gifts for the poor Jewish people of Hebron and sent him off with much honor.<sup>18</sup>

#### Simplicity and Concern Repaid from Above

R' Eliyahu was once in Damascus, Syria, attending an uplifting event for a public cause. A wealthy man from the city, Mr. Parchi, insisted on hosting the *hacham*. R' Eliyahu declined, but Mr. Parchi continued insisting until he promised R' Eliyahu that he will give him his own private living quarters so that he could learn and pray peacefully. R' Eliyahu finally accepted on condition that no ladies should walk near where he was staying, because the heels of their shoes make noise and it would disturb his learning. Mr. Parchi accepted, and was honored and happy with R' Eliyahu's decision.

At the meal, R' Eliyahu acted as he always did when abroad, and only ate bread. However, Mr. Parchi — who had bought new pots, pans, plates, and cups so that there wouldn't be even the slightest *issur* (sin) — didn't let R' Eliyahu only eat bread, and insisted that he eat from the fine foods at the *seudah*. R' Eliyahu, of course, refused. Mr. Parchi didn't give up, until he actually brought the *shohet* himself with his knife to show R' Eliyahu that he really had *yirat Shamayim*, and performed reliable *shehitah*.

R' Eliyahu finally agreed to eat from the fine foods before him, due to the perseverance of the wealthy man. Mr. Parchi and all the guests were very happy and they started to serve R' Eliyahu.

While R' Eliyahu was cutting the chicken, he noticed that one of the bones of the chicken was broken, presenting a problem of *safeik treifah*. R' Eliyahu turned to Mr. Parchi to show him, and said, "I appreciate your tremendous respect towards me but you see, even *Shamayim* wants me to keep to my *humrot* [stringencies] and prevents me from eating your meal!"

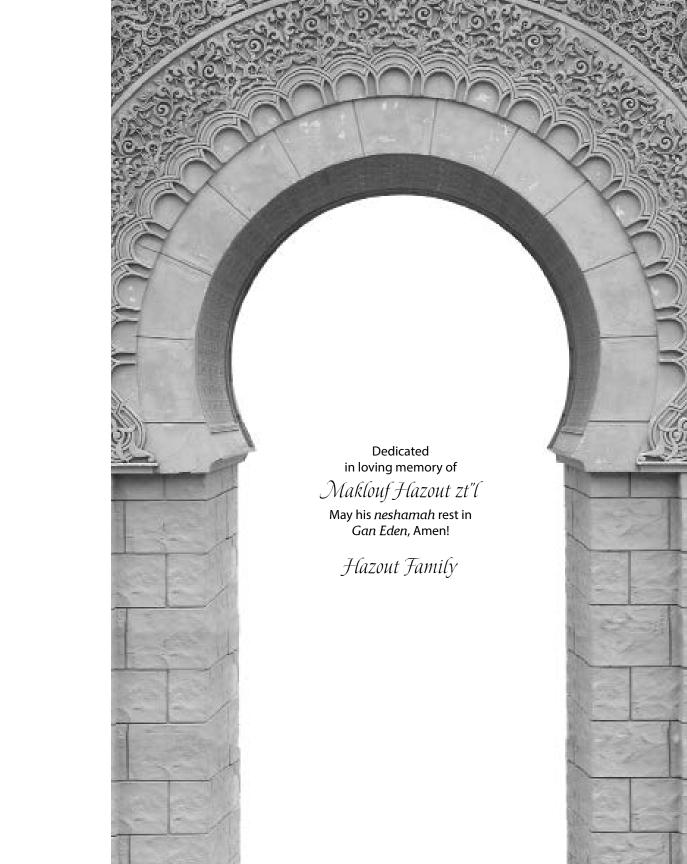
<sup>18</sup> The above story is brought down from; Sefer 'Hachme Hasepharadim Beretz Yisrael'



#### HACHAM SHELOMO ABEN-OANAN

Fez, Morocco

5608 - 5689 / 1848 - 1929



## HACHAM SHELOMO ABEN-OANAN

acham Shelomo Aben-Danan *zt"l* was born on Shabbat, the ninth of Sivan 5608/1848. His father, R' Moshe, was a prominent *talmid hacham* and noble scholar, who wrote several *sefarim* on halachah. There was a *bet hakneset* in the city of Fez that was passed from generation to generation in the Aben-Danan family. In this *bet hakneset*, the *kehillah* prayed in their local style of praying, and not in the style of Spanish Jewry

R' Moshe Aben-Danan passed away at the young age of thirty, on the eighteenth of *Sivan* 5616/1856. His son Shelomo was eight years old at the time. After his father's death, Shelomo and his mother were looked after by his grandfather, R' Shemuel Aben-Danan, a great *talmid hacham* and a preacher, and his uncle, R' Yitzhak Aben-Danan. R' Yitzhak was a *dayan* and had high authority in Fez, and he wrote a *sefer* of his halachic rulings called "Le'Yitzhak Re'ach." He passed away in Fez on the fourth of *lyar* 5659/1899.

As a boy, Shelomo studied with his mother and uncle, and later with Hacham Avner Yisrael (1826–1883) from France. R' Avner Yisrael had a large library with hundreds of handwritten sefarim of Rishonim. He wrote many sefarim on different Torah subjects, including a sefer on the lineage of Fez and Moroccan families.

It is said that at sixteen, R' Shelomo was knowledgeable in all of *Shas* and *Poskim*. He began studying Kabbalah at a very young age. When he was eighteen, R' Shelomo was asked to teach *Gemara* in the Yeshivah of Fez.

R' Shelomo Aben-Danan loved Eretz Yisrael with all his heart and soul, and always wanted to visit there. In 1874, when he was twenty-seven years old, he joined his uncle, R' Yitzhak Aben-Danan, and together they visited Eretz Yisrael. R' Yitzhak was looking into the possibility of moving to Eretz Yisrael permanently. They stayed there for thirty-three days, and visited all the holy sights. They found a hint for the number of days they should stay in the *pasuk*<sup>19</sup> — "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonders from Your Torah." The numeral equivalent of the Hebrew word **LG** is thirty-three. In the merit of the thirty-three days they spent in Eretz Yisrael, they would see the greatness of Torah.

When R' Yitzhak and R' Shelomo passed through Alexandria, Egypt, they met the Chief Rabbi, Hacham Moshe Pardo. When they came upon him, he told them he had spent three days struggling over the words of one *Tosafot*, to no avail. They sat with him and discussed the matter until the words of the *Tosafot* were clear to them all.

From the time he returned to his city of Fez, R' Shelomo encouraged the people of the community to move to Eretz Yisrael. He recognized the greatness of the *hachamim* living in Eretz Yisrael. He also hosted and assisted the emissaries from Eretz Yisrael who came by Fez. Any family who thought to move to Eretz Yisrael came to receive his *berachah*.

The community of Fez asked R' Shelomo to be their treasurer and community leader. He took care of the poor people in the community, and supported Jews who had lost their fortune, especially those who were in trouble with the government. He was a community leader for three years before he became Chief Rabbi of Fez. Like his ancestors, he stood at the gate of his town to defend his fellow Jews. Every so often he had to represent the community before the authorities, and demand their rights from the government of Morocco.

In 1918, the French authorities asked R' Shelomo to become a judge in Rabat. R' Shelomo had a difficult time leaving his family in Fez, so he asked the authorities to dismiss him and let him return to his city.

In *Shevat* of 1920, R' Shelomo returned to Fez and became Chief Rabbi and *dayan*. He judged the community righteously all of his days in *bet din*. The people who came to be judged before him felt his judgment was just, and they always left the court pleased, feeling they had received the authority of Moshe *Rabenu* from Har Sinai.

R' Yosef Ben-Naim wrote in his sefer, Malche D'Rabbanan: "When R' Shelomo was eighty years old he sat and learned Torah with great enthusiasm, like a twenty-year-old."

R' Shelomo would deliver a sermon each year on Yom Kippur, and he would always point at empty seats and mention people in the community who had died during that year.

On the eve of *Yom Kippur* 5689/1929, R' Shelomo began to recite "Kol Nidre" with great enthusiasm, and when he reached the part stating "From last *Yom Kippur* until this *Yom* 



Dayanim of Fez. Sitting from left to right: R' Shelomo Aben-Danan, R' Vidal Hassarfati, R' Mattitiahu Serero

<sup>19 &#</sup>x27;Gal Aini Ve'Abita Niflaot Mitoratecha' - Tehillim (Perek 119; Pasuk 18)

Kippur, and from this Yom Kippur until next Yom Kippur which we should reach in peace," he skipped the last part, as though he knew that he would not live to see the next Yom Kippur.

On Rosh Hodesh Heshvan, R' Shelomo fell ill, and got sick again on the twenty-fourth of Heshvan. Toward the end of Shabbat he rushed his sons to make havdalah, and passed away a few hours later. Word of his passing reached the far cities of Morocco, and people from all over the country came to pay him his last respects. Hacham Shelomo Waknin from Eretz Yisrael eulogized him, as well as R' Nissim Dannon, Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Yerushalayim, and R' Rephael Bibas of Tiberius. He left a great impression on Moroccan Jewry.



Funeral of R' Shelomo Aben-Danan in Fez, Morocco, 5689/1928

#### Against All Odds

In the *bet din* of Fez there were scholarly judges who granted all their respect to R' Shelomo. In spite of his young age, they gave him affection and encouragement. One of the decisions that R' Shelomo had to make during his first year as a judge concerned a married couple who had written certain conditions of inheritance in the event of the death of a spouse.

These conditions were neither in agreement with Jewish law, nor with the government standards in Morocco. The conditions had been registered outside the prenuptial agreement. The legal beneficiary wanted to cancel the legitimacy of the will, because it went against halachah. Having studied the case attentively, R' Shelomo determined that the will was valid.

In 1880, R' Shelomo drafted an innovative ruling that angered those who were hurt by his decision. Every judge who was acquainted with the case and with the decision of R' Shelomo declared it correct. The *talmidei hachamim* of Fez were the first to support it. They wrote a statement in which they expressed their agreement, and they added favorable words with regard to R' Shelomo's great decision. The ruling was then passed on to all the wise men of Morocco, who all acknowledged R' Shelomo's great achievement.

#### From A Mother's Pain To Her Son's Gain

Relating National States of Shelomo was greatly grieved by his grandfather's passing. Having no one to turn to after his mother rebuked him for some mischief, he went one night to the grave of his father. There, he burst into bitter tears and cried out to his father: "Abba, I know I made a mistake for which mother rebuked me. But I am hurt, and I have no one to turn to other than you. I regret the mistake I made, and from this point on I want to follow the path of our holy sacred Torah and our righteous ancestors, the Aben-Danan family. I want to bear the name of the family proudly."

Having calmed down, he returned home. No one had noticed his absence. That night, his father appeared in a dream to his mother and said: "My dear wife, you shouldn't feel lonely and distraught regarding the education of our dear son, Shelomo. From now on you will not need to discipline him; he will also support you and assist you in all your personal needs. He is blessed from the Aben-Danan family up here in heaven, and is destined for greatness." The dream frightened the mother, who went to her husband's grave the following morning to light a candle there, as is the custom of Moroccan Jewry.

She returned home and conversed with her son Shelomo, who conveyed to her his regret and pain at his mistake. From that day on mother and son were close, and R' Shelomo was on his way to greatness.



#### HACHAM REPHAEL ENCAOUA

(HAMALACH)

Sale, Morocco

5608 - 5695 / 1848 - 1935



## HACHAM REPHAEL ENCAOUA (HAMALACH)

acham Rephael Encaoua zt"/s brilliant father was Hacham Mordechai. He was born in the city of Sale, Morocco, on the second of Tevet 5608/1848. His family is of impressive ancestry, its roots tracing back to the famous hachamim of Spain from 900 years ago. The family is well known for its public service, spiritual and community leaders, royal servants, ministers, bookkeepers, doctors, and miracle workers. Some were killed by Jew-haters as martyrs, Al Kiddush Hashem, the name of the family sanctified forever.

R' Rephael was known for his Torah, greatness, and wealth, all of which are factors in the greatest of all *talmidei hachamim*. He was a brilliant genius in Torah, with great insight in halachah. He was modest, humble and self sacrificing, and his name was well known. He was commonly called 'Hamalach' (The Angel Rephael), since his character was like that of a perfect angel.

R' Rephael married the daughter of R' Yissachar Azzaraf, who was the *Av Bet Din* of Sale. R' Azzaraf moved to Eretz Yisrael in 1880 and became a well-known and respected *talmid hacham*. R' Rephael was renowned for his Torah, his holiness and his fear of Hashem. When he was twenty-two years old, his father-in-law appointed him as a judge in the *bet din*, along with R' Yitzhak Amzaleg and his uncle R' Messod Encaoua.

R' Rephael founded an important yeshivah in Sale, which is famous for its great *talmidei hachamim* over many generations. Many pupils were drawn there to learn Torah, fear of Hashem, and words of wisdom in all branches of Jewish thought. Some became well known, such as R' Abraham Revach, author of

Vaya'an Abraham and who was a teacher in the city of Rabat. R' Michael Yissachar Encaoua later filled his position.

R' Rephael disliked receiving gifts and favors from other people. He did not enjoy the efforts of any man but his own, and became wealthy from Hashem's blessing. He spent minimal time doing business, and he was exceedingly successful in the business he conducted. Even the *sefarim* he wrote and published were handed out for free to people who desired to learn Torah.

He did not show favor to any man for being rich or famous, and he stood firm in his vigilance in keeping *mitzvot* and the ways of the Torah. He fought the war of Torah without fear. He was very strict regarding modesty in women. He lectured profusely against the new fashion of short sleeves and dresses. For this, he merited in seeing many miracles, which his congregation witnessed, due to his good deeds.

In 1918, when he was seventy years old, R' Rephael became the Chief Rabbi and Av Bet Din of Rabat, Morocco. This exalted position was approved by the head governor of France, who ruled over the area at the time. In 1930, when he was eighty two years old, he was decorated with the Legion of Honor by the government of France, and was acknowledged by the nations as the wise Jew of Morocco. Due to his great humility, he wanted to refuse these posts, but the decline of the generation gave him no choice but to fill them for the greater good.

R' Rephael was sent questions from Jews around the world, including great talmidei hachamim from Europe. He answered them all humbly and in great detail. Many of his writings mention his name and the name of his father.

He helped sick and poor people, and assisted many miserable people physically and spiritually. He became a father to them, encouraging them to shed the poverty and the misery they were in. Many of these people were hosted in his home and shared his bread. He would pay fines for Jewish prisoners, or got them out of jail with his own money, so that their homes would not be destroyed.

For a full month he told his family, pupils, friends, and the *hebra kadisha* that his days were numbered, giving clear instructions regarding his funeral, the *hespedim*, and keeping the month and the year of mourning. On Friday night, the fourth of *Menchem Av* 5695/1935 at the age of eighty-seven, R' Rephael was finally taken by the *malachim* of *Shamayim*.

Thousands from all over Morocco and France came to see him off, including representatives of governments and countries. Over 40,000 people attended the funeral; twelve of the greatest *talmidei hachamim* carried the casket, which was covered with his *talit*; twelve men blew the *shofar*; and 200 children wearing black walked before the casket in four rows, while saying lamentations and *Tehillim* in sad tunes. The Moroccan community mourned for thirty days, as world Jewry lost one of its greatest leaders.



Kever of R' Rephael Encaoua

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#### Concern with Modesty

Rephael was very well respected in Sale, Morocco. He once heard that a young lady in town was walking with her elbows uncovered. He went to speak with the young girl's father, and warned him against his daughter's actions. The father responded by saying, "It's against my wishes and she refuses to listen to me." The *hacham* responded: "This is the time of *Mashiach* and the daughters will rebel against the parents. Perhaps she will listen if you tell her in my name that I demand she refrain from walking the streets dressed improperly."

R' Rephael followed up on the issue and found out that the girl was still going out dressed improperly. The *hacham* sent for the father again and asked him if he had warned her. The father said he had warned her. R' Rephael asked the father what his daughter had said. The father said, "I'm embarrassed to tell the *Hacham*." He was embarrassed to repeat the nasty comments about him that she had made. R' Repahel sighed and said he did what I had to do, and one can not punish unless one warns first, but he warned her.

At that time the girl became afflicted with painful sores and boils on her arms. And she was forced to cover her arms with bandages. She understood very well that the sores came as a punishment for not listening to the *hacham*, and for her immodest dress. She immediately asked her father to accompany her to R' Rephael and tearfully promised him that she would correct her ways of dressing modestly. She asked him to heal her afflictions. R' Rephael felt that she was sincere and that she had learned her lesson and repented properly. R' Rephael prayed for her and she quickly became healthy!

The following story illustrates R' Rephael's personal modesty:

Someone once saw R' Rephael going to pray in another bet hakneset in order to pay tribute to an important family. Naturally, his arrival in the bet hakneset was received with great honor, and when the Torah reading began the hazan called out: "May our teacher and hacham arise, the jewel of our crown, the gaon and flawless dayan, a humble and righteous man..." R' Rephael did not move from his place when he was called up. Since everyone believed that he had not heard the hazan's invitation, he was told that he had been called up to the Torah. He softly replied that he had heard what the hazan had said, but that such a description did not refer to him. The hazan was describing someone else, and R' Rephael refused to move until the hazan called out again, inviting R' Rephael Encaoua by name, without further qualification, to come up to the Torah.



R' Rephael Encaoua (Hamalach)

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#### Hacham Rephael's Just Ways

n Arab once entrusted a certain sum of money with a Jew before making his trip to Mecca. When the Arab returned from his journey and requested his money back, the Jew said, "I've never seen you before and I don't recognize you." The Arab saw his world darken before him as he realized he was not going to be able to prove his claim. The Arab went to see his friends, who advised him to go to R' Rephael Encaoua. The *hacham* would certainly find a solution using his wisdom and honesty.

The Arab took the Jew to *a din Torah* before the *hacham*, and they each argued their case. R' Rephael asked the Arab, "Do you have any witnesses?"

"Only G-d up in heaven," the Arab responded.

"Do you remember which place you gave the money to the lew?"

"Yes, this I remember! It was beside the big tree just outside of the city!"

"If so," said R' Rephael, "take a rope and go measure the circumference of the trunk of the tree and return to me and tell me the measurement."

The Arab left, and the Jew remained behind with the hacham.

R' Rephael made it look like he was mumbling to himself: "I have to rush out to something important and I don't know how long it will take the Arab to return."

The Jew, not realizing R' Rephael's intention, answered confidently, "The tree is very far away. The Arab will probably come back in about an hour."

Pleased, the *hacham* said to him, "If you know the location of the tree, the Arab is telling the truth. Go right away and return every last penny to its rightful owner."

One hour later, the Arab returned and while he was opening his mouth to say something, R' Rephael said, "You don't need any proof, you are right in your claim and the Jew is obligated to return the money to you."

The Arab exploded with happiness, and kissed the *hacham's* hand. The Arab walked out from the *hacham's* house and told anyone who would listen, "There is no judge as righteous as the *Hacham*."

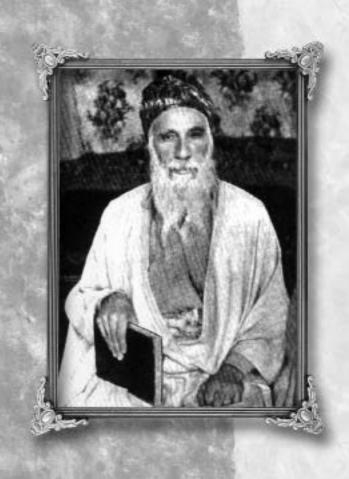
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#### Hashem Saves The Righteous

n the city of Rabat, Morocco, there lived a non-Jew who was honored among his people for his wealth and was known as a hater of the Jewish People. His mouth was always filled with curses and insults for the Jews, and many Jews suffered because of him.

One day R' Rephael was passing by the evil man's yard. Suddenly, a sick dog came out at him, barking ferociously. When the *hacham* saw the sick dog approaching to attack him, he stood and cried from his heart, "Hashem saves!" Upon hearing the voice of a Jew, the man who caused many problems to the Jewish People came out to see what was happening. He had to take but one step, and the dog attacked him, since he was closer than the *hacham*.

People gathered around the dog with sticks, and were trying to beat the dog off of the man, but they could not avoid hitting the man, and both the man and the dog died. When R' Repahel saw this he quickly fled, and made the day into a personal day of fasting and giving *sedaka* for the rest of his life. All of the Jews and even the honest Arabs were happy about the gruesome death of this man and learned from this to better their ways with the Jews.



#### HACHAM SHIMON AGASI

Baghdad, Iraq 5611 - 5674 / 1851 - 1914



# HACHAM SHIMON AGASI

acham Shimon Agasi zt"l was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 5611/1851. His father was Hacham Aharon, the son of Hacham Abba Agasi.

The family originally descended from Persia — today's Iran. R' Abba Agasi traveled often from Persia to Baghdad for business. Eventually he established his home there. According to the family tradition, R' Abba passed away before his son was born. The family name comes from the Persian word aga, which means "commissioner." The name was given to them due to the family's closeness to the royal family and the government.

R' Aharon Agasi, R' Shimon's father, ran a dye business. He specialized in a certain dye that came from India. His sons also worked in the business and traveled to other cities and towns to sell the dye.

At the time, Baghdad was undergoing an economic revolution. The opening of the Suez Canal in 5629/1869 broadened the economic ties between Baghdad and Europe. Several factors, including the discovery of oil in Iraq, steamship voyage on the Euphrates, and businessmen who came regularly to Baghdad, caused the majority of Jewish children to leave their studies in the *bet hamidrash* at the age of thirteen and go to work in their parents' or relatives' business.

However, R' Shimon was not interested in all that. Like every young Jewish child, he studied with a teacher. By age eleven he had studied the entire *Tanach* many times. He knew several chapters of Talmud perfectly, spoke Hebrew fluently, and was able to write Hebrew in the Babylonian Jewish tradition. When

he turned thirteen, unlike other boys his age, he had no interest in the world of business. His heart's desire was to learn and understand the wisdom of the Torah and to dedicate himself to studying the Torah's secrets. He also kept his distance from the boys who continued their studies in the school established in 5625/1865 by the organization *Kol Yisrael Haverim*. Many children who learned in this school left the path of Torah and *mitzvot*.

R' Shimon studied day and night in the *Bet hamidrash Zilka*, which was established by the *gaon* R' Abdallah Somech. Since business was of secondary importance to him, he devoted only a small part of his day to working with his father. His brothers were not pleased with this. They began to complain that young Shimon was not carrying his weight. However, his parents were thrilled with the idea of Shimon becoming a *talmid hacham*. As time passed, Shimon's parents, who had named their son after the great *hacham* Shimon Agasi, decided to help him emulate his namesake.

R' Shimon studied and served R' Shemuel Maglad and R' Nissim Halevi. When he got older, he went to learn with R' Yitzhak Mordechai Sasson, one of the great *hachamim* of *Bavel*.

He got married in 5638/1878, and then continued to learn Torah with great concentration in R' Yitzhak's yeshivah. He thirstily drank in tractate after tractate with commentary, and learned every *sefer* on halachah. He amazed the *hachamim* of *Bavel* with his wisdom in hidden and revealed Torah. Every time he completed a tractate, he would lecture the *kehillah* with sermons that captured the heart, which were later printed in his *sefer*, *Imrei Shimon*.

However, R' Shimon's peaceful days did not last long. In the first years of his marriage, his young sons passed away, and his oldest son Aharon passed away just before his wedding day.

R' Shimon's students eventually became great scholars and talmidei hachamim. Among them were R' Eliyahu Hava,

R' David Mutzafi, R' Hai Matuk, R' Yehoshua Moshe (who became head of the yeshivah *Oleh Bavel*), R' Yehezkel Hugi Abudi, R' Yaakob Mutzafi (who became head of the *bet din* of the hareidi community in Yerushalayim), R' Salaman Hugi Abuddi (who became *Av Bet Din* in Yerushalayim), R' Ezra Atzalan, and R' Sasson Daniel.

R' Shimon Agasi left this world at the age of sixty-three on the eighth of Av 5674/1914.



R' Shimon Agasi

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## A Holy Neshamah

he *neshamah* of R' Shimon Agasi was very distinguished. R' Ephraim Menashe Hakohen (1885-1957), father of R' Shalom Hakohen, the present Rosh Yeshivah of *Porat Yosef*, once recounted his dream: "One night, angels came to me in a nightly vision and asked if I wanted to see the face of Moshe *Rabbenu alav hashalom*? I said, 'Yes, absolutely.' They told me, 'Turn your face behind you!' So I turned my head and saw the face of *hamekubal* R' Shimon Agasi!"<sup>20</sup>

#### Trust in His People

'Shimon was known to give *sedakah* to the poor in *anivut* (humbleness). He was also known for his interest-free loan organization. Every Friday, *Erev* Shabbat, the borrowers would pay him the set amount they had agreed on.

One time, a poor lady came to him to ask for a loan. He asked her if she had any collateral, and she replied, "I have a garment." She gave R' Shimon the garment, and he gave her the loan. R' Shimon showed the garment to his wife, and she said to him, "This isn't even worth a penny," and was furious. R' Shimon said to his wife, "The important part is not the collateral; it is the loan." The woman, of course, proceeded to pay back the loan on time!

#### A Hidden Scholar

R' Yosef Haim — the Ben Ish Hai. Due to his modesty, he rejected the request made of him to eulogize the gadol hador (greatest in the generation). But that night, the deceased (the Ben Ish Hai) appeared to him in a dream and urged him to eulogize him.

R' Shimon's friends and neighbors were shocked to see him go up and eulogize the *gadol*, since they had no idea that he himself was a hidden scholar.

## Justice from Above

n evil Muslim, who lived near R' Shimon's house, testified that he allegedly saw him strike a Muslim woman. R' Shimon was immediately arrested and put to trial. It was quickly revealed that the man was lying, and just wanted to give R' Shimon a bad name, in an attempt to spur Muslims to carry out an attack on the Jews. R' Shimon, of course, was acquitted, and the Muslim was sentenced to thirty lashes.

A few days later, the same Muslim was suddenly afflicted with blindness. In a short amount of time his entire body was riddled with a horrible disease, and he died soon after.

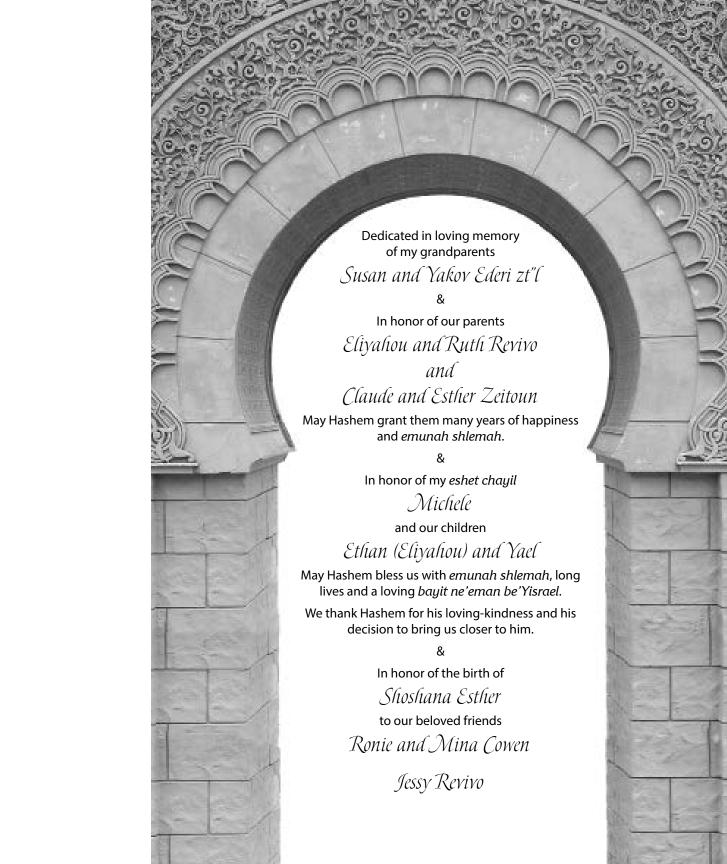
This event became known, and glorified the name of R' Shimon. Even the Muslims spoke of "The holy man of G-d," whose justice was sought from above. R' Shimon wrote a poem of thanks to Hashem for saving him from the terrible plot against him.

<sup>20</sup> This story has many sources. See: Sefer Mahashem Shel Hachme Hasepharadim, pg. 163; and Sefer Livne Aharon (Introduction).



# HACHAM YEHUDA MOSHE FETAYA

Baghdad, Iraq 5619 - 5702 / 1859 - 1942



# HACHAM YEHUDA MOSHE FETAYA

acham Yehuda Moshe Fetaya zt"l was born in Baghdad, Iraq, on the second of Shevat 5619/1859. His father, R' Moshe, was a well-known talmid hacham and mekubal. Growing up in his father's home, R' Yehuda developed his spiritual roots, his thirst for Torah, and his kind personality.

In his youth he studied at *Midrash Talmud Torah*, where his extraordinary intellect and his desire to learn Torah and keep the *mitzvot* were evident. He learned Torah in the *Bet hamidrash Zilka* with his teacher Hacham Shimon Agasi. Another one of his teachers, Hacham Abdallah Somech, had a special love for him. R' Abdallah held R' Yehuda in such high regard that when he was only seventeen years old, R' Abdallah gave him *semihah* (rabbinic ordination) as both a teacher and a *posek*.

At the very young age of twenty-five, having studied *Gemara* and *Mishnayot*, R' Yehuda authored his first great work on *Kabbalah*. In his writings, he dealt with *Torat HaSod* and practical Kabbalah. Despite his greatness in Torah, he was always extremely humble. He tried to conceal his greatness and spirituality from others, but he became too well known, and many Jews and non-Jews sought his spiritual assistance and *berachot*.

He came to Yerushalayim three times — in 1905, again in 1923, and finally in 1934, when he settled and built his home in the holy city of Yerushalayim.

"A great righteous man and *mekubal* who is known to be a holy man, the wisdom of Hashem is within him. His *sefarim* prove the extent of his *kedushah* and his hidden wisdom,

which is evident to those who love to learn." (Quotation from the *haskamah* to his writings)

R' Yehuda rose to be the foremost student of the Ben Ish Hai. He confessed that he was the reincarnation of R' Yehezkel ben Yehuda-Landau (1713–1793), a great Ashkenazic gaon, author of the responsa, Noda BeYehudah. R' Yehuda said that he had to come back to earth, since indeed he was a saddik and pious man in his lifetime, but he did not fulfill his Torah obligation to study Kabbalah. Therefore in this next life the study of Kabbalah was his main focus and tikkun.

Among his many works, which include multiple commentaries to the *Zohar* and *Etz Haim*, R' Yehuda authored the well-known *Minhat Yehuda*. This *sefer* is a compilation of his experiences with earth-bound souls, and the exorcisms that he performed. Even among *mekubalim*, this was not the norm. R' Yehuda was a head above the rest. R' Yehuda was a master at detecting the presence of spirits and demons and an expert in the art of exorcism. However, he also knew that many times people make up or imagine things which are just

not true. He never simply accepted someone's word that they were in contact with a spirit or demon. In order to ascertain their credibility, R' Yehuda would test them to see if the person really was having a mystical experience or not.

R' Yehuda Moshe Fetaya passed away on the twenty-seventh of *Av* 5702/1942, and was buried at Har Hazetim (Mount of Olives), in the section of the great *talmidei hachamim* of *Bavel*.



Hamekubal R' Yehuda Fetaya

# A Teacher's Great Love

Yehuda received his ordination when he and several other students were staying in Hacham Abdallah Somech's home. When it was time to pray *Minhah*, R' Yehuda was asked to be the *hazan*. One of the people present complained that according to halachah, a person is not supposed to be the *hazan* if he does not have a full beard.

R' Abdallah got up and said firmly, "Are you saying that R' Yehuda cannot be the *hazan*? You should know that he is a rare *talmid hacham* and that the only thing he is lacking is a rabbinical ordination." R' Abdallah then placed his hands on R' Yehuda's head and said, "I grant you ordination now as a *hacham*. Everyone should now obey what R' Yehuda says as a rabbi and a *talmid hacham* of Klal Yisrael."

## A Humble Author

n 5665/1905, R' Yehuda moved to Yerushalayim. He had been in Yerushalayim for only one day when R' Abraham Haim Ades came to his door. "My master," R' Yehuda exclaimed, seeing his distinguished guest, "why did you put yourself to the trouble of coming here? I was going to visit you just as soon as I settled in."

"I have come for a very specific and important purpose," R' Abraham Haim replied, "and that purpose is that you have written a commentary on the *Idra Rabba* and *Idra Zutta* and I want to know why it has not yet been published."

It's not easy to surprise a *hacham* and *mekubal*, but these words came as a shock. R' Yehuda had indeed written a commentary on those great works, fifteen years earlier, but he hadn't told a soul about it, preferring to keep it a secret.

"How did my master know about my commentary?" he asked. R' Abraham Haim pointedly ignored the question, and instead repeated his own query, "Why have you not published the commentary?"

R' Yehuda did not answer. Seeing that he would get no reply, R' Abraham Haim was forced to reveal his own secret. He told R' Yehuda that a distinguished visitor had appeared before him not long before in a dream: R' Shimon bar Yohai himself.<sup>21</sup>

The great *Tanna* who had revealed the *Zohar* to the world told R' Abraham Haim of a *mekubal* who had written an important commentary but hadn't published it. "This sage will be coming to Yerushalayim from Baghdad, and he must be urged to share his commentary," R' Shimon bar Yohai had concluded.

R' Yehuda admitted that he had written the commentary. "I was young when I wrote it, and I felt it wasn't appropriate to publish," he said. "Now I see that the Heavens wish it to be revealed, and so I will reveal it."

A few years later, the kabbalistic work, *Yayin HaRekach* on the *Idra Rabba* and *Idra Zutta*, written by R' Yehuda Fetaya, was published. R' Shimon bar Yohai's wish had been fulfilled.

# The Test of Anger

he summer heat in Baghdad was extremely intense. During summer months people would eat their meals on the rooftops, which were fitted for this purpose in order to benefit from the cooler air.

On the night of *Rosh Hashanah*, R' Yehuda Fetaya and his family gathered around the table on their roof for the festive meal. The *hacham* was about to make Kiddush. His wife, Rabbanit Fetaya, had the bottle of red wine in her hand ready and was about to hand it to her husband, when she slipped and the bottle fell, spilling wine on the floor of the roof.

Being a woman, she expressed her fear that maybe it was a bad omen for the New Year. Her husband calmed her fears and told her not to worry; they could make Kiddush from a different bottle of wine. However, there was no more wine in the house. Not a problem, they could use the hallah<sup>22</sup> for Kiddush. Everyone washed; R' Yehuda then made Kiddush on the hallah and recited the blessing on the bread. When R' Yehuda lifted the hallah, his hand knocked into the hanging oil lamp. All the oil in the lamp spilled onto his clean holiday clothes. R' Yehuda accepted this calmly and continued with the meal. However, the challenges did not end there.

As his wife brought out the soup, she banged into a chair and the pot fell to the floor. She almost burst into tears seeing all her hard work go to waste. He calmed his wife and comforted her. Then he proceeded to salvage whatever he could from the floor.

After they ate, R' Yehuda told his family, "It is well known that there is a strong commandment not to get angry on *Rosh Hashanah* since all the bounty for the next year is reliant on

<sup>21</sup> Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai was a prominent rabbi who lived in the era of the Tannaim. He was one of the most renowned disciples of R' Akiva, and is accredited by many with the authorship of the zohar hakadosh.

<sup>22</sup> Shulan Aruch (Siman 272-9); and Masechet Pesachim (106:B)

this day. Thank Hashem I withstood all the tests that came my way tonight and did not get even slightly angry."

#### Hachnasat Orchim

he city of Baghdad is situated on the banks of the Euphrates River. One harsh winter, the water rose so high that it threatened to drown all the city's residents who lived around it.

The Jewish residents moved in with families who lived far from the danger zone. A number of families were hosted by R' Yehuda. He was overjoyed to be able to perform the *mitzvah* of hachnasat orchim, which  $Hazal^{23}$  (Sages) tell us is even greater than greeting the *Shechinah* (Hashem's Presence). He took care of all their needs with utmost care. When the danger passed, the families slowly returned home except for one family who seemed to enjoy staying with the *hacham*'s family. They stayed for over a year without any specific reason.

R' Yehuda warned his family that they should not give the slightest hint that they were dissatisfied with the prolonged stay, or that the guests were making things difficult for the family. The family was supported by R' Yehuda for the length of their stay, even though the financial situation was very difficult those days.

R' Yehuda told his family afterwards that they had fulfilled the *pasuk* in *Tehillim*: "Only goodness and kindness should chase me all the days of my life."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Masechet Shabbat (127:A)

<sup>24</sup> Tehillim (Perek 23; Pasuk 6)



# HACHAM EZRA HAMWAY

Aleppo, Syria 5620 - 5705 / 1860 - 1945



## HACHAM EZRA HAMWAY

acham Ezra Hamway zt"l was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 5620/1860. His father was Hacham Yitzhak and his mother was Senyar. His parents were honest, humble people, known in their community for their hessed and love of Torah. R' Ezra descended from a lineage of talmidei hachamim, going back all the way to David Hamelech. The illustrious hacham and saddik, Hacham Abraham Harari-Raful zt"l mentioned that the verse, "A sprout will come from the trunk of Yishai, and a shoot will blossom from its roots..." (Yishayahu 11:1) hints to this. The initials of the verse's first five words spell the name "Hamway."

R' Ezra's parents lived in the *Bachsita* neighborhood in Aleppo. It was also known as "*Harrat El Yahud* – The Jewish neighborhood." The neighborhood was a crowded collection of poor Jews. Those who were more prosperous lived in the wealthier neighborhood located in the suburbs of Aleppo.

His daily schedule consisted of a breakfast of bread, a cup of milk, and cheese, after which he made his way to the Talmud Torah where he learned until noon. He returned home to have a bowl of vegetable soup for lunch, and then returned to his studies in the *bet hamidrash* until evening. After *Arbit* and supper, he went to bed.

In the Talmud Torah, R' Ezra learned the art of writing "with a half quill." The children learned calligraphy and practiced for an entire hour each day, writing both *lashon hakodesh* and Arabic. Destitute parents — who barely knew how to read and write – took pride in their sons who could write with a half

quill. This was a skill which usually only the great hachamim acquired.

R' Ezra received most of his Torah education from Hacham Abraham Haim Ades, whose many students later earned their place on the eastern wall of the Aram Soba community. Despite R' Abraham's young age, R' Ezra viewed him as his personal mentor whose stature was that of "a hacham similar to an angel." R' Abraham's appreciation was reciprocal. He felt immense love for his select student, and their relationship was as close as that of father and son. R' Abraham imparted a wealth of wisdom and Torah knowledge on his student.

His diligence and toil in Torah study with his *havruta*, Hacham Abraham Haim Ades, boosted R' Ezra's stature, and he gained proficiency in all areas of Torah study. After becoming renowned for his astute, pure Torah study, he was appointed *dayan* at a young age in Aram Soba's *bet din*. He served on the *bet din* together with other well-known *talmidei hachamim* such as R' Shelomo Safdeye, R' Yeshaya Dayan, R' Yaakob Shaul Hakohen Dweck, and R' Eliyahu Hamway.

R' Ezra served in the *bet din* for approximately forty-five years. Other *talmidei hachamim* felt his rulings were righteous and truthful, and he gave clear reasons for of all his decisions. R' Ezra's perception and sharpness were evident during his sessions in the *bet din*. After he had sat many years in the *bet din*, deliberating thousands of cases in complete harmony with his colleagues, the spiritual leadership of Aleppo appointed him as the *Rosh Av Bet Din* of the Aram Soba community, a distinguished role that he filled until the day he emigrated to Yerushalayim in 1935.

R' Ezra Hamway's legacy lives on. R' Ezra's influence was essential in founding a generation of exceptional leaders who went on to serve great communities and found new generations of *talmidei hachamim*. His many disciples include Hacham Raphael Shelomo Laniado, who became Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Porat Yosef in Yerushalayim; Hacham Yehuda Aslan

Attiah; Hacham Yitzhak Chehebar, who became Chief Rabbi of Argentia's Syrian community; and many other disciples who carried the torch of R' Ezra's Torah.

He left behind children who continued the Hamway legend and were virtuous throughout their lives: Nissim (Sam), Yaakob, and Albert. R' Ezra's daughters were Senyar, Jemila, Gilsom, Rina, Adela, and Sarah.

"The eight days of Hanukah begin on the twenty-fifth of *Kislev*, and it is prohibited to eulogize or fast on these days, except in the case of a great *hacham*" (*Shulhan Aruch, Orah Haim 670:1*). As R' Ezra passed away on Hanukah, only a number of short eulogies were spoken. The Chief Rabbis eulogized R' Ezra, as well as the Sephardic Rishon LeSion, R' Ben-Sion Hai Meir Uziel. Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Herzog spoke about Yerushalayim's loss, as well as the great loss to the Syrian Aram Soba community.

R' Ezra Hamway left this world on the twenty-eighth of

Kislev 5706/1945. It was on the fourth night of Hanukah that the head of Judges in Aram Soba (Aleppo), R' Ezra Hamway returned his soul, at the age of eighty-five.



Hacham Ezra Hamway

# Preventing Hillul Hashem

Jewish goldsmith living in Aram Soba once came with an Arab litigant before R' Ezra. The presence of non-Jews in the *bet din*'s, waiting room seeking the revered *hacham's* judgment was a daily phenomenon that didn't attract attention.

The Arab had asked the goldsmith to solder a weak section of his ring. When he came to pick up the ring, the Arab realized that the gem in the center of the ring had been exchanged for a less expensive stone and he accused the goldsmith of stealing it. The goldsmith claimed that he had not touched the stone.

Both the goldsmith and the Arab stubbornly maintained their views. The Arab said that the precious stone had been exchanged for a cheaper one, while the Jew claimed he had done no such thing and he was returning the same ring he had been given to fix.

Finally the Arab agreed to the goldsmith's offer to have the case arbitrated by R' Ezra, hoping that the wise *hacham* would vindicate him. When it was their turn to enter the *bet din's* chambers, the Arab asserted his claim, after which the goldsmith delivered his version. R' Ezra meticulously questioned the defendant, and reached the conclusion that the goldsmith was not telling the truth.

To prevent a *hillul* Hashem, R' Ezra told the litigants that he wanted to see each privately so he could question them more effectively. At first he asked the Arab several questions, and then he asked the goldsmith to enter. When the goldsmith was with him alone, Rav Ezra told him conspiratorially, "Insist on your version until the end. Don't let the court break you. Make sure that *has ve'shalom* (G-d forbid) you don't ruin the good

name of the Jews..." "Of course," the goldsmith beamed. "I'll keep my version until the end and no matter what happens; I won't be broken by the interrogation..."

Having obtained this partial admission from him, R' Ezra's face turned stern. He demanded in an authoritative tone that the goldsmith immediately return the gem to its owner. The goldsmith was struck dumb, overcome with humiliation in front of the *hacham*. The humbled goldsmith returned home without delay to restore the stolen gem to its owner.

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# A Great Kiddush Hashem

'Ezra's neighbor was an important Arab who was an alcoholic. One evening he returned home drunk, and ordered his wife to serve him a steaming cup of coffee. He threatened her that if she wouldn't serve him the cup by the time he finished eating a cracker, her end would be bitter.

The frightened woman rushed to boil up a coffee for her husband as he had ordered. She ran to the stove in the corner of the house, quickly lit the fire, placed the kettle on it, and waited nervously for it to boil.

In the meantime, the husband sat on his couch nibbling his dry cracker. He finished it before his wife had served him the coffee. His fury was aroused at the perceived sign of disrespect, and he shouted, "You are divorced! You are divorced! You are divorced!" (According to the laws of Islam, repeating these words three times legally executes a divorce.)

Several hours later, the husband became sober and realized the severity of his behavior. He had divorced his wife due to impulse, but how could he undo his words? He anxiously headed for the local sheikh to ask how he could cancel his declaration so he could live with his wife again. But the sheikh wrung his hands and said, "According to the laws of Islam, your wife is divorced! You have no possibility of retracting your words because your wife didn't fulfill your will."

In his great distress, the Arab turned to his neighbors and told them what he had done, while wailing and crying about his bitter fate. The neighbors were not too impressed with the sheikh, and they advised him to go to the Jewish leader, R' Ezra, whose wisdom could be relied upon to find a way to cancel the divorce.

The Arab headed to the home of R' Ezra without delay. The *hacham* listened carefully to the events that had led to his gloomy situation. The Arab hoped that the Jewish leader would annul his act of divorce, but to his surprise, R' Ezra refused to give a ruling.

"I cannot judge this alone," the *hacham* told the husband. "I will only judge this case if the *khadi* and the sheikh invite me to judge it before them." The Arab turned to the *khadi* and the sheikh, and urgently asked them to order R' Ezra to adjudicate his case before them. They agreed to invite the Jewish leader, and eagerly waited to see what he would say.

The husband again asked the judges to permit the couple to remain married, and the *khadi* and sheikh insisted that according to the laws of Islam, he was divorced. Then R' Ezra stood up and said, "Perhaps I can find a way to permit the couple to remain married even according to the laws of Islam."

The *khadi* and sheikh nodded their heads, waiting to hear his words. R' Ezra then asked the husband, "The cracker you were eating when your wife prepared the coffee — was it fresh or dry?" "Dry, very dry," the husband replied. "That's why I was so thirsty," he excused himself.

R' Ezra turned to the *khadi* and sheikh and said, "It's normal that when one eats a dry cracker, a few crumbs fall." "True," the *khadi* and sheikh agreed. R' Ezra then told the husband, "You told your wife that if you finished *all* of the cracker and she hadn't brought you the coffee, then you would divorce her."

"True," the husband confirmed.

R' Ezra explained, "Since the cracker was dry and, without a doubt, crumbs fell from it, it was impossible for you to eat the entire cracker. If so, your wife didn't disobey you and there was no basis for divorce. Your wife is therefore not divorced, and you are permitted to remain married."

The speechless *khadi* and sheikh heard R' Ezra's ruling, and praised his sharpness and brilliance. The two whispered to each other in astonishment, "Fortunate is a people with such great leaders!"

# The Branch Confirms the Loan

ne case in *bet din* that came before R' Ezra involved an Aleppo Jew who complained that his neighbor had broken his promise to return a loan he had borrowed long ago. The *shamash* of the *bet din* set a date for the litigants and invited the defendant to come at a pre-arranged time.

When the two entered the *hacham's* chambers, each presented his side of the argument. The lender related that he had given the loan to his neighbor, but when the loan was to be repaid, the man denied that he had even taken it. The defendant maintained that he had never needed such a loan.

R' Ezra turned to the plaintiff and asked him, "Do you remember exactly where you gave him the money?"

"I remember the place," the man replied. "It was under a tree with wide branches. We were standing in its shade when we agreed upon the details of the loan."

R' Ezra asked the plaintiff to go to the place, pick off a branch of the tree and bring it to the *bet din*. In this way, he explained, he would be able, with the help of Hashem, to reveal who was saying the truth.

The plaintiff left the *bet din* and set off for the tree where he had given the loan to his neighbor.

In the meantime, R' Ezra was impatiently looking at his watch and drumming on the table with his fingers, as if he was in a rush. "Where is the plaintiff?" he said impatiently. "I have other litigants outside and much work to do. Why is he gone so long?"

Feeling uncomfortable for causing inconvenience to the *hacham*, the defendant cautiously spoke up, "The place he went to is far from the *bet din*. It will take a long time until he reaches the tree..."

This was exactly what R' Ezra was hoping for. The unwitting defendant didn't realize that he had given himself away. The *hacham* and the defendant continued to wait until the plaintiff returned with the branch in his hand. R' Ezra gazed a long time at the branch, and then said staunchly, "The plaintiff was telling the truth! The branch itself has confirmed the loan!"

At first, the defendant tried to deny it. He demanded: "How can a branch confirm or deny what was said in the *bet din*?" But R' Ezra quickly put him in is place by pointing out that he had confessed to the loan by admitting that the tree was far away.

Humiliated, the defendant conceded he had taken the loan, but added that his present financial state didn't permit him to return it. That was why he had decided to deny the loan.

R' Ezra took the man's hand and simply rebuked him for his behavior, and the *hillul* Hashem it had caused. Then he asked the plaintiff to allow the man to pay the loan back in installments over several months, which the borrower said he could do. The pleased plaintiff agreed, and the affair ended peacefully.

# Salvation from the Almighty

ne day, R' Ezra was walking in the alleyways of the city when suddenly a young Arab attacked him with a knife.

R' Ezra didn't lose his head and thought fast. He asked the Arab to wait a little because he wanted to tell him a short story. Afterwards, he could do as he pleased.

Following an Arab custom, the Arab agreed to fulfill the Jewish *hacham's* "last" request. As they walked on, R' Ezra began to weave a story of how several people asked Moshe *Rabenu* to pray for them before the Creator of the World. One wanted to be granted children, one wanted a complete recovery from illness, and one wanted material success.

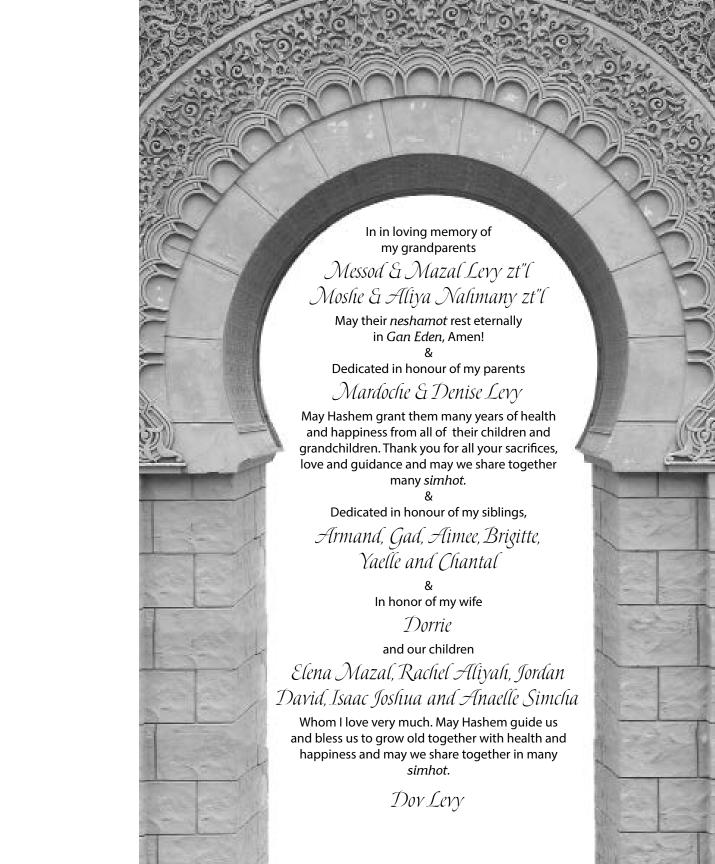
R' Ezra went on and on with his story until they had passed through the darkened alleyways and found themselves in a main city street filled with people. The young Arab was afraid to carry out his wicked act in front of everyone and he quickly disappeared. R' Ezra sighed with relief, while thanking and





# HACHAM YOSEF YEDID HALEVI

Aleppo, Syria 5621 - 5690 / 1862 - 1930



# HACHAM YOSEF YEDID HALEVI

acham Yosef Yedid Halevi zt"l was the head of the bet din for the Syrian and Bucharian communities in Yerushalayim. He was born in Aleppo (Aram Soba), Syria in 5621/1862.

R' Yosef's father, R' Mordechai, was a teacher of young children. R' Yosef helped his father teach children for a few years, until he realized that teaching took too much time away from his own studies. He had a burning desire to study Torah, Mishnah, Gemara, and Halachah, but he could not afford to pay a teacher. Every evening, after Yosef finished helping his father with the children, he would go to the *bet hakneset*, open up the *aron kodesh*, and cry to Hashem for help so he would be able to study Torah.

R' Yosef studied in Aram Soba with R' Abraham Ades (1848–1925). His *havruta* was R' Ezra Shrem. The two were very serious about their studies. They both became members of the *bet din* as well as teachers.

R' Yosef would sit all day in a studyhall in the Bucharian Quarter of Yerushalayim, surrounded by rare *sefarim* that filled the room from the floor to the ceiling. Anyone who approached him was struck by his inspiring appearance and penetrating eyes.

Every morning, on his way from the *bet hakneset* to the *bet hamidrash*, he would buy himself a single pita. He would begin the day by washing and eating a small amount, the equivalent of a *kezayit*. During the day, he would continue eating small amounts of the same pita, waiting just short of the maximal interval between eating and the recital of *Birkat Hamazon*. R' Yosef was therefore able to devote the whole day to

studying without interruption. Toward evening, he would finish the pita, recite *Birkat Hamazon*, and return to the *bet hakneset* for *Minhah* and *Arbit*.

In 5650/1890, R' Yosef immigrated to Eretz Yisrael and settled in the holy city of *Sefat*. There he studied Torah with great intensity. He wrote the first volume of *Torat Hacham* and met his cousin, the *mekubal* R' Yom Tov Yedid Halevi, who suggested that he move to Yerushalayim. The Bucharian community offered R' Yosef a position as a *dayan* and teacher, and after a while he was appointed *dayan* for the Aram Soba community as well.

R'Yosef Yedid was blessed with many students who followed in his path. Among them were R' Raphael Shelomo Laniado, R' Yaakob Kassin, and Hacham Ezra Attiah. R' Raphael Laniado and R' Ezra Attiah both later became the Roshei Yeshivah of *Porat Yosef* in Yerushalayim, and R' Yaakob Kassin was offered the position of Rosh Yeshivah of Bet El, but moved to America instead. When R' Yaakob Kassin lost one of his closest mentors, he delivered a brilliant speech in the Great Synagogue of the Bucharian Quarter.

R' Yosef Yedid Halevi left this world on the eighth of *Adar* 5690/1930 at the age of sixty-eight.

# Destined for Greatness

Yosef would teach young children along with his father, and his income was always small, thus he lived a life of poverty. When R' Yosef grew up, he had to help his father educate and watch over the children, and he would learn a little with his father.

As time went by, the young Yosef realized his work was taking up too much of his time, when all he desired was to learn Torah. He yearned for the opportunity to learn *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, and *Poskim*, but poverty made it difficult to set aside time for learning. R' Yosef secretly went to the *bet hakneset* and prayed before Hashem. He cried to Hashem from the depth of his heart, asking for the help he needed to be able to study Torah as he desired.

One day, the distinguished *mekubal* R' Shaul Kassin (father of R' Yaakob Kassin) was on his way to the synagogue. He was walking after R' Yosef and saw him entering the Great Synagogue in Aleppo and sitting by the opened *heichal*, praying and crying bitterly. R' Shaul went up to him and asked him what was wrong. He replied that all of his time was being lost with the small children of his father's Talmud Torah, while his true desire was to study *Shas* and its *Poskim*. His father was unable to help him because of his poverty, which was barely sufficient to support his own family.

R' Shaul calmed him down, and told him he should try his best to learn whenever he could, and he would try to help. R' Shaul Kassin went and spoke to several wealthy and generous people, asking them to contribute money so that young Yosef could study properly with the *saddikim*, since he was destined to become one of them. Thus, R' Yosef sat and learned *Shas* 

and *Poskim* diligently, ascending in Torah and becoming one of the *gedolei* Yisrael of that generation.

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#### Ahavat Yisrael

R'Yosef's heart was always full of *ahavat* Yisrael. At the end of World War I the Turks ruled that all American citizens living in Eretz Yisrael were to be deported. They announced that anyone who did not report to the police station with regard to this deportation would serve jail time and be tortured. A similar punishment was also announced for those who tried to hide Jews with American citizenship in their homes.

Among those who came to the *bet hamidrash* of R' Yosef was the secretary of the American Kollel. Upon hearing this terrible decree, the secretary sought out a hiding place until this decree would pass. R' Yosef went against the decree, hiding the secretary in his home until it was no longer necessary. R' Yosef was willing to risk his very own life in order to save one Jew.

# Hacham Yosef's Dream of Heaven

Yosef's was very ill in his last days in this world. R' Yosef spoke to R' Natan Salem (1896-1975), and gave him instructions regarding his burial. R' Natan asked R'

Yosef for two special favors as a reward for undertaking this task. He asked him to appear to him in a dream and describe what goes on in *Shamayim* (Heaven), and for R' Yosef to plead with Hashem to grant him and his wife a child.

R' Yosef Yedid Halevi passed away in 5690/1930 at the age of sixty-three. After he died, R' Natan went to pray at his grave. The following Friday night, R' Natan had a dream in which he saw his departed teacher, R' Yosef, learning in the *bet hamidrash*. In his dream, R' Natan approached his mentor and kissed his hand. R' Yosef proceeded to describe the experience in Heaven. R' Yosef said, "They went through my daily schedule ... *tikun hatzot* [midnight prayer], learning all day, the accounts that took place in *bet din*, and all the events that took place in my regular day."

Following a long process in Heaven, R' Yosef had to be cleansed through a very short period in Gehinnom (purgatory), to perfect his soul. When he arrived at the first gate of Gehinnom, a *malach* (angel) refused to let him in. He tried several other gates, but the guarding *malachim* (angels) refused his admission. R' Yosef asked the *malachim*, "Why aren't you allowing me in? I want to be cleansed! Why don't you complete my judgment?" One *malach* answered, "At the first gate, all the *masechtot* [tractates] of *Gemara* came and blocked the entrance. At the second gate, the *Poskim* [rabbinical authorities] came. At each successive gate more Torah scholars came to deny you entry. Finally, we realized that due to all your *zechuyot* [merits], it would be impossible for you to come in."

"People who learn Torah have a unique appearance in Heaven. Learning Torah guards one's *neshamah* [soul]. The light of the Torah cleanses the soul." R' Yosef opened a *sefer* and showed R' Natan a page with a stain on the corner. "There are two ways you can take this stain out. One is to physically tear the page, and the other is to rub it out with a chemical so

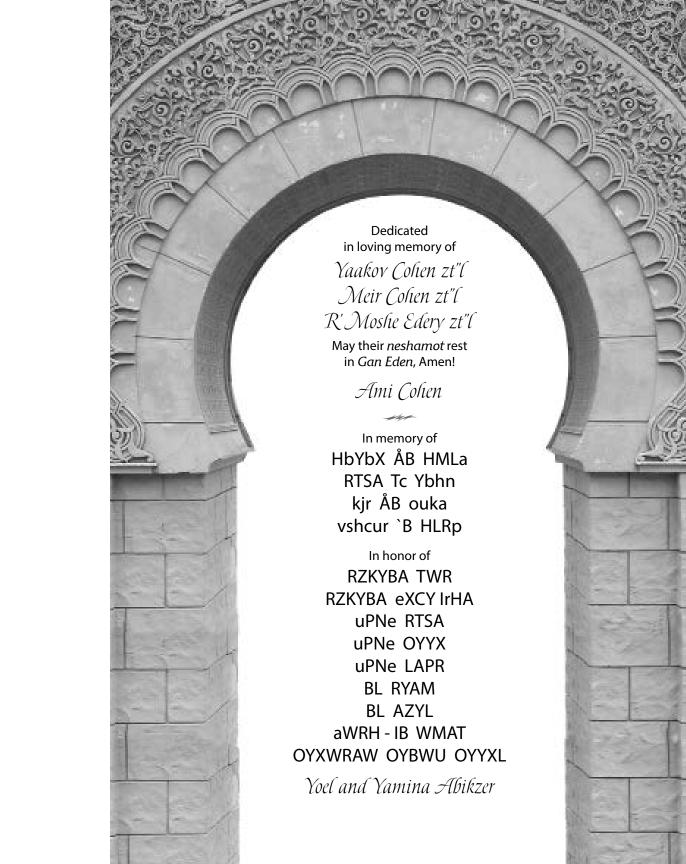
there is no need to destroy the page. Learning Torah removes the stain from the soul and purifies it so *yisurim* [experiences of regretful suffering] aren't necessary. You should learn Torah with all your strength, because only that will save you in judgment." R' Yosef continued, "I've also taken care of your second request, and Hashem shall grant you a child."

R' Natan indeed had a boy, Abraham, named after R' Natan's father. The boy was R' Natan's only child, and he became a noteworthy *talmid hacham* and Rosh Yeshivah of Meor Hatalmud in Yerushalayim.



# HACHAM BEN-SION HAZZAN

Baghdad, Iraq 5636 - 5712 / 1876 - 1952



# HACHAM BEN-SION HAZZAN

acham Ben-Sion Mordechai Yehezkel Hazzan zt"l was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 5636/1876. He was known to be greatly knowledgeable in hidden and revealed Torah. He was one of the greatest students of R' Yosef Haim, and he also studied with R' Shemuel Abraham Maglad. R' Maglad had many students, and was knowledgeable in all aspects of Torah law.

Since he was his star pupil, and as he was very close with his teacher, the Ben Ish Hai, R' Ben-Sion Hazzan was nicknamed "Ne'eman Beito – The one loyal one of his home." People who wanted to know more about the Ben Ish Hai would ask R' Ben-Sion to tell them about him. However, the hacham asked that his rulings and actions be kept secret. In the preface to his sefer Da'at Tevunah, R' Ben-Sion writes: "His [the Ben Ish Hai's] love for Eretz Yisrael was enormous, especially his love for Yerushalayim and its institutions."

He always honored messengers from Eretz Yisrael greatly, and he would defend those who dwelled in Eretz Yisrael, and ask for mercy on their behalf. When he received a letter from their leader about a crisis, he would rattle the city, and collect donations, and send them out as soon as possible.

R' Ben-Sion signed a petition against the scandal in Yemen of people speaking poorly of the *Zohar* and Kabbalistic *sefarim*, along with 119 other Ashkenazic and Sephardic *hachamim* from Yerushalayim.

After a few years, his teacher asked him to help found Yeshivat Porat Yosef, which later produced thousands of students. The year that R' Ben-Sion Hazzan moved to Eretz

Yisrael, the Ben Ish Hai met with the Iraqi millionaire Yosef Abraham Shalom.

The philanthropist Yosef Shalom agreed to support his yeshivah. R' Ben-Sion Hazzan was appointed by the Ben Ish Hai to start the yeshivah. With much effort, he managed to purchase a lot near the Kotel, where they set the cornerstone for *Yeshivat Porat Yosef*, named after the philanthropist Yosef Shalom. Nine years later, on *Rosh Chodesh Iyar*, 1922, the yeshivah was inaugurated. A big beautiful building was built near the ruins of the Temple, and was frequented with visitors.

It is interesting that, although advised differently, Yosef Shalom listened to the advice of R' Yosef Haim and built a yeshivah instead of a hospital, and R' Ben-Sion Hazzan became the actual founder of the yeshivah.

R' Ben-Sion was also burdened with running *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* during difficult times. When the financial situation was bad, he called for emergency fundraising. The yeshivah was having a particularly hard time in 1948, when the Jordanian legion fought the Jewish army.

A few months before his passing in 1909, he asked R' Yosef Haim to accept the appointment as Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel. The Yerushalayim *hachamim* all pleaded with the Ben Ish Hai to move to Eretz Yisrael and accept the position of *Hacham Bashi* (Chief Rabbi). There was a great controversy regarding who would fill the position of the then Chief Rabbi, R' Yaakob Shaul Elishar, after his death.

In order to persuade the Ben Ish Hai, they asked him to teach and rule in halachic questions alone, and promised that he would not have to deal with other responsibilities of leadership of the community. But he did not accept the position, despite the conditions. This is what he wrote to R' Ben-Sion Hazzan, on the 10th of *Nissan*, 1908:

"I received three letters from [so and so], all asking me to move to Eretz Hakodesh, etc., and from two batei din in Yerushalayim, and from the Yemenite community. I have answered them, and said I could not take the position, and I send my apologies. And if Hacham [so and so] is not in Yerushalayim, please show him this letter."

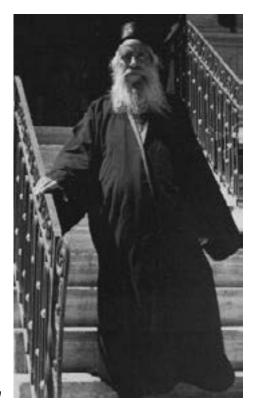
In the preface to his *sefer Niflaim Ma'asechah*, which he published in Yerushalayim, he wrote: "In our generation we were blessed to see a great *hacham*, a genius in Torah, R' Yosef Haim, who was also a great speaker and linguist. And I merited to be his loyal pupil and servant. I also merited to move to Eretz Yisrael, and print his holy *sefarim* and stories in a sefer I called *Niflaim Ma'asechah*, since they are wondrous tales ... and I know great storytellers will bring this blessing to their home and many *batei midrashim*, and will take great pleasure in reading them."

In 1901, R' Hazzan printed a *Tikkun Klali* and in 1904 he published *Ma'asei Nora* about the *Ruach*. Other than publishing the writings of his teacher, he published 164 stories in a *sefer* called *Niflaim Ma'asechah*. The *sefer* was first printed in Yerushalayim in 1911, and was reprinted in many editions. This way he gathered 183 parables by his teacher, and published them in a *sefer* entitled *Mashal V'Nimshal*. This *sefer* was also reprinted in several editions.

Similarly, he told other parables: "And I called the *sefer Mashal V'Nimshal*, and the *sefer* was great in quantity and in quality, since I wanted to bring a verse or saying and then its parable." The second edition includes praise for R' Yosef Haim from several *hachamim*, and he copied praise for his teacher from his other *sefer Da'at Teyunah*.

Approximately two weeks before R' Ben-Sion passed away, R' Ben-Sion's son, living in Netanya, was invited to visit him. He told him he was going to leave this world, and gave him the exact date of his departure. He passed away on the twelfth of *Heshvan* 5712/1952.

Interestingly, R' Ben-Sion Hazzan, who was the Rosh Yeshivah of *Porat Yosef* at the time, died exactly on the same day as one of the previous Roshei Yeshivah, R' Yehuda Sadakah.



R' Ben-Sion Hazzan

#### Brit Yitzhak

ne unfortunate family lost six children, each of whom died after circumcision. When the seventh child was born, the father met with R' Ben-Sion and asked his advice. R' Ben-Sion gave him a *berachah* and told him: "Tonight, make a *brit Yitzhak [Zohar]*, for your newborn son. Gather a *minyan* [prayer quorum] to learn Torah and read *Zohar*, and you should make a beautiful *seudah* with lots of food and sing *zemirot*. Then your child will live."

Additionally, one of the ten wise men who participated in the *brit Yitzhak* was the well known *mekubal* R' Yitzhak Kaduri. Indeed, after six children passing away, everything happened exactly as R' Ben-Sion had predicted, and his *berachah* was fulfilled. In honor of the *hacham* the family named the baby "Ben-Sion!"

#### The Famous Hazzan

ne day, R' Ben-Sion Hazzan<sup>26</sup> walked out of the synagogue and toward his home in Baghdad. An Arab sheikh was waiting to greet him on the road. The sheikh said, "G-d has granted you a pleasant voice; I would like to make you a profitable offer." The sheikh asked the *hacham* if he would

<sup>26</sup> R' Mordechai Eliyahu (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi) retold this story. According to one of the descendants of R' Ben-Sion, the original family name was not Hazzan, but Nachum. R' Ben-Sion was given the name Hazzan because of his beautiful voice, and the name stuck as a family name.

sing the *muezzin*<sup>27</sup> in their mosque, and described his great reward in Heaven, after a long life. R' Ben-Sion was appalled, but quickly recovered and responded, "I need to swallow ten eggs a day to keep my voice clear." The sheikh answered, "I can provide you even with twenty eggs a day." He added that his salary would be as high as he asked. R' Ben-Sion quickly walked to the home of the Ben Ish Hai, and told him what had happened.

The *hacham* advised him to leave the country and move to Eretz Yisrael, since they would not let up until he agreed to do the *muezzin*. This was not an easy decision, since it meant leaving his family and his profession. The Jewish community was scant in those days, and most could not make a decent living. R' Yosef Haim told R' Hazzan, "I will send my writings to Eretz Yisrael and you will print them; that way you can easily make a decent living."

In 5660/1900, when he was twenty-four years old, R' Ben-Sion left his city to go to the Holy Land, through Yemen. The Iraqi authorities forbade citizens to move to Eretz Yisrael, and they had to get there in a roundabout way through Yemen. They traveled for six months before reaching their destination, and the Ben Ish Hai, true to his word, sent his writings. R' Ben-Sion handled proofreading, printing, and distribution, and thanks to him all of the Ben Ish Hai's writings were published.

14

### Hacham Ezra Attiah's Beracha

n 1948, the building of *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* was tragically destroyed during the capture of Yerushalayim's Old City by the Jordanian masses. The Rosh Yeshivah, R' Ezra Attiah, and R' David-Sion Laniado, among the leading *mekubalim* in the yeshivah, came to visit R' Ben-Sion, who had remained in the Jewish Quarter until its fall.

When they arrived at his home, the two *hachamim* sat on the ground and emotionally recited *Tehillim:* "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and also wept as we remembered Sion." After they had calmed down a bit, R' Ezra asked, "The large library and its treasures, the *sefarim* and the huge collections of old manuscripts — what happened to all of them?" R' Ben-Sion informed him that they were all burned.

R' Ezra began reciting the *kinah* (lamentation), *Sha'ali Serufah Ba'esh*, which was composed as a dirge over the burning of sacred *sefarim* in France. He then asked, "And the *batei knesiyot*, what about them?"

"They too were destroyed."

They sat and wept, their tears flowing like rivers. R' Ezra asked about every building and was informed that everything was destroyed. Finally, he stood up, placed his hand on R' Ben-Sion's shoulder, and gave him a *berachah*: "You shall restore the foundations of old. We will build Yerushalayim yet, and it will return to our hands, with Hashem's help."

R' Ben-Sion immediately dedicated his efforts to the restoration project with the objective of rebuilding the yeshivah in the New City. Seven years later, the groundbreaking ceremony of the yeshivah building was held in the Geulah neighborhood. R' Ezra instructed that the invitations and

<sup>27</sup> The muezzin is a chosen person at a mosque who leads the call to Friday service and the five daily prayers from one of the mosque's minarets.

<sup>28</sup> Tehillim 137

announcements of the event should begin with the verse, "Men from among you shall rebuild ancient ruins, you shall restore the foundations laid long ago, and you shall be called repairer of fallen walls, restoring streets for habitation." He explained that this verse from the *haftarah* of *Yom Kippur* is a Divine promise to every individual who repents, and a promise to the community and nation at large, that everything that is destroyed both physically and spiritually, can be rebuilt.

4

# The Honesty of Hacham Ben-Sion

Porat Yosef with the door closed. His forehead wrinkled, he was counting and recounting the money on his desk. He asked himself where two coins had gone, since according to his records there should have been two more coins. One of his sons made him lunch, and waited for the longest time, but the door remained shut. He finally knocked on the door to tell his father that the food was getting cold. "I'm not interested in anything right now but solving this mystery," he responded. When his son heard the story, he gave his father two coins, and told him to forget the problem. "No! We have to look into this matter seriously," he answered. His son went to the bank and found out that the bank had charged them for ordering checkbooks.

-4-

#### 29 Yeshayah 58:12

## ADream that Became Reality

Yosef Haim traveled to Al Kafil in Elul of 5669/1909. On his way back to Baghdad, in the village of Gez, on the thirteenth of *Elul*, he suddenly became very ill, and passed away at the age of seventy-seven. His body was taken back to Baghdad, and the funeral was held the night of the fifteenth of *Elul*.

R' Ben-Sion had a dream on the day following his teacher's death. He dreamed about one of the older members of the *hebra kadisha* of the Baghdadi community in Yerushalayim (where R' Ben-Sion lived). This man, a gravedigger on Har Hazeitim, visited him in his home, demanding the fee of two *meggidi* (Turkish coins). R' Ben-Sion asked him, "Why do you need this money? Have you become a beggar?"

"G-d forbid!" the man replied. "That is the fee I charge. I am supposed to get this amount for digging the grave of R' Yosef, who passed away and was buried here in Yerushalayim."

R' Ben-Sion thought the old man had become senile but hastened to give him the money. Fearing, nonetheless, that perhaps there was some truth to the man's words, he continued to question the elderly gravedigger. "And where did you bury R' Yosef — hopefully in a respectable spot?"

The gravedigger answered, "Certainly, right next to his uncle, who died recently, the righteous R' Abdallah Haim."

The gravedigger continued and said, "Yesterday morning, twenty men who belong to that *saddik*'s family — I recall them from my birthplace, Iraq — came to my house. They told me that they had brought the remains of their master along with them and asked me to dig a grave next to his uncle's resting place, so that he could be buried with honor. I did as they said

and when I finished my labor, they told me to go to Rav Yosef's *talmid*, R' Ben-Sion, who would pay me the usual fee."

The sleeping R' Ben Sion was shaken by the old man's words. He quickly put on his outer coat, tied its belt, and followed the old man to Har Hazeitim, straight to the fresh grave. R' Ben-Sion stretched himself out upon the grave, bursting into tears.

When R' Ben-Sion awoke, he remembered his dream clearly, but he decided not to tell anyone about it, for fear that they would ridicule him. The fearful news of the Ben Ish Hai's *petirah* (death) soon reached Yerushalayim.

For many reasons of his own, R' Ben-Sion continued to keep this episode a secret. However, before being taken into Jordanian captivity by the Arab legion (upon the Arab conquest of the Old City) in 5708/1948, he related the story to his friend, the distinguished R' Ephraim Menashe Hakohen, for fear that he might never return and would not have the chance to tell it again.

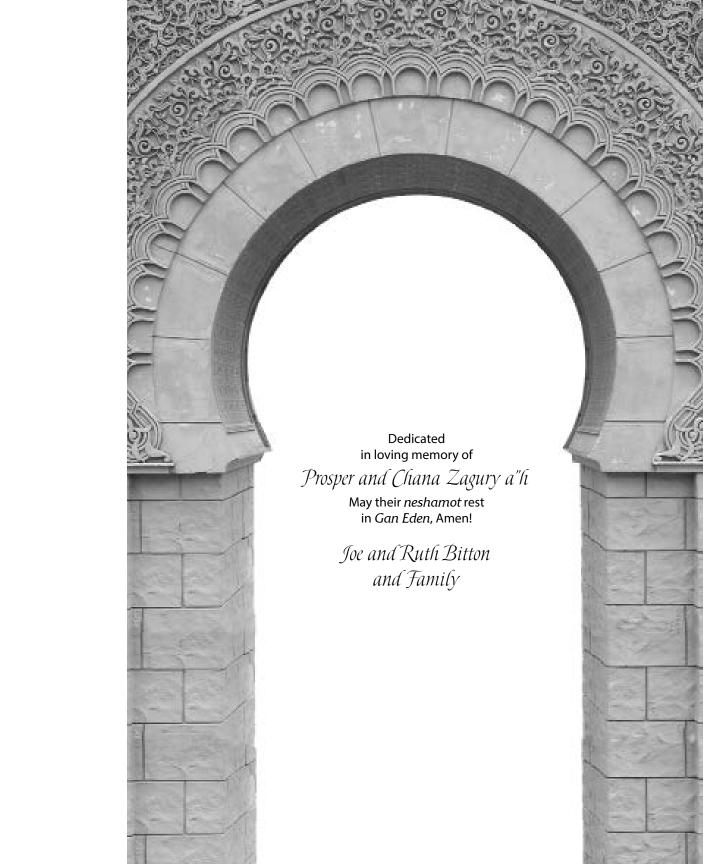


Left to right: R' Ben-Sion Hazzan & R' Ephraim Menashe Hakohen



# HACHAM SADKAH HUTZIN

Baghdad, Iraq 5636 - 5721 / 1876 - 1961



## HACHAM SADKAH HUTZIN

acham Sadkah Hutzin zt"l was born in 5636/1876 in Baghdad, Iraq. When he was young, R' Sadkah studied in a yeshivah in Baghdad, and even then he was acknowledged as a great talmid hacham by R' Yosef Haim (the Ben Ish Hai). R' Sadkah was a sixth-generation descendant of Hacham Sadkah Hutzin the first.

R' Sadkah refused financial help from anyone, including the yeshivah. As soon as he got married and had a family to support, he decided to become a merchant so that he could support himself and not receive money for learning Torah, but rather learn *lishmah* — for the sake of learning.

Despite his work load, he came to yeshivah every day to learn with the great *hachamim* of his time, R' Nissim Kaduri (R' Yitzhak Kaduri's father), R' Yosef Ravia, and others. He would work as a merchant only during *ben hazmanim* (yeshivah break). Eventually, Hashem helped him out and he received a large inheritance from a family member, which allowed him to quit his work as a merchant altogether, and devote himself completely to Torah and *avodat* Hashem.

He was also known as a great *mohel*, and circumcised thousands of children without payment. Furthermore, when he saw that the family was poor, he would offer them financial assistance and support.

R' Sadkah moved to Eretz Yisrael and built a beautiful *bet hakneset* in Yerushalayim, while he himself could not afford a home, and was renting one apartment after another. But he built this *bet hakneset* with his own money, with no help from

anyone other than his sister-in-law, who donated part of the building.

The attendants prayed each day at sunrise (*vatikin*) in the *bet hakneset* R' Sadkah built. An hour before sunrise they would gather and sing until sunrise, and would then pray. This was the custom at the start of the *bet hakneset* until the day R' Sadkah passed away. He never missed praying *vatikin*, even when he would travel to another city. In his travels, he sometimes had to walk a long way during the night so that he would never miss the early prayers.

The bet hakneset was not only a place of prayer, but a center for Torah learning as well. From the day the bet hakneset was built in 1929, R' Sadkah began learning Torah there in the evenings with men from the community. At midnight, they would recite tikkun hatzot, pleading and asking for Hashem's mercy on Am Yisrael. He also had a special garden in his bet hakneset, where he planted wheat for baking matzah. He would sift the flour he made himself after taking terumot u'ma'asrot, and he would bake matzot with great effort, but with great pleasure as well.

After R' Sadkah passed away, R' Yaakob Mutzafi was put in charge of teaching *shiurim* each evening, during the week and on Shabbat. Hundreds of men studied in the *bet hakneset*, and by this merit raised their sons to be Torah scholars and *gedolim*, all due to the love of Torah he had instilled in them and Hashem's wish for their success.

R' Sadkah left this world on *Rosh Hodesh Adar* 5721/1961. His legacy continues with the grandchildren and great-grandchildren he left behind, all of whom are great *talmidei hachamim* in Eretz Yisrael. Today, his *bet hakneset* still prays *vatikin* each day, summer and winter, on Shabbat, and on holidays. The *bet hakneset* is a center of Torah and prayer in the Geulah neighborhood of Yerushalayim to this very day.

#### The Importance of Minyan

uring the conflicts of 5689/1929, the British ordered "house arrest" on all the inhabitants of Yerushalayim. It was extremely dangerous to venture out into the street during this time. R' Sadkah secretly brought ten men (the prayer quorum) to a house he rented on Habakuk Street. He took care of all their needs including food, drink, and sleeping accommodations. All this was done to ensure he would have a minyan as long as the edict was enforced.

During the Arab riots of 5708, R' Sadkah gathered people in his *Bet hamidrash Shemesh Sedaka* on Hagai Street and employed many tactics so that the three *tefillot* would take place with a minyan every day.

After he grew old, there was once a heavy snowstorm in Yerushalayim. R' Sadkah was quite unwell and could barely drag his feet. It was extremely dangerous for someone as weak as he was to walk through the streets, as he could easily slip and fall. However R' Sadkah would not pray alone. He walked to the *bet hamidrash* from his house on Strauss Street without giving it a second thought. When the other people saw him arrive in the middle of the snowstorm, they were shocked that he had made it all the way on foot.

They asked him, "How was the *hacham* able to walk to the *bet hakneset* without falling on the way?" He responded, "I was fine, I fell only three times. I slipped and I fell, so I got up and continued. I fell again, but again I stood up and continued... That's how important *tefillah* with a minyan is," said R' Sadkah.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> R' Yehuda Sadkah zt"l spoke very often about the importance of tefillah with a minyan. He would speak about his uncle, Hacham Sadkah Hutzin, how he never missed tefillah with a minyan, and praised his diligence in this mitzvah. This story was told from R' Yehuda Sadkah.

#### The Great Sacrifice

hen a question regarding education arose in Baghdad, the members of the Spiritual Council, which included wealthy members of the community, decided to incorporate secular studies into the Talmud Torah. They thought the *hachamim* would not object, since they were being supported by them. R' Sadkah refused and called for a demonstration. When he saw that they stood firm in their decision, he started saying *selichot* every day, and blowing the *shofar*. When the council found out, they informed the police that the *hacham* was demonstrating against the government. R' Sadkah was arrested, but did not stop informing the community about the problem. With his sacrifice, and Hashem's assistance, the notion was cancelled. The Talmud Torah never incorporated secular studies and Reform ideology into their education thanks to the great sacrifice of R' Sadkah.



Wedding in Yerushalayim: R' Shalom Azoulay (center) and R' Sadkah Hutzin (right)

#### Pure Intentions

R'Sadkah once left his home in Baghdad with some people and headed to a far-off village. They stayed there for a few days to cut wheat for Matzah Shemurah in accordance with all of the halachic stringencies. Upon completing this difficult job, they loaded the sacks of wheat onto their donkeys and headed home. While still on their way, the sky suddenly darkened and was filled with heavy gray clouds. The hearts of everyone in the group were filled the identical concern. What would happen if the rain would fall and wet the sacks, causing all their hard work to go to waste?

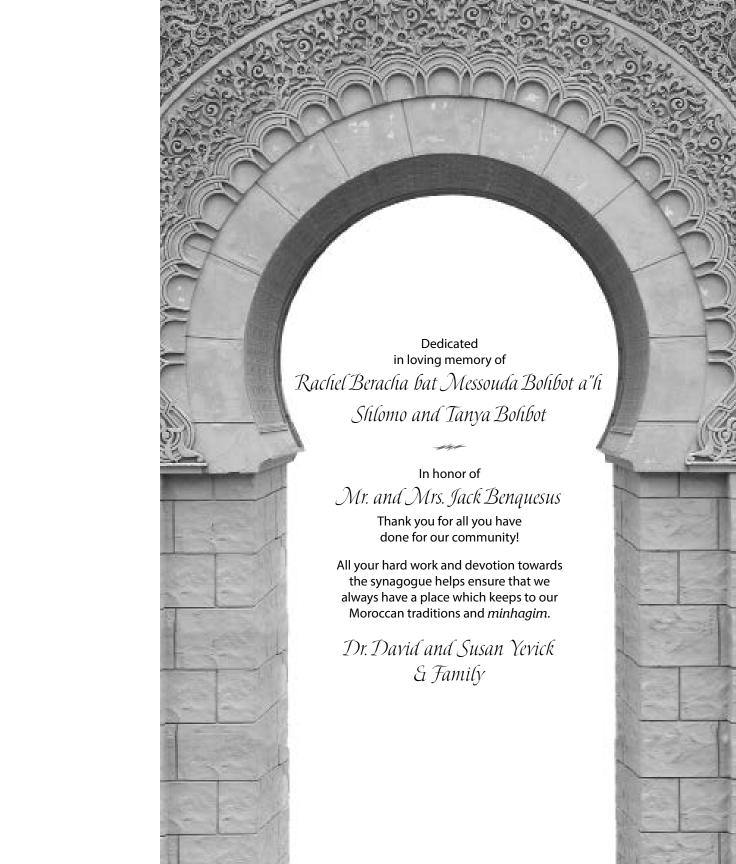
When R' Sadkah noticed their fear, he immediately got off his donkey, lifted his hands to the Heavens and offered the following prayer: "May it be Your Will, Hashem that if it has been decreed that rain should fall, let it rain so hard that the donkey's saddle becomes completely soaked." The people with him were very surprised. Not only was R' Sadkah not asking Hashem to hold back the rain but he was asking specifically for strong rains which would surely make the wheat wet and cause it to be *hametz*.

R' Sadkah knew their thoughts and explained: "Today is the day we harvested the wheat. If only a light rain would fall and not soak the wheat completely we might try to come up with a leniency to use the wheat for matzot and that would be wrong. Therefore I asked Hashem that if the decree was already sealed that it should rain, it should be a powerful storm. Then we would have no room for doubt that the wheat is unfit for use as matzah. As soon as R' Sadkah finished speaking the clouds dispersed and the sun shone for them without a drop of rain falling.



### HACHAM YEHOSHUA SHARBANI

Baghdad, Iraq 5639 - 5733 / 1879 - 1973



# HACHAM YEHOSHUA SHARBANI acham Yehoshua Sharbani zt"l was born in Baghdad in 5639/1879. His father was hacham Yitzhak Sharbani. He was known to be one of the elder pious mekubalim of Yerushalayim in the previous generation

Yerushalayim in the previous generation

As a young man, he studied at Bet hamidrash Zilka with the famous hachamim of Bavel. He had a close relationship with

R' Yosef Haim (the *Ben Ish Hai*), and as one of his outstanding students he was able to study with him personally.

R' Yehoshua decided to move to Eretz Yisrael on his wedding day in the year 1900. R' Yosef Haim credited him with a warm written reference, intended for the Chief Sephardic Rabbi in Eretz Yisrael at the time, R' Yaakov Saul Elishar (author of *Yisa Berachah*). All of the *hachamim* of the city were present at his

huppah, and the Ben Ish Hai was the mesader kiddushin. He had asked the Ben Ish Hai to attend, in order to ensure that all the other hachamim would escort him in the start of his journey after the huppah. The mekubal, R' Shimon Agasi, who was also at the huppah, gave R' Yehoshua some money for traveling expenses. After the huppah, the Ben Ish Hai escorted him to the harbor with the rest of the hachamim, to show how much respect they had for him.

When he reached Yerushalayim, R' Yehoshua studied Kabbalah in *Yeshivat Rechovot HaNahar* with R' Haim Shaul Dweck HaKohen, and later in the *Yeshivat Mekubalim* next to *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* in the Old City of Yerushalayim. He became a great *mekubal*, and practiced his Kabbalah pragmatically.

According to the testimony of R' Ben-Sion Abba Shaul, who was the husband of R' Yehoshua's granddaughter, R' Yehoshua

spent some time studying in a yeshivah where *hachamim* learned Torah continuously from *Motza'ei* Shabbat until Friday afternoon. They would then go home only for Shabbat.

R' Yehoshua was cofounder of *Yeshivat Shoshanim L'David*, along with R' Yaakob Haim Sofer (*Kaf Hahaim*) and R' Yehezkel Ezra Halevi, two Babylonian *hachamim* who lived in Yerushalayim.

He lived his life in holiness, simplicity, fasting, and self mortification by immersing his body in the snow. On the traditional fast days of *shovavim* he would fast every Monday and Thursday.

He prayed both for the public and for private people, and many of the *gedolim* in Yerushalayim sought his blessing. When he grew old, he moved to the Bakah neighborhood in Yerushalayim, and became the community *hacham*. He developed a close friendship with the *Baba Sali*, who was his neighbor for a brief period of time.

R' Yehoshua wrote a sefer on Masechet (tractate) Beitzah, which was lost in Baghdad.

He was nearly 100 years old when he passed away on Shabbat, the eleventh of *Tevet* 5733/1973. He was buried *Motza'ei* Shabbat on Har Hazeitim (Mount of Olives) in Yerushalayim, near the grave of the *Maharsha Alfandri* (R' Shelomo Eliezer Alfandri [1820–1930]) and R' Yaakob Haim Sofer (*Kaf Hahaim*).

R' Yehoshua sacrificed greatly for the education of his children (R' Yitzhak, R' Shaul, R' Yosef, R' David, and R' Shelomo). Despite great misfortune and ongoing concerns, he was able to raise children and grandchildren he was proud of, who all grew to be *talmidei hachamim* and great Torah educators.

#### A Revealed Dream

ne night while asleep, R' Yehuda Sadkah suddenly found he was suffering from a terrible disease. His blood became poisoned, and as a result, one of his hands became extremely swollen. R' Yehuda suffered from such terrible pain that his face turned blue. His sickness continued to worsen until he had to go to a local hospital in the city in order to undergo an operation. The operation itself also caused terrible suffering, and he cried so bitterly from the pain, that his voice reached his brother R' Ovadia, who was waiting for him outside the operating room. R' Ovadia cried bitterly at the sound of his brother's suffering.

On the night he became ill, the *Ben Ish Hai* revealed himself from the World of Truth to his student, the *mekubal* R' Yehoshua Sharbani in Yerushalayim, and called to him: "Get up and go quickly to the house of Hashem, open the *Hechal*, and pray that R' Yehuda Sadkah may be healed; he is very sick!" R' Yehoshua Sharbani hastily woke up and walked quickly through the dark night to the *Shoshanim LeDavid* synagogue. When he got there, he opened up the *aron hakodesh* and he poured out his heart, crying that R' Yehuda may be healed. He returned home and climbed onto his bunk to rest a little, so that he could continue his regular nightly *seder*, with its specific *tefillot*, until daybreak.

R' Yehoshua lived in a nearby neighborhood, and R' Ezra Attiah always relied on his *tefillot* and dreams. R' Attiah would tell the story of how after the passing of R' Abraham Ades, whose *tefillot* were always answered, he was worried about who he would now turn to for help. He got his answer in a dream: "Go to R' Yehoshua Sharbani; the gates of Heaven are open for his prayers!"

When morning came, after praying *Shacharit* at the synagogue and returning to his house, R' Yehoshua dropped in on R' Yehuda Sadkah's mother (the *saddeket* Marat Simha) to inquire about the well-being of her son. "How does he feel?" he asked. She was surprised, and asked how he even knew that her son R' Yehuda was sick. After all, he only became sick in the middle of the night, and until then he was as healthy as any other person. Everyone was still baffled by how he had contracted such a disease. R' Yehoshua did not answer her question, but rather persisted and continued to ask about R' Yehuda's health. When she told him that in the morning he had shown some improvement and his pains were alleviated,

R' Yehoshua was filled with happiness at this good news.

R' Yehoshua never revealed his dream to anyone except one of his sons, R' Shelomo Sharbani, who was student the top R' Yehuda However. Sadkah. R' Yehoshua, in all of his great humility, warned his son very strongly not to reveal this story, and not to repeat it to any human being while he was still alive. It seems that after R' Yehoshua's



R' Yehoshua Sharbani

death, R' Shelomo Sharbani repeated the story to R' Yehuda Sadkah, who was instructed to keep it a secret.

#### First They Should Cry Out and I Will Answer

t the time of the Turkish rule in Eretz Yisrael, one of the governors of the city, who was also a commander in the army, wanted to turn the residential neighborhood of Bet Yisrael into a military base. The residents of this area, many of whom were talmidei hachamim and saddikim, discovered that they would have to move far away from the Torah center that they had built for themselves in Bet Yisrael. They quickly approached R' Yehoshua Sharbani and woke him up in order to set up a day of tefillah and tahanunim in order to reverse this terrible decree. R' Yehoshua set up a day where everyone was to meet up in the synagogue for a tefillah to reverse this decree. When the entire congregation gathered in the synagogue, the saddik R' Yehoshua went up to the teva and started together with the entire kahal the Vehu Rahum prayer that is customarily said by some on Mondays and Thursdays.

When R' Yehoshua finished the *tefillah* of *Vehu Rahum*, he stopped the *tefillah* and went down from the *teva*, which shocked the entire *kahal*, who had waited and prepared for this day. He told everyone that it was not necessary to stay any longer, for the decree had been annulled.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> This story was repeated by the gabbai of the Musayof synagogue, Mr. Mola Yochai Yisraelov, who attended that tefillah service.

After a few days it became known that the governor who made the decree had a new car, and when he took it out for a test drive, he had a head-on collision with a wall and got crushed to death. With that, the decree was nullified and the issue was never again raised.



Left to right: R' Mordechai Eliyahu conversing with R' Yehoshua Sharbani



# HACHAM BEN-SION MEIR HAI UZIEL

Baghdad, Iraq

5639 - 5733 / 1879 - 1973



### HACHAM BEN-SION MEIR HAI UZIEL

acham Ben-Sion Meir Hai Uziel zt"l was born in Yerushalayim on the thirteenth of Sivan 5640/1880. His father was R' Yosef Raphael Uziel, Av Bet Din of Yerushalayim as well as president of the community council. His mother, Rabbanit Sarah, was the daughter of R' Moshe Hazzan. Her great-grandfather, R' Yosef Raphael Hazzan, was the author of the well-known, twelve-volume sefer Hikrei Lev. R' Haim David Hazzan, Sarah's grandfather, was a well-known talmid hacham. He was called "R' Had Badra," which was a play on words using the letters of his name. Both father and son were appointed as Chief Rabbis with the title of Rishon LeSion.

R' Yosef suffered for many years watching his young children die, until his wife gave birth to R' Ben-Sion. His mother, Rabbanit Sarah, once had a dream that her son would light the world with Torah, so she must call him Meir — one who lights up. The names Ben-Sion and Hai were given as a blessing for a long life.

R' Ben-Sion studied Torah with his father and many other great *talmidei hachamim* at the famed *Yeshivat Tiferet Yerushalayim* in the Old City of Yerushalayim. His primary teacher was R' Ben-Sion Koinka, a great *talmid hacham* and the editor of *Hamarech* and author of several important works on halachah.

Though he had excellent teachers, R' Ben-Sion acquired much of his Torah knowledge through independent study. It was difficult for him to learn with his peers, because his grasp was so fast and sharp, and he could not get used to the slower pace at which his friends studied.

In 5654/1894, at the age of fourteen, R' Ben-Sion's father passed away. As the oldest child, the responsibility for supporting the family fell on his young shoulders. His diligence and intelligence were great assets in those difficult times.

R' Ben-Sion became well known in halachic circles as a *talmid hacham* with extraordinary potential and abilities. In 5660/1900, at the tender age of twenty years old, he was appointed as a teacher at *Yeshivat Tiferet Yerushalayim*.

During the next twelve years, R' Ben-Sion assumed important positions in his community, in addition to being a respected *talmid hacham*. He was one of the founders of a school for orphans, and established the *yeshivot Machzike Torah* and *Share Sion* whose purpose was to produce *talmidei hachamim* for the Sephardic community. He had a reputation as a gifted speaker and was an active and successful community leader. He was a prolific writer and two of his most famous *sefarim* are *Mishpetei Uziel* – Responsa, and *Sha'arei Uziel* – Writings.

R' Ben-Sion attempted to raise the status of the working Jews in Yaffo and the persecuted Jews in Eretz Yisrael. Because of his attempt to do so, the Turkish government exiled him to Syria during World War I, but he was allowed to come back before the British army took over Palestine in 1919. He represented the Jewish community in many times of trouble throughout the British Mandate. He became the Chief Rabbi of Salonika from 1921 to 1923, but then returned to Eretz Yisrael. In 5672/1912, when he was thirty-two years old, R' Ben-Sion was appointed Chief Rabbi of the Tel Aviv-Yaffo neighborhood. He gave his inauguration speech, which comprised a deep halachic discussion followed by a moving presentation of aggadah, in the Bet Kneset Kehilat Yaakob in Yaffo on the sixth of Heshvan 5672/1912.

In 1927 R' Ben-Sion went on a mission to Iraq, where he persuaded Jews to return to the Holy Land. While visiting, he was asked to remain as the Chief Rabbi of Iraq, but once again he refused.

During his reign as Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, the Central Israeli Chief Rabbinate was created. He initiated the building of the *Ohel Moed* synagogue, the great Sephardic synagogue. He was loved by all in Tel Aviv, where he lived until he was nominated as Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel.

On the tenth of *Tammuz* 5697/1937, R' Ben-Sion moved to Yerushalayim to serve as the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel and *Rishon LeSion*. Large crowds of Tel Aviv residents assembled to bid him a bittersweet farewell that morning, and in Yerushalayim, crowds of residents came out to greet the new Chief Rabbi at the entrance to the city.

R' Ben-Sion Meir Hai Uziel left this world on Friday night, just after Shabbat started, from severe diabetes. He passed away on the twenty-fourth of *Elul* 5713/1953, when he was seventy-three years old. Thousands attended his funeral and the *gedolim* of his generation all eulogized him.



Left to right: R' Ben-Sion Uziel and Hagaon R' Isser Zalman Meltzer (1870 - 1953)

#### Speechless

hen R' Ben-Sion lived in Yaffo, the Turkish army made the lives of the Jews very difficult. One Friday night, the peace was disturbed by Turkish soldiers. They stopped a Jew who owned a grindstone, and ordered him to grind flour for the soldiers. He said he would not grind on Shabbat, unless he got permission from one of the *hachamim*.

The soldier immediately sent for R' Ben-Sion, and ordered him to permit the Jew to grind on Shabbat. R' Ben-Sion stated without fear, "I cannot permit grinding on Shabbat."

The soldiers returned to headquarters and reported the rabbi's answer. When Governor Hassan Beck<sup>32</sup> heard the answer, he was furious. He sent an armed convoy to pick up the *hacham*. R' Ben-Sion joined them calmly. When the general saw R' Ben-Sion's amazing countenance, his anger dissipated at once.

"Why did you disturb my rest?" demanded R' Ben-Sion.

"Because ... you disobeyed my command ..." the governor hesitated.

"Your command?" said R' Ben-Sion. "What is a king's command compared with the command of the King of kings, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* [The Holy One, Blessed Is He]?"

Governor Hassan Beck was left speechless, and was forced to apologize for disturbing the *hacham's* rest.

#### Honest Words Penetrating The Heart

r. Gemal Pehah was the jurisdictional ruler of Yaffo and the surrounding area. On one of his visits to Yaffo, he looked out the window of the government office, and noticed that the cemetery lay beneath it. He was infuriated. "The graves have to be moved out of town immediately!" he demanded. He did not listen to the complaints and pleas of the citizens, and immediately began moving the graves. When they neared the Jewish section, R' Ben-Sion approached the ruler. The great sadness in his eyes touched the heart of the ruler.

"Why would you do this to the Jews of this city?" he demanded. "Is it not enough that you banished most of the living Jews? Now when they return they will not be able to find the graves of their fathers! At least wait until they have returned!"

R' Ben-Sion's honest words found their way to the ruler's heart, and he immediately ordered the work stopped. The Jewish graves in Yaffo, *baruch* Hashem, remain intact until this very day.

#### Proper Guidance

nce R' Ben-Sion gave his daughter an amount of money in order to hire a private teacher who could assist with her education. His daughter received the sum of money from her father but studied diligently by herself. She passed her tests without the extra help, and received excellent grades. With the money designated for her private tutor she bought a new

<sup>32</sup> Governor Hassan Beck was a ruler for the Arab community in the Yaffo-Tel Aviv region in the early 1900s.

dress, assuming her father would be pleased with her success, and would not mind her buying a new dress.

When R' Ben-Sion heard about this he turned to her and said, "You should know that you received money for a specific purpose and you had no permission to use that money for any other reason. If you had told me ahead of time, I surely would have agreed to buy you a new dress, but your dishonesty makes what you did wrong."

# A Leader's Great Courage

or a time after the war, R' Ben-Sion agreed to be the rabbi Tof the Jewish community of Salonika, Greece. On *Erev* Yom Kippur, the local general sent a message to his house saying that many Turkish refugees were arriving from Turkey the following day, and that the synagogues must be emptied to host them. R' Ben-Sion was horrified at the thought of the lews being unable to pray in their synagogues on the holiest of days. He arrived at the general's home, and told him he could not agree to such a demand. The general was furious, and explained that the needs of the war came before the religious needs of the Jews. R' Ben-Sion stood courageously before the general, and exclaimed, "You will be unable to remove the Jews from their synagogues. Only policemen with swords will be able to move the Jews. However, if you send your troops, word will spread about how evil your government is to all lews in the world, and they will all condemn your actions."

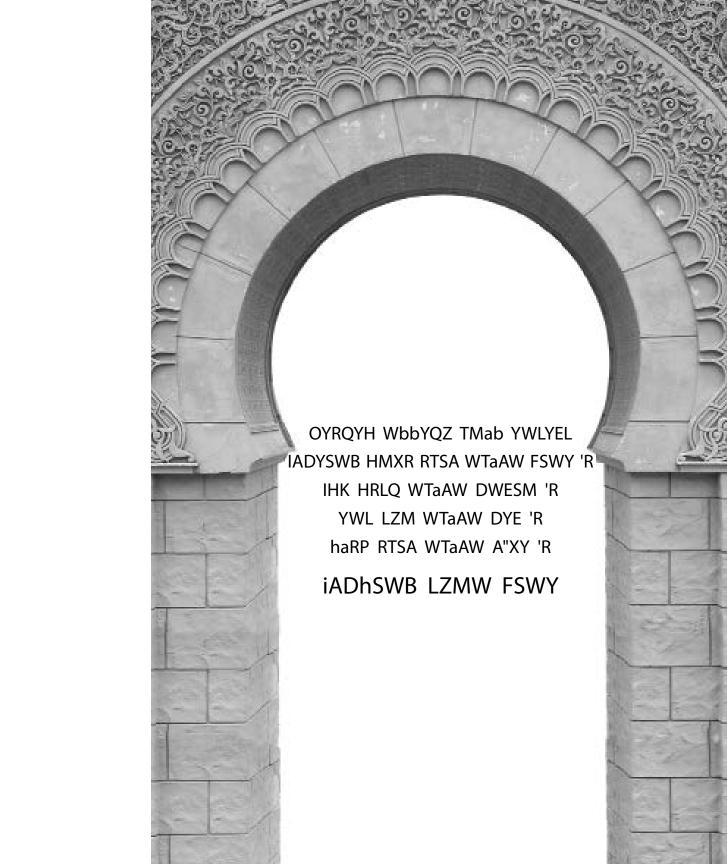
The Greek general agreed that R' Ben-Sion was correct. That *Yom Kippur* the Jews prayed peacefully in their synagogues as they did each year!



# HACHAM YOSEF MESSAS

Meknes, Morocco

5652 - 5734 / 1892 - 1974



#### HACHAM YOSEF MESSAS

acham Yosef Messas *zt"l* was born in Meknes, Morocco, in 1892/5652. R' Yosef was an outstanding and original figure among many *talmidei hachamim*. His father, the illustrious R' Hayim Messas, passed away in 1904, and fourteen-year-old Yosef had to provide for his mother and two brothers by working as a *sofer* (scribe), illustrator, bookbinder, watchmaker, and notary while keeping up with his studies. He was unbelievably talented, and his talent was recognized at a young age. His father instilled a love of Torah in him from a young age, and that love helped him to keep up with his vast responsibilities and his studies. He spent every spare moment studying Torah.

R' Yosef attended Yeshivat Etz Haim, where he studied with R' Haim Berdugo in Meknes, Morocco. In 1924 he was asked by the community of Tlemcen, Algeria, to serve as their Chief Rabbi. He was admired and referred to as "El Hacham" ("The Wise"). He was only thirty-two years old at the time, and served as Chief Rabbi for seventeen years. R' Yosef concentrated on strengthening the city and particularly the level of kashrut among members of the community. During this time the people realized how great the saddik really was and how much he accomplished at such a young age. He drew many people to his community, and people sought his advice on all matters.

During this time the French Alliance movement was in full force, causing many families to veer from the path of Torah. The rabbis of the city decided that only R' Yosef was capable of combating this. They appointed him to be the speaker for

Shabbatot and other special occasions. R' Yosef's speeches were full of intellect, patience, and softness, and with these qualities he attracted the vast majority of the city and he was successful in his mission to keep people on the path of Torah.

In 1940 he returned to Meknes to sit on the *bet din* with R' Rephael Baruch Toledano (1890–1971) and R' Yehoshua Berdugo (1876 – 1953). He turned down offers to be the *Rosh Av Bet Din* of Casablanca and Cairo. R' Yosef was appointed by the Moroccan government to take care of all Jewish affairs countrywide.

His love for Eretz Yisrael was inherited from his parents. On the ninth of *Nissan* 5724/1964 R' Yosef moved to the *Kiryat Shemuel* neighborhood in Haifa. Though the majority of the people in Haifa were far from the path of Torah, R' Yosef had a big impact on them, and only a year later he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Haifa. His work in Haifa was similar to his work in the past. He gave many *shiurim* in the *bet hakneset* that he established and in a yeshiva in his area. He visited hospitals and prisons regularly to give *hizuk* to his fellow Jews. R' Yosef served in this position until his passing in 1974.

R' Yosef didn't like the terms "Sephardi" "Askenazi" "haredi" and "hiloni" (nonreligious). He would say, "We are all Yehudim [Jews]; some of us keep more, some of us keep less, some are from this country and some are from that country."

Throughout R' Yosef's life he tried to bring young people closer to religion and tradition. An excellent orator, he meticulously prepared his speeches and sermons. The *sefarim* he wrote attested to the fact that his priority was to spend each possible moment learning Torah. The light in his library was always on. R' Yosef had a deep understanding of the Torah, and his remarkable memory led to vast knowledge. R' Yosef's greatness was recognized by the Torah world, and he corresponded with the entire spectrum of *gedolei Yisrael*. He wrote to rabbis worldwide, and received questions from

New York, Baltimore, Poland, Tunisia, and all over the Middle East.

R' Yosef Messas is the author of many works. After his death, the *Otsrot Yosef* (Yosef's Treasures) association was founded in Haifa to ensure the publication of his manuscripts. His first responsa *Mayim Hayim* was printed in Fez in 1934 and reprinted in Yerushalayim in 1967. Other works by R' Yosef include *Ner Mitzva, Purim del M'agaz, Nahalat Avot* (3 volumes), and *Otsar Hamichtavim* (3 volumes).

R' Yosef Messas passed away in Haifa on the second of *Shevat* 5734/1974.



Left to right: R' Baruch Toledano, political leader (unknown), R' Rephael Baruch Toledano, King of Morocco, R' Yosef Messas and a political leader (unknown).

#### Softly Spoken

In the early 1960s, the southern city of Eilat was a small town in which a visitor was a novelty. One *Erev Shabbat*, Mr. David Bitton<sup>33</sup> made his way to pray *Kabbalat Shabbat* along with his fellow worshipers, who were streaming to the *bet hakneset*. The sun was quickly setting, and as he settled in someone whispered to his ear, "An important *saddik* is in our midst. His name is Hacham Yosef Messas and he's staying at the home of the Zahavi family."

When Mr. Bitton first set eyes on the rabbi, he felt as though he was seeing an angel from *Shamayim*. After Shabbat morning prayers, the community accompanied R' Yosef back to the home of his host. As they were walking they noticed a nonreligious man coming towards the crowd. He was one of the veteran residents of the city and he was clothed only from the waist down, smoking a cigarette. In respect to the honor of the *saddik*, Mr. Bitton tried diverting the route so as not to pass this man. However, R' Yosef saw Mr. Bitton's good intentions and grabbed hold of his hand. "Leave it to me," R' Yosef said. He approached the man and whispered something in his ear and then continued on his way. In fear, the irreligious man turned and asked in a voice filled with emotion, "Who was that righteous rabbi?" "Why, what did he say to you?" Mr. Bitton pressed.

The veteran responded, "Shalom to you, fellow Jew. You probably forgot that today is our sacred Shabbat.' That is what the rabbi said to me. He did not rebuke me, but rather spoke in a soft voice, and I find myself truly inspired." Mr. Bitton replied, "R' Yosef will be speaking at *Minha* today in the *bet hakneset*." He then quickly rejoined the group walking with R' Yosef.

At *Minha*, the *bet hakneset* was filled with many people who wanted to hear the *hacham's* wisdom and insight. On the last bench in the corner of the *bet hakneset* sat the man the crowd had seen in the morning. Now he was dressed in a manner that respected the Shabbat and he craved the words of R' Yosef with a tremendous thirst for insight from the *saddik*. From that day on the man was known as a tribute that R' Yosef was once in Eilat, touched by the softness of the noble R' Yosef.

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#### A Father's Modesty

Yosef was due to fly from the south of Eretz Yisrael to Yerushalayim at 8:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning. An important meeting of the Chief Rabbinical Council was taking place there. At 7:00 a.m. he was deeply engrossed in his prayers and could not be rushed. His wife also refused to rush him and continued calmly packing the suitcases. Knowing that the group was short on time, the *hacham's* son R' Eliyahu quickly went to the airport to see if he could help. R' Eliyahu approached the airport manager and said, "I have an important request and would like your assistance."

R' Eliyahu began telling him all about his saintly father the *saddik*, a member of the Chief Rabbinical Council, who was due to fly out but was delayed. The son asked if the flight could be delayed so that the rabbi could make it. "Are you crazy?" shouted the manager. "Now it is 7:30 and in half an hour that plane is taking off."

R' Eliyahu tried pleading with him, but he firmly replied, "Departure is 8:00 a.m. exactly." R' Eliyahu hurried back to R' Yosef and found him still praying. A few minutes passed and

<sup>33</sup> The name Mr. Bitton is not the original name of the character in this story.

he heard him calling to R' Eliyahu, "R' Eliyahu, have you had your tea this morning?" "No," he replied, "we are already late for the flight." R' Yosef calmly and patiently asked his wife to prepare tea, and asked: "Tell me, who is greater, I or Hashem?" the question seemed out of place — was R' Yosef unwell? It was clear that he was purposely trying to delay going to the airport. And what was the point of his strange comparison?

R' Eliyahu tried to avoid giving a direct response to the question. "Answer me precisely," said R' Yosef. "Surely Hashem is greater," R' Eliyahu had no choice but to answer. In the meantime the Rabbanit brought their tea. R' Yosef told his son to recite the blessing first. R' Eliyahu began, but as he said the word "Hashem," R' Yosef commanded him to stop. "Listen to what you have just said. When addressing me you always use the third person; His honor this and His honor that, but when addressing Hashem you use the first person saying 'Blessed are You, Hashem.' But Hashem is the greater of the two of us. When addressing me you should always use the first person and only for the honor of the Torah may you call me father." R' Eliyahu was amazed at his father's modesty and humility.

After drinking tea and tasting the cake that the Rabbanit had put out for everyone, R' Yosef said it was time to leave to the airport. It was already 8:45 a.m. and R' Eliyahu was sure that the flight was long gone. R' Eliyahu was concerned about them missing the Rabbinical Council meeting. With these thoughts going through his head, they arrived at the airport, where their plane stood, surrounded by electricians and repairmen.

R' Eliyahu sought the airport manager and asked him what was happening. "I have no idea. Since 8:00 a.m. we have been trying to fix the problem but we still haven't managed to locate the source." The manager was very troubled.

"While your workers see to the problem may we board the flight?" R' Yosef requested. The manager looked at R' Yosef

and saw that he was a holy person. "It would be my pleasure, please go on board." As soon as R' Yosef found his seat and settled in, the engines roared to life victoriously and the plane took off. As they watched it fly into the heavens, the manager whispered in the son's ear, "R' Eliyahu, someone told me that your father was praying this entire time and why didn't you tell me you were talking about such a big *saddik*?"



Left to right: R' Haim David Serero and R' Yosef Messas



R' Yosef Messas

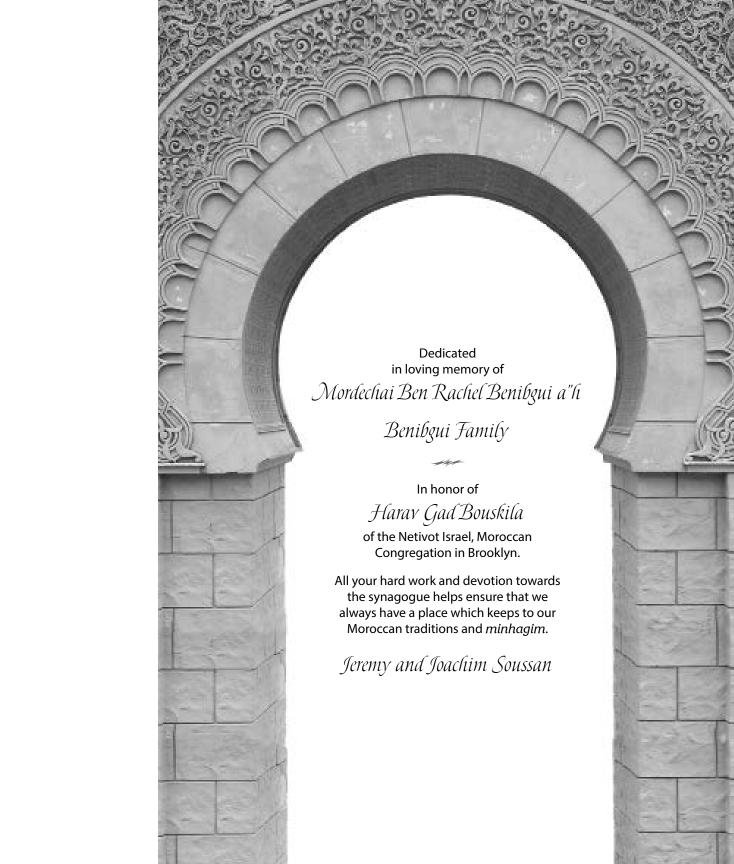
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## HACHAM YITZHAK ABUCHATZERA

(BABA HAKI)

Tafillalt, Morocco 5655 - 5730 / 1895 - 1970



# Baba Sali). mekubal R' Moshe Tourjeman.

#### HACHAM YITZHAK ABUCHATZERA (BABA HAKI)

acham Yitzhak Abuchatzera zt"l was born in the village of Risanni in the district of Tafillalt, Morocco in 5655/1895. His father was the notable R' Messod Abuchatzera. His brothers were R' David (known as Ateret Roshenu) and R' Yisrael (the

He studied with his father in his grandfather's Yeshiva, but when he was bar mitzvah his father passed away, and he continued to learn from his brother R' David, his uncle R' Yitzhak (youngest son of Abir Yaakob) and from the great

During World War I the Jews of Morocco were persecuted as their neighbours set out to torment, rob, and embarrass all Jews. R' Yitzhak, who was twenty-five years old at the time, organized protection for the Jews of m'lach (Jewish ghetto). He was successful in moving many families to the city of Budniv where there was French rule. After the murder of their father, his brothers R' David and R' Yisrael moved to Budniv with their families. Similar travel plans were arranged from different areas of Morocco.

In 5685/1925 he went to Eretz Yisrael for the first time, to publish his brother's books. On his journey he passed by the grave of his grandfather R' Yaakob Abuchatzera, the Abir Yaakob, in Dimanhur, Egypt (see 'A Legacy of Leaders Vol. I). After spending one year in Eretz Yisrael he went back to his city to organize the last Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. He was delayed since he did not want to leave his kehila, who would be left leaderless, like sheep without a shepherd.

On his return R' Yitzhak set up a yeshivah in his town. His brother R' Yisrael was the Rosh Yeshivah, and R' Yitzhak's house was like a dormitory for the students. After some time, R' Yitzhak went to the city of Erpud and continued with his public services. In 5706/1946 he set out on his way to Eretz Yisrael. His journey was delayed by two years in the city of Werhan (Algeria), where he tried to convince more Jews to move to Eretz Yisrael. In 5709/1949 he finally reached Eretz Yisrael, and settled in Givat Olga (near the city of Hadera).

He was soon called on by the *Rishon LeSion* R' Ben-Sion Meir Hai Uziel to accept the position as rabbi of the cities Ramle-Lod, and to become an active partner in the Council of Rabbanut. His house was always open and many came to seek his advice and visit his home. His conduct was pleasant, and R' Yitzhak became the head of the Sephardic Rabbinate.

In 5712/1952, R' Yitzhak was sent by the Aliyah Agency in Algeria and Marseille, France, to organize an *aliya* movement. However, his main interest remained the education of Eretz Yisrael children in a warm atmosphere.

R' Yitzhak's *berachot* were valuable, and many were helped on his behalf. He was killed in a car accident on the twenty-fifth of *Adar Bet* 5730/1970 when he was seventy-five years old, and was buried in the Ramle cemetery.

R' Yitzhak's legacy continues with his children R' Abraham (the rabbi of Yavneh, who took over his father's position from 1970 to 1973), R' Pinhas, R' Aharon (who was Minister of Religion), R' Yehiel (current rabbi of Ramle, and head of the *Ohel Yitzhak* institution), R' Meir, R' Shimon (head of *Yeshivat Ner Yitzhak*), and six daughters.



R' Yitzhak Abuchatzera (Baba Haki) holding hands with R' Shaul Aben Danan (1882-1972)

#### ADream to Remember

'Yitzhak Abuhatzera was accustomed to giving a *berachah* to anyone who came by his house to request a blessing. No matter the hour, his house was open to the public, and those who came for a blessing or to seek his advice always received a warm welcome. R' Yitzchak's family was astounded by the way he was always able to answer people with love and kindness, with no consideration for his privacy or rest time. One day his son R' Aharon approached him and asked him, "Abba, Why do you burden yourself nonstop with blessing and advice for everybody?"

R' Yitzhak answered, "I will tell you a story that will answer your question. When I was eleven years old I went out to play in the streets of the city of Erpud. Suddenly a lady came to me screaming loudly and bitterly, with a child in her arm, and said to me: 'Please *hacham*, my son is deathly ill. I beg you to bless him!'

"'Would I know how to give a *berachah*?!' I answered her. 'I am only an eleven-year-old boy! Go now to my older brother, R' David, and he will happily bless your child.' The lady went to R' David's house, but did not find anyone home, and she returned to her house heartbroken."

"That night I had a dream that I was taken to the Heavenly Court to be judged. 'Behold, you are guilty of murdering a little boy,' the angels told me. I was shocked and replied, 'Of which boy do you speak?' One angel answered me loudly, 'A lady came to you and requested that you bless her sick child, and you would not. Had you but placed your hand on the child and blessed him, the child would have lived!'"

R' Yitzhak continued, "I was terribly troubled, when the *Abir Yaakob* [R' Yaakob Abuchatzera] came to me and whispered,

'Know that I fought for you in *Shamayim*, and they let you off this time because your intentions were pure. But from now on hear my advice, my son: whenever someone comes to you and requests a *berachah* or help, you will do your best to help, and anyone you bless — shall be blessed."

R' Yitzhak explained with a pleasant and calm voice: "Since that dream, I always accept every single person with a smiling face and I bless every person with *simhah* and good heart. Remember this dream! I command you and your brother to bless and to help any person who asks, because the merit of our forefathers is with us always."

#### The Love for Eretz Yisrael

uring the Six Day War, on the day the city of Hebron was liberated, R' Yitzhak ordered a taxi and went on his way to see the city. His son asked him, "Where are you going?" "My son," he answered, "I am going to the Me'arat Hamachpela."

His son was amazed. "The soldiers themselves are afraid to go to travel now, and you are traveling immediately to Hebron?! Wait at least a few days until things settle, and then you can go!" R' Yitzhak heard him, but would not heed his son's words. He soon left to visit to the *Kotel Hama'aravi, Keber Rachel*, and *Me'arat Hamachpela*. The soldiers at the checkpoints on the way wanted to prevent travel to Hebron, but the light shining from the *hacham's* pleasant face dissuaded them from stopping him, and R' Yitzhak continued on his way and reached *Me'arat Hamachpela*.

The *hacham* returned to his house, and his son said to him, "Abba, why were you in such a hurry?" "My son," said R' Yitzhak, "In my younger days I came to visit Eretz Yisrael and I travelled to Hebron, city of our Forefathers. When I reached the *Me'arat Hamachpela*, the Arab guard there stopped me after a few steps in and ordered me to return to where I came from. I built up some courage and told him, 'I am going directly inside to pray, and we will see if you are strong enough to know who is really in charge!"

"The guard was frightened, and I went in and prayed by the holy *Avot*. When I came out, the chambers of my heart were filled with sadness that our beloved Forefathers are under the rule of the *goyim*, and Jews are not able to pray at their own leisure in the *Me'arat Hamachpela*.

"And now," said the *hacham*, "When I heard that Hebron was liberated and is back in our hands, I rushed to announce that Hebron is ours and we are the masters and rightful owners of Eretz Yisrael!"

#### The Passing of the Baba Haki

acham Ovadia Yosef would repeat the following story, told by the *Baba Sali* (R' Yisrael Abuchatzera) himself:

In the city of Netivot where the *Baba Sali* lived, there was a couple who was experiencing trouble with *shalom bayit*. The *Baba Sali* knew that his brother R' Yitzhak was very clever in his methods of creating peace between a husband and wife. So the *Baba Sali* asked his brother to come to Netivot to save the marriage. R' Yitzhak left immediately, traveling by car to Netivot. After visiting his brother, he went to the couple's

home to solve the marriage problem, and Hashem helped R' Yitzhak bring *shalom bayit* to their home. R' Yitzhak went back to the *Baba Sali's* house where they spoke about Torah for a while. Finally, R' Yitzhak left to go back home to Ramle.

A great tragedy then took place: R' Yitzhak never made it home because he was in a fatal car accident. When the *Baba Sali* heard the tragic news, he would not accept any comfort from anyone. For the entire thirty days he cried bitterly because he thought his brother's death was his fault. On the night ending the thirty days, R' Yitzhak came to the *Baba Sali* in a dream, saying, 'Why wouldn't you accept any comfort? I experienced no pain and went straight up to *Shamayim*. You have no reason to be upset over my passing.' The very next morning, the *Baba Sali*'s face lit up with the realization of the high position his brother had in *Shamayim*.<sup>34</sup>



Sitting: R' Yitzhak Abuchatzera (Baba Haki) & Standing second from right is R' Meir Abuchatzera (Baba Meir)

<sup>34</sup> R' Shimon Abuchatzera (R' Yitzhak's son) said that Baba Sali told him, "R' Yitzhak came to me in a dream and told me he was with our uncle R' David Abuchatzera (Atert Roshenu) and the entire Abuchatzera dynasty in Shamayim."



### HACHAM ABRAHAM HARARI-RAFUL

Yerushalayım, Eretz Yisrael

5655 - 5752 / 1895 - 1992



# HACHAM ABRAHAM HARARI-RAFUL acham Abraham Mordechai Nissim Harari-Raful zt"I was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 5655/1895. The Harari-Raful family originated from Aram Soba (Aleppo). R' Abraham's father was a great talmid hacham, R' Ezra Harari-Raful. The family could trace their origins to fifteenth-century Spain. At the time

R' Abraham was considered to be the leader of the Sages of Aram Soba in his lifetime. From a young age, he suffered from vision problems and nearly lost his ability to see. For many years he would just review over and over from memory what he had learned in his youth. Due to his excellent memory and his unique capabilities, he merited to learn all of *Shas* and Kabbalah. It is said that at the very young age of eleven he had memorized the entire *Tehillim*.

of the Spanish Expulsion they arrived in Aram Soba.

Both scholars and laymen were astounded by his phenomenal memory. R' Ovadia Yosef used to say, "If someone wanted to know the exact location of any *midrash*, R' Abraham was the one to ask. He was a giant in Torah and in *middot*, while modesty was his most notable trait."

R' Abraham started learning Kabbalah at a very young age. He studied with the famous *mekubal* R' Haim Shaul HaKohen Dweck. They learned from *Etz Haim* and *Shemonah She'arim*. R' Abraham also learned and reviewed *sefer Rehovot Hanahar* nearly forty times. The study of Kabbalah was conducted in extreme secrecy. During the High Holidays he prayed at *Bet hamidrash Bet El* in the Old City of Yerushalayim in order to hear the *tefillot* of the great *mekubal* R' Sasson Parsayado, who authored *Shemen Sasson*.

R' Abraham began his formal education in the Talmud Torah of the Bucharian neighborhood in Yerushalayim. Just before the outbreak of World War I, he married Sarah Zakai, who was a great example of modesty, humility, and simplicity. After his first wife passed away in 1969, R' Abraham remarried. During the war years, most yeshivah students had left the country, and he was overburdened with the care of his young children. Yet, R' Abraham did not cut down on his Torah studies, despite the lack of food and other necessities. He continued learning with great passion, alongside great Sages and *mekubalim*, despite his young age.

In *Adar* of 5683/1923, *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* was inaugurated in the Old City of Yerushalayim. R' Abraham was one of the outstanding students of the yeshivah, and he continued his studies there, learning all aspects of Torah with great diligence. When the yeshivah building was destroyed by the Jordanian Legion, it was relocated to the Mussayof *bet hakneset* in the Bucharian neighborhood, and R' Abraham went along, taking only his *tallit* and *tefillin* with him.

R' Abraham suffered from severe vision problems and almost lost his vision entirely. He used to hide in the attic of R' Haim Shaul HaKohen Dweck, and would study with his teacher whenever he was available. Nonetheless, most of his time was spent in the attic, a fact that affected his vision. However, due to his amazing memory he managed to go through the entire *Shas, midrash,* and mastered *Kabbalah*. Some of his Torah thoughts were recorded in the *sefer* of his father's *mussar* teachings, *Hachin Ezra*.

R' Abraham was full of charm and had a gentle heart. He was very careful with his speech and spoke in a soft and gentle manner to everyone. R' Abraham led an extremely simple life, with no luxuries or extras. He taught himself never to waste time from a young age. He would sit and study Torah day and night, and he once recited the entire *Tehillim* by heart six times in a row.

For many years, R' Abraham suffered in silence and accepted his pain with love. He would not let even one sigh escape his lips so as not to cause pain to those around him. In his last years it was very difficult for him to respond when spoken to. However, when people would share a Torah thought with him he would strain to open his eyes and try to catch every word.

On the night of the twenty-fifth of *Kislev* 5752/1992, the light that shined in Klal Yisrael which was R' Abraham was extinguished. At the age of ninety-seven, his soul ascended to the Heavens. Members of the *hebra kadisha* said they had never seen such a pure face as his when performing a *taharah!* 



Left to right: R' Ben-Sion Abba Shaul; R' Mansour Ben-Shimon; Hacham Ezra Attiah; R' Abraham Harari Raful; R' Yehuda Sadkah

#### Chosen from Above

young girl who had a buildup of bacteria in her eye once needed surgery. When her family came to the *saddik* R' Abraham requesting that he pray for her, he took a handkerchief in his hand and mumbled various holy words of Torah over it. He instructed them to place it over her eyes. They followed the exact instructions of R' Abraham. He told the parents they should have her rest in their home. The next morning she woke up, and she no longer needed the surgery.

That day, the cheerful parents ran around the streets of Yerushalayim announcing their gratitude to Hashem and R' Abraham for their daughter's recovery. They told everyone that the *saddik* R' Abraham must have been "chosen from above."

#### A Soft-Spoken Manner

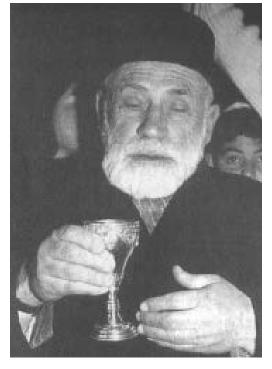
Abraham once got a haircut, and the barber accidentally shaved one side of his beard. R' Abraham did not get angry at all, but told him in his soft-spoken way, "If you already shaved one side, you might as well shave the other." He then asked the barber for a towel and walked home with the towel over his face. He didn't leave his house for many weeks until his beard grew back.<sup>35</sup>

#### Fearless and of Pure Heart

ne Friday night R' Abraham remarked to his family, "Why are there such dark clouds today, making it impossible to see anything?" His family realized that he had lost his vision and they wanted to call a doctor to examine him. R' Abraham told the family that a doctor wasn't necessary, for it is written that one who loses his vision should look at the cup filled with Kiddush wine and at the Shabbat candles during Kiddush.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, after looking at the Shabbat Kiddush and candles his vision miraculously returned. After Kiddush, he asked for the

sefer Hok L'Yisrael and began to read from it, his vision fully restored. When the family members saw what had happened to R' Abraham they recognized he was "fearless and of pure heart."



R' Abraham Harari-Raful saying a beracha at a wedding.

<sup>35</sup> R' Eliezer Papo (1785–1826) brings down in his sefer Pele Yoetz that it is written, "It is improper for a G-d-fearing Jew to cut away any part of his beard." Sefer Pele Yoetz (Ot Gimel, Section Giluach)

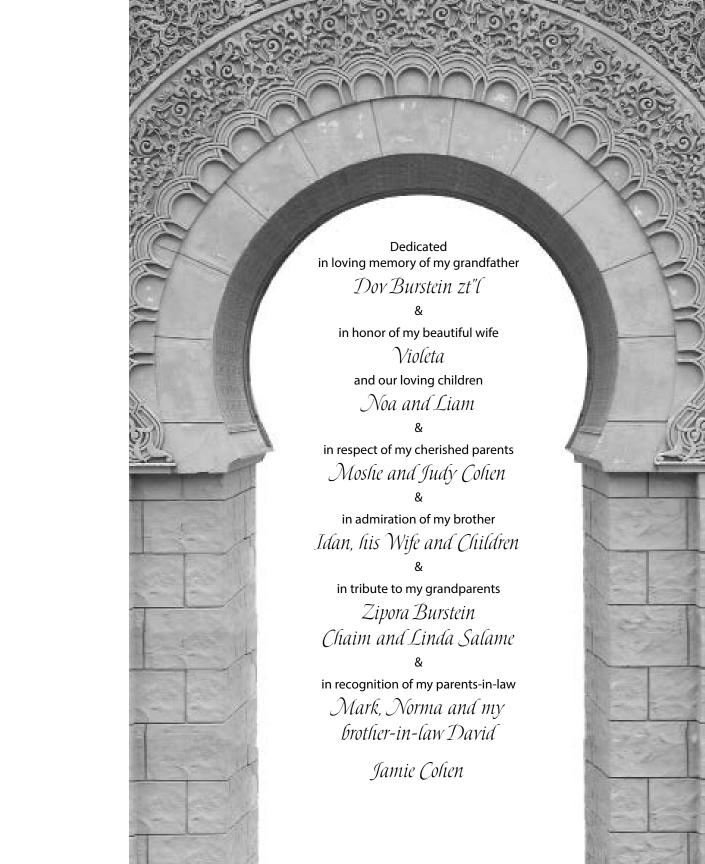
<sup>36</sup> Sefer Ben Ish Hai (Bereshit - Second Year; Halachah 29)



# HACHAM YAAKOB KASSIN

YERUSHALAYIM, ERETZ YISRAEL

5660 - 5764 / 1900 - 1994



## HACHAM YAAKOB KASSIN

acham Yaakob Kassin *zt"l* was born in 5660/1900 in Yerushalayim. His father was the notable *talmid hacham* R' Shaul Kassin, who instilled in his son a great passion for Torah. From a young age, R' Yaakob was destined to do what he loved most. During his childhood years he naturally set himself aside from child play and focused on the service of Hashem.

R' Yaakob attended *Yeshivat Ohel Mo'ed* in Yerushalayim, a yeshivah founded by Hagaon Raphael Shelomo Laniado. Many great Sephardic *hachamim* were educated in Yeshivat Ohel Mo'ed, which became *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* in 1923.

In 5677/1917 R' Shaul died of typhus. Two months later, his wife passed away, leaving behind R' Yaakob and his young siblings. R' Yaakob continued studying enthusiastically despite his personal difficulties. In 5679/1919, R' Yaakob met his life partner, Mazal, daughter of Hacham Shalom Hedaya (1864–1945). She was descended from a distinguished lineage of *hachamim* from Aleppo, Syria. Her father was the *Av Bet Din* of the Sephardic *bet din* of Yerushalayim and Rosh Yeshivah of the Bet El yeshivah.

In 1923, R' Yaakob was admitted to a program of advanced Gemara studies at *Yeshivat Porat Yosef*. R' Yaakob soon joined a small group for advanced learning of Kabbalah. This study circle, officially known as Yeshivat Oz V'hadar, was headed by the *mekubal* R' Saliman Eliyahu (father of R' Mordechai Eliyahu), and *mekubal* R' Ephraim Menashe HaKohen (1886 –1957).

R' Yaakob had an encyclopedic knowledge and could easily identify any *sefer*, chapter, or sentence, which he could complete when asked. At twenty-five, R' Yaakob wrote his first *sefer* on Kabbalah called *Ohr Halevanah*. He had received approbations from R' Yosef Haim Sonnenfeld (1849–1932), R' Haim Shaul HaKohen Dweck, and R' Aharon Shelomo Maharil.

In 5687/1927 R' Yaakob became the founder of *Yeshivat Gan HaLevanon*. This yeshivah was attended by many great Sephardic *hachamim*. The *hachamim* excitedly gathered to hear the young R' Yaakob giving his brilliant sermons. Despite his young age, he was recognized as a great kabbalistic authority, accepted by all Torah scholars in Yerushalayim.

In 1928, R' Yaakob was appointed to serve on the Sephardic bet din of Yerushalayim. Soon after, R' Yaakob was selected by R' Yaakob Meir and R' Ezra Harari Raful, the Chief Rabbis, to go on a fundraising mission to the United States on behalf of the Sephardic orphanages of Yerushalayim. R' Yaakob wanted to decline due to his full agenda and the burden of his duties in Yerushalayim. He eventually gave in to the pressure of the hachamim, who believed he would be the best representative, and R' Yaakob agreed to go to America for two months.

When R' Yaakob arrived in New York, he was welcomed by rabbis and leaders of the Syrian community. The two months that R' Yaakob originally intended to spend in America became six. R' Yaakob made a great impression on every representative he met with. The community repeatedly begged him to extend his stay in order to benefit from his knowledge. At the time, the Syrian community lacked a spiritual leader who would keep them strong and united.

The members were impressed with R' Yaakob, and wanted him to accept the position of Chief Rabbi. After relentless pleading from both the leaders and the rabbis of the community, Mr. Isaac Shalom and Mr. Shelomo Grazi finally came to an agreement with R' Yaakob. R' Yaakob signed a contract that should he decide in the future to leave Eretz Yisrael, he would serve as a rabbi in the Syrian community of New York.

After six months in America, R' Yaakob returned to his family and colleagues in Eretz Yisrael. R' Yaakob Meir and R' Ezra Harari-Raful were delighted with the successful results of his mission. His success in fundraising exceeded R' Yaakob's expectations, as he had significantly eased the financial burdens of several institutions.

After R' Yaakob's arrival in Yerushalayim, he received numerous letters from leaders of the Syrian community of New York. The letters urged R' Yaakob to return to New York and accept the position of Chief Rabbi. The *hachamim* of Yerushalayim and R' Yaakob's father-in-law advised him to take this position so that he might inspire the Syrian community of New York. R' Yaakob replied that he would accept the position for the period of one year. The one year became sixty-two years in which R' Yaakob served as leader of the Syrian community in New York. R' Yaakob became the leader who would mold the image of the Syrian community in New York.

R' Yaakob had many wonderful talents that he shared with his community members. The Sephardic community, comprised nearly six hundred families, providing R' Yaakob with a lot of work. He performed *britot* (circumcisions), was a *sofer* (scribe), trained men in the laws and practice of *shehitah* (kosher slaughter), founded a *bet din*, taught bar mitzvah lessons, officiated at weddings, delivered *shiurim* on various topics, served as head of the *Magen David Yeshivah*, and worked to perfect his community in its service of Hashem.

R' Yaakob produced many halachic rulings for his community. He adopted an edict by R' Shaul Setton, head of the rabbinic court in Argentina, to ban conversions and marriage with converts. In the New York community, the edict addressed specifically those who converted to Judaism for the purpose of marriage, and not converts with genuine intent to become Jewish. The 1935 edict was reissued in 1946, 1972,

1984, and finally in 2006, and signed by all leaders and rabbis of the Syrian community, often with additional clauses. The proclamation has been successful, and the rate of intermarriage with non-Jews in the Syrian community is believed to be less than 3%, as opposed to reaching 50% in the general American Jewish population.

R' Yaakob Kassin passed away on the third of *Tevet* 5755/1994. R' Yaakob left behind a distinguished community, which was devoted to him throughout his sixty-two years in office. His influence on thousands is felt in the community to this very day. R' Yaakob molded and unified the New York Syrian community. He left behind nine children, and was succeeded by his son in-law Hacham Baruch Ben-Haim *zt"l*, and his son Hacham Shaul, who took over as rabbi of *Congregation Shaare Zion*. R' Yaakob was cherished by all who knew him. The fruits of his labor are apparent in the growing Torah community he created.



Left to Right: Hagaon R' Moshe Feinstein (1895–1986) conversing with R' Yaakob Kassin

## The Anonymous Author

In 1928, R' Rahamim Shrem (1859–1934) was preparing to publish his second volume of *sefer Shaare Rahamim*. This *sefer* was a responsa in two volumes, addressing issues related to the teachings of the Rashash (R' Shalom Sharaby, 1720–1777) on *tefillah* and other *mitzvot*. R' Rahamim wanted an experienced *talmid hacham* to review his work, and confirm the accuracy of the *sefer*.

R' Yaakob accepted the task, on condition that his part in the editing should remain unknown. He insisted on this condition since he was humbled to be chosen when there were numerous other *hachamim* in the city of Yerushalayim. When the *sefer* was published, the leading *hachamim* were astonished that he had chosen to hide his identity, when his outstanding entries could have made him famous! R' Yaakob fulfilled the saying of the Sages, that a *talmid hacham* should compose one anonymous *sefer* in his lifetime, to prove humility before Hashem.

## Miraculous Recovery from Illness

n R' Yaakob's diary, he describes a remarkable event that took place when his first *sefer*, *Ohr Halevanah*, was published.<sup>37</sup> During the year before the *sefer* was published, R' Yaakob suffered from excruciating pain. It occurred to R' Yaakob that the merit of publishing his book might help,

<sup>37</sup> In R' Yaakob's introduction to his sefer, he praises Hashem, who enabled him to prevail over his affliction. Sefer Ohr Halevanah (Introduction)

and perhaps Hashem would send him a complete recovery.

The following was recorded in R' Yaakob's diary:

"Hagaon R' Shelomo Sofioff, who is a great friend of mine, told me that he dreamed he was standing in the *bet hakneset* of his late father, R' David Sofioff. During *tefillah*, he noticed an old man standing in the northeastern corner, wrapped in his *tallit* and *tefillin* and chanting the prayers with great concentration. He was told that this was none other than the great *mekubal* the Rashash — R' Shalom Sharaby.

"My friend approached him, kissed his hand, and said, 'R' Yaakob Kassin, the son of R' Shaul is very ill. Please pray for him, that he should be healed; he is a diligent student in Kabbalah, and recites his *tefillot* with your *siddur*.'

"The Rashash replied, 'Yes, this is the reason I have come; do not fear, he will recover shortly and all will be well.'

"R' Sofioff gave me this good news, and indeed it was so. From the year in which I completed my *sefer* on the *kavanot* [meditations], I began to have relief from my suffering. By then my situation had improved, and *baruch* Hashem, now my illness has gone completely."

## Keeping Family Purity

Yaakob was approached by someone in his community who wanted to speak to him about a personal matter. R' Yaakob asked that he meet Mrs. Tawil<sup>38</sup> in his *bet hakneset*, *Shaare Zion*. R' Yaakob could tell just by looking at Mrs. Tawil's distressed face that something was wrong.

R' Yaakob humbly asked her, "Mrs. Tawil, how are you?" She responded sadly, "Each time I come to the *bet hakneset* I see children playing and walking home with their parents. I feel terrible pain when I see this, since I have no children of my own." R' Yaakob said, "The only thing that will bring such *kedushah* to your life is if you and your husband oblige by our sacred Torah and its precious *mitzvot*. Do the two of you observe a life of Torah and *mitzvot*?"

She replied enthusiastically, "Yes, Hacham Yaakob!" R' Yaakob mentioned relevant *mitzvot* in detail, and then asked, "Mrs. Tawil do you keep the sacred *mitzvah* of *taharat hamishpachah* [family purity]?"

She replied, "But of course!" However, after reviewing a few *halachot* it became apparent that she was not familiar with most of the laws. R' Yaakob met with the couple and taught them the *halachot* properly, reviewing them numerous times.

He told them if they apply the sacred *halachot* properly, they will merit having children. Nine months later, Mrs. Tawil bore a healthy son. The couple named the son after the special *saddik*, who taught them how to achieve their goal!<sup>39</sup>



R' Yaakob Kassin in his younger years

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<sup>38</sup> The name Mrs. Tawil is not the original name of the character in this story.

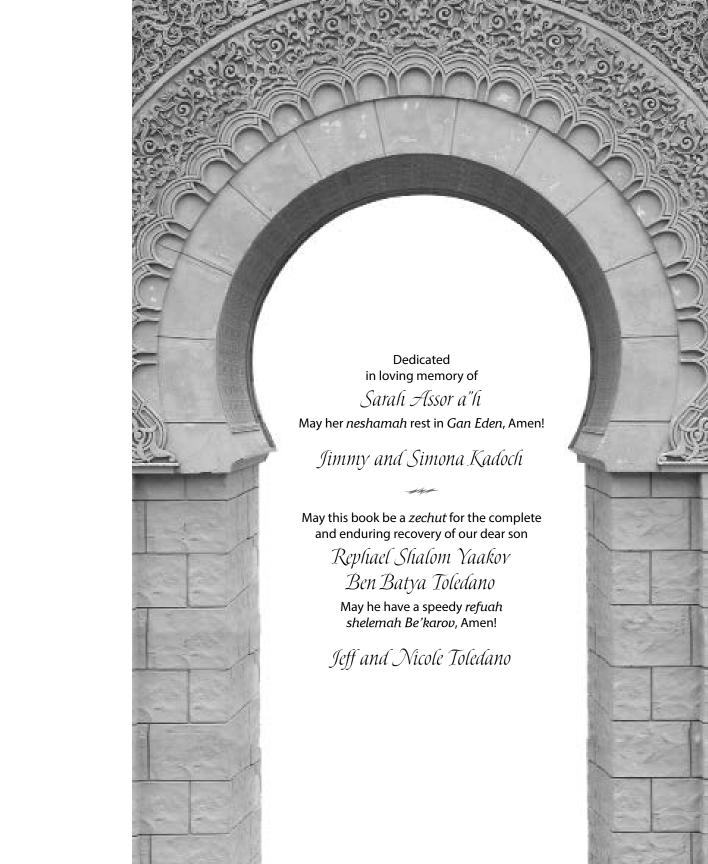
<sup>39</sup> The story was told to the author by R' Yaakob's son, Hacham Shaul Kassin.



## HACHAM RAHAMIM HAI HAVITA HAKOHEN

Djerba, Tunis

5661 - 5719 / 1901 - 1959



### HACHAM RAHAMIM HAI HAVITA HAKOHEN

acham Rahamim Hai Havita HaKohen *zt"l* was born in Djerba, Tunis, on the twenty-second of *Sivan* 5661/1901. He was born into a family of illustrious scholars. One of his ancestors was R' Mordechai HaKohen, who was known for performing miracles. His father was R' Hanina HaKohen, a scholar who made a living as a silversmith. R' Hanina would ask his son R' Rahamim to write down his thoughts on Torah for him, and on many occasions R' Rahamim quotes his father in his *sefer Minhat Kohen*.

The sefer Midot Harachamim, written by R' Bugid Saadon, tells the following about R' Rahamim: "As a child, he was called by his first name, Havita, since it was customary in our city to give children names of fish to protect them from the evil eye. Our Sages learn this from the verse in the blessing Yaakob gave Menashe and Ephraim: 'May you multiply like fish ...' At first he would sign his name just as Havita and later he signed with all three of his names. It seems the name 'Hai' was added at some point due to illness."

His contemporary, R' Eliyahu Hadad, recounts that even in his youth R' Rahamim liked to spend his time around the *talmidei hachamim* of the generation and learn from their great holy ways. At a young age he would write his original explanations in all fields of Torah study, including *Tanach* and *Shas*. When one reads the approbation that Hagaon R' Ovadia Yosef wrote for the second printing of R' Rahamim's *sefer*, responsa *Simhat Kohen*, it is clear that he holds the author in high esteem:

"My heart was gladdened ... when I heard that the sefer Simhat Kohen was being reprinted. The stature of the author is well known in scholarly circles. He was one of the leaders of his generation ... who toiled in Torah and accomplished in his short life what others cannot do in a hundred years."

One of his greatest and closest disciples, R' Matzliach Mazuz (1912–1972) described R' Rahamim with these words:

"He was knowledgeable in everything, a powerful and sharp fountain, esteemed halachic authority, excellent orator, and expert in Kabbalah. He knows Hebrew grammar, understands the cycle of the leap years, and has a clear grasp of Jewish history. He is a poet and songwriter. There is no sefer that he did not open and no topic that he did not explore."

R' Rahamim got married in 5680/1920. At that time he served as a *sofer* (scribe) in the *bet din*. His position enabled him to become an expert in all the matters brought before the *bet din*. At the age of twenty, in 5681/1921, he started teaching Torah, and his talents in learning and teaching quickly became apparent.

In addition to his writing skills, R' Rahamim was also an outstanding public speaker. In Djerba, the custom on the Shabbat before *Rosh Hodesh* was that one of the *hachamim* would deliver a sermon in the main *bet hakneset*. Many people came to his sermons to hear his holy words. When the benches would fill up they would spread mats on the floor until the *bet hakneset* was filled from wall to wall, and then R' Rahamim would begin to speak. The *hacham* would speak for many hours and the people did not tire of hearing him, since his words were sweet as honey and full of wisdom.

During the Second World War the Germans reached Tunis on Shabbat, the eighth of *Adar* 5703/1943. The Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Moshe Kalfon HaKohen, who was standing during *Kedushah of Mussaf*, was asked by the Germans to appear before them. They made many false accusations against the Jews and fined the community fifty kilograms of gold. If they

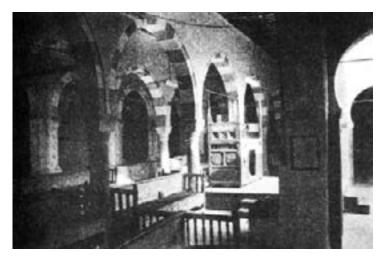
would not fulfill the order, the Germans would destroy the Jewish community of Djerba. The Chief Rabbi, along with R' Rahamim went around with a basket collecting the gold and managed to put together a total of forty-three kilograms. The next day, the Germans were defeated by the British. The stress of this ordeal caused R' Rahamim to become very sick. His illness lasted from Pesach of 5704/1944 until 5706/1946. When he recovered, he made a *seudah* to thank *Hashem* for healing him.

In 5710/1950, some people in the community wanted to build a sports arena in Djerba. R' Rahamim felt that it would cause boys and girls to mingle, along with other problems, and after he delivered a tear-filled sermon on Shabbat the idea was abandoned. That same year, the great leader of Djerba and *Av Bet Din*, R' Moshe Kalfon HaKohen, passed away. R' Rahamim was appointed in his stead and served in this position until he emigrated to Eretz Yisrael.

On the twenty-seventh of Av 5714/1954, R' Rahamim moved to Eretz Yisrael, settling in Moshav Berachyah near Ashkelon. When he arrived in Eretz Yisrael, he became rabbi not only of the *moshav* but of the Tunisian community in Eretz Yisrael. Ashkenazic and Sephardic scholars streamed to him from all corners of the land to hear his words of Torah and to consult with him in all matters. Several scholars called him "the admor of Djerba."

R' Rahamim Hai Havita HaKohen passed away in 5719/1959 on the tenth of *Shevat*. Every year there is a big gathering on the day of his passing in Moshav Berachyah. Hundreds of his students and their students stream to the *moshav* for the *hillula* (anniversary). His will was characteristic, requesting from anyone who had studied Torah from him to learn *Masechet Mikvaot* every *motza'ei* Shabbat during the year following his passing. He promised anyone who took the task upon themselves that he would intercede on their behalf in Heaven for their physical and spiritual success.

R' Rahamim authored many *sefarim*, some of which were published during his lifetime, but mostly after his death. His closest disciple, R' Raphael Kadir Saban, published many of his works. R' Matzliach Mazuz was one of his notable students. He merited raising the level of Torah learning in Tunis by establishing a yeshivah that he called *Yeshivat Kissei Rahamim*, named after his teacher. Additionally, his grandson R' Haim HaKohen established *Yeshivat Hochmat Rahamim* in Moshav Berachyah. The yeshivah serves as a spiritual center and includes a Talmud Torah, yeshivah, and *kollel*, which are active to this very day.



The Great Synagogue (El Ghriba) of Diebra

## Sacrificing for Torah

he following demonstrates the extent of R' Rahamim's thoughtfulness: He would learn until very late at night, and his father was so overwhelmed with pride that he wanted to wait up until he finished learning and then go to sleep at the same time as his son. R' Rahamim did not want his father to stay up so late so he would pretend to go to sleep at an early hour. Once R' Rahamim saw that his father was sleeping soundly, he would return to his studies until the early hours of the morning.

R' Rahamim's father was once dealing with a halachic issue that kept him up all night. R' Hanina had realized that his son only pretended to go to sleep before him every night, so he too pretended to sleep with one eye open. Later that night, R' Rahamim peeked into his father's bedroom and ran off to the *bet hamidrash*. R' Hanina would say from that day on that his son was always 'sacrificing for Torah.'

#### Without A Teacher

t the age of twenty-four, R' Rahamim was appointed Rosh Yeshivah in the *Bet Medrash Rabbi Eliezer*. The brilliant *saddik* R' Magoutz Sabag related that he once had to attend to some business at the yeshivah where R' Rahamim taught. On entering the *bet hamidrash*, he noticed the students sitting with perfect decorum. He was sure that their teacher was present, and they were well behaved and mannered due to their respect for him. To his surprise, their

teacher was not there, and he was amazed by the training they had internalized from their teacher

## A Guest of Honor

hen he was eighteen R' Rahamim traveled to a town in Tunis for medical treatment. While he was there, he learned how to perform *shehitah* and after six months he received his certificate testifying that he qualified as a *shohet* and *bodek* (kashrut checker). The certificate was signed by R' Abraham Belish, R' David Katorza, R' Yehoshua Elmaliah, R' Yisrael Zeitoun, and R' Moshe Shatruch. Additionally, he learned how to write in Arabic and French and had beautiful handwriting.

During his stay in Tunis he visited at *Yeshivat Limud Hatalmud*. The Rosh Yeshivah was the famed R' David Katorza. He told his students to keep their eyes on the guest and take notice of the *sefarim* he learned from. One day, the Rosh Yeshivah asked a difficult question and all the students were stumped. R' Rahamim whispered the answer to one of the students sitting near him who then repeated the answer out loud. The Rosh Yeshivah said to his student, "You did not think of that on your own." Afterwards it became known that the guest, R' Rahamim, had provided the astounding answer.

#### Oblivious to the World

Rahamim's diligence was so extreme that he never felt hunger, and his parents feared for his health. Many times they would call him to come and eat, and when he finally came he would eat in such a hurry that he did not even taste the food. His only concern was learning more Torah.

Once someone placed some grapes in front of R' Rahamim while he was learning Torah. His eyes were on the Gemara in front of him and he did not notice that the bowl contained grapes. He took one and dipped it in salt, thinking it was a black olive (a type that is eaten with salt). That was his degree of oblivion to the material world.



R' Yisrael Zeitoun

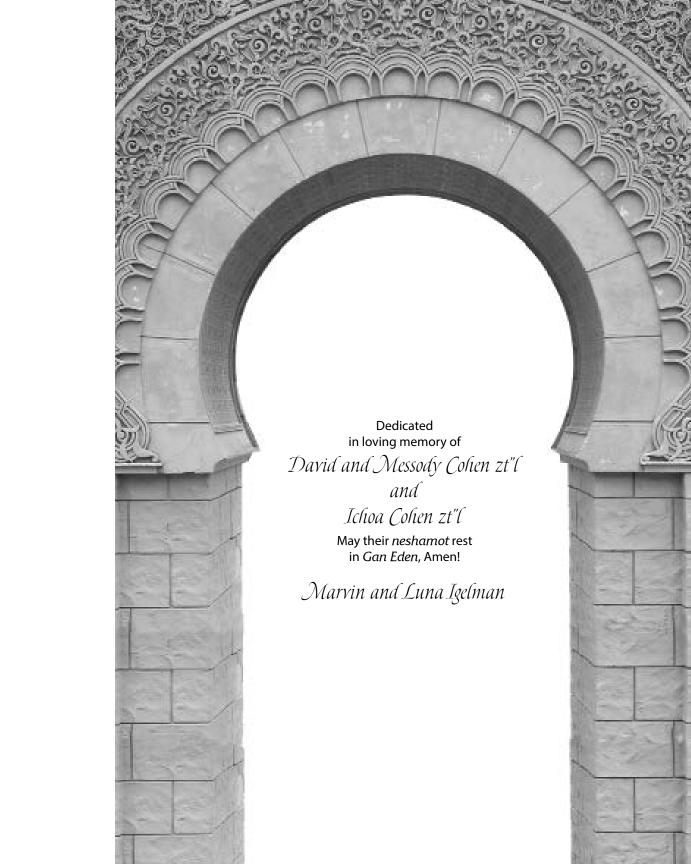


## HACHAM MATZLIACH MAZUZ

(ISH MATZLIACH)

DJERBA, TUNIS

5682 - 5732 / 1912 - 1972



## HACHAM MATZLIACH MAZUZ (ISH MATZLIACH)

acham Matzliach Mazuz zt"l was born on a Friday evening, on the twenty-sixth of Heshvan 5682/1912, in Djerba. His parents were R' Raphael and Rachel Matzliach. After his son's brit milah, R' Raphael went to visit Hacham Nissim Cohen, who did not attend the brit, in order to receive a berachah. When he heard the names the baby was given — Haim Kadir Matzliach — the hacham said, "He will surely be a big hacham in Klal Yisrael." He explained that his name is proof of this fact, since the acronym of his three names is hacham XYLCM rsK OYYX.

R' Matzliach spent his early years in Ariena, approximately 140 kilometers outside of Tunis. The city of his childhood was known for its clear, crisp air. In this beautiful, comfortable setting, R' Matzliach's father taught him Torah in his free time. R' Matzliach also studied with R' Yehuda Hagag zt"l. When he graduated from learning humash to the Gemara class, R' Matzliach couldn't find a havruta. There was no one on his level who could learn with him. Even the teacher had difficulty; R' Matzliach had outgrown the school in Ariena.

R' Raphael would return home from a long day at his store to find his wife weeping. She would plead with him to return to Djerba, a city full of *talmidei hachamim* who could teach R' Matzliach and help him reach his potential. Every day she would say to herself, "I would rather live in a small, dark house in poverty so my son could study Torah." R' Raphael could not resist her pleading. He sold his store and their house at a loss, and returned to Djerba at the end of 5682/1922.

At the age of twelve, R' Matzliach traveled with his father to Tunisia, where he underwent an operation to remove his tonsils. At the time, R' David Ketura zt"l, who later served as Tunisia's Chief Rabbi, lived in the city. Every Shabbat, scholars and elderly hachamim came to him to study Shulchan Aruch, Tur and Bet Yosef. R' Raphael and R' Matzliach were among the hacham's visitors on the Shabbat that they were in Tunisia.

When the family returned to Djerba, R' Raphael opened a grocery store, but it was not successful. Eventually he lost all the money he had made in Ariena. Hoping a change of location would help, R' Raphael moved his store to Medanin, a suburb of Djerba, but again he did not succeed. Eventually he was penniless, and his meals consisted of the raw seeds he sold in his store. Surprisingly, he did not despair. He was content that R' Matzliach was progressing in his studies. When his son's teacher, R' Rachamim Hai Havita, would tell him how well R' Matzliach was doing, R' Raphael felt like a king.

Still, his happiness over R' Matzliach's learning could not feed his family, and he was forced to return to Tunis to work. He left his son and wife alone in their home in Djerba and sent them money every month so R' Matzliach could continue studying. R' Raphael himself would make due with what was left. Within six months he returned to Djerba for the holidays.

R' Matzliach studied in Djerba for seven-and-a-half years. Night after night he sat, surrounded by *sefarim*, until dawn, when he went to pray in the *bet hakneset*. Then, until the time came for him to go to his teacher's class, R' Matzliach would sit at home and study quietly. As a child, he had always worn a watch so he could plan his time exactly — so much time for praying, so much for eating and sleeping, and the rest for learning Gemara and halachah.

Aside from their daily classes, the students in Djerba studied every morning and evening to gain a broader knowledge of the Gemara. The teacher also gave the students questions on *Shulchan Aruch*. Each student was required to bring the

answers to the teacher on Shabbat. The teacher would then review the answer and give the students his comments. At first, the teacher provided sources where the boys could find the answers. Later, when they became more proficient, he left out the sources, and they would have to figure out the answers on their own.

In 5686/1926, when R' Matzliach was fourteen years old, he was invited to the wedding of his cousin Ben-Sion. He was required to attend, though it would take time from his studies and he was in the middle of several difficult Talmudic topics. He sat among the guests and studied the Gemara by heart, with commentaries. From time to time he would leave the wedding and go into a side room, where he wrote down a note to himself to remember what he had studied. Then he returned to his place at the wedding.

His greatest pupil was R' Yitzhak Buchanick zt"l, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Hevrat HaTalmud in Tunisia. Eventually, R' Buchanick taught his rebbi's son — R' Meir Mazuz shlita (current Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Kissei Rahamim).

In 5706/1946, R' Matzliach was appointed as a judge in the local bet din. He would judge monetary matters — wills and gifts — and all matters relating to the household and marriage, divorce, etc. At first he judged alongside R' David Ben-Be'eron, who was a very good investigator, and he learned from his ways. Sometimes the defendant would shout to the Heavens and pretend he was the victim, but a few months later he would admit to R' Matzliach that he had judged fairly, and asked for forgiveness for his complaints at the time.

In 5713/1953, R' Matzliach told his children that he had written over 100,000 pages in his lifetime, and when his sons took his writings to Eretz Yisrael, the suitcase carrying the manuscripts weighed over thirty kilo. (This is not counting the doubles and mistakes that were buried in the *genizah* in the graves of his parents.)

In 5717/1957 the bet din of Tunisia was closed down, and R' Matzliach had to tend to some old cases that were not yet settled. He was a big expert on divorce and monetary law, and for many years he was the sole divorce judge in Tunisia. He corresponded with hachamim in Eretz Yisrael on this matter, including Hacham Ovadia Yosef, as well as hachamim from America and other countries.

On the twenty-first of *Tevet* 5732/1972, R' Mazuz had a horrific cold, but insisted on praying at sunrise. After prayers were over, as well as the *Hok L'Yisrael* session, R' Mazuz was walking (wearing his *tallit* and *tefillin*) at 8:45 with a seven-year-old student on Protistan Road — one of the largest roads in Tunisia — when a gunshot was fired. The English date was a national holiday — Jan. 18th, 1972, the day on which the Tunisian president, Haviv Borgiva, was released from prison. Due to the holiday there was no one on the streets. After the first shot was fired, the Arab who had shot it ran into an alley. R' Mazuz screamed, but no one came to his aid. The shooter noticed that R' Mazuz was still alive, and shot him twice more. He died soon after, just like R' Hananiya Ben-Tradion, who was burned with a Torah scroll.<sup>40</sup>

After his horrific murder, R' Matzliach's remains were brought to Eretz Yisrael, and he was buried on Har Hazetim on the third of *Adar* 5732/1972. An eyewitness to the burial said when they wanted to open the coffin, the *hebra kadisha* shouted at the crowd to stand back because it was dangerous, but the crowd would not disperse. When the coffin was opened, R' Matzliach looked like he was asleep, not deceased, and there was miraculously no odor.

Today R' Matzliach's legacy continues with his remarkable son Hagaon R' Meir Mazuz *shlita*, who is currently the Rosh Yeshivah of *Yeshivat Kissei Rachamim*, continuing where R' Matzliach left off.

## Aged in Wisdom, Young in Years

hen R' Matzliach was sixteen years old he had already written halachic responsa at great length. His answers were full of quotes from the Talmud, from books of *Rishonim* and *Achronim*, with grammatical notes and halachic conclusions.

One of these responsa dealt with the question of permissibility to study language, writing, and math in the synagogue. In his answer, he discusses at great length all of his knowledge on the matter, quoting the appropriate sources. He concludes that it is permissible to study languages and math in the *bet hakneset*.

This response was sent to Hagaon R' Ovadia Hedaya. The level of knowledge and writing was so high, that R' Ovadia thought it was written by a much older *talmid hacham*. It was clear to him that the answer was that of an important Rosh Yeshivah in Tunisia, so after he wrote his halachic opinion, he proceeded to ask whether he would tend to the collection of funds for the Bet El Yeshivah (a yeshivah for *mekubalim* in Yerushalayim where R' Ovadia taught).

The young student R' Matzliach answered to the author of  $Maskil\ L'David$ , "I am still studying in yeshivah and am not yet a man of the world." R' Ovadia Hedaya was amazed when this letter reached him - R' Matzliach was advanced in wisdom and young in years, clearly destined to become great.

<sup>40</sup> Masechet Avodah Zara (18:A)

## Every Minute Counts

hen R' Matzliach reached marriageable age, he married his cousin, the daughter of R' Menahem Mazuz. His father in-law told R' Raphael that at first he did not know the great worth of his son, who was great in Torah, until he saw that the rabbi of the community and the *Av Bet Din*, R' Halfom Moshe HaKohen *zt"l* wrote about him, "*Hacham HaShalem -* a complete *hacham*." It was well known that R' Hafom Moshe HaKohen did not easily distribute compliments, and did not write things that he did not mean. "Good for you, R' Raphael," said R' Menahem, "that such a groom would be your son."

On the day of his wedding, all of the guests arrived on time, and waited for the groom to show up. Relatives looked for the groom in his house, but he was nowhere to be found.

They asked his rabbi, R' Haim HaKohen, "Have you seen the groom? All of the guests have arrived, but he is nowhere to be found!" He answered, "I guess he must be in the yeshivah." And so he was. When they asked him why he hadn't come, he said, "I'm washed and dressed, and ready. When everything is ready I figured I would be called. I don't like the minutes to waste away, because every minute counts."

## Young and Sharp-Minded

teacher once asked R' Matzliach a question about the *mitzvah* of fulfilling the wishes of a deceased. Three weeks passed, and the young R' Matzliach had not presented an answer to his teacher. His teacher said to him,

"What is taking you so long? You can't have written more than a few pages on the subject." Matzliach showed his teacher the three hundred pages he had already written, and he was still not finished.

### In Zechut of Hacham Matzliach

nce, R' Matzliach was walking along near Yeshivat Kissei Rahamim (many years after the rabbinic court of Tunisia was closed), when a lew walked by with his wife and children. The man called to R' Matzliach, "These are your children, *Hacham*!" He told him that many years earlier, he and his wife came to R' Matzliach's court for a divorce, and R' Matzliach worked hard to make peace between them. Once, when he was investigating their names, he asked what name the man uses when he gets an aliyah. The man answered that he doesn't go to synagogue to pray. The hacham shouted at him, that he should at least be praying in the bet hakneset on Shabbat and holidays. When he met R' Matzliach on the street, he told him, "Ever since you screamed at me so sincerely, I've been praying three times a day, and it's all in your great zechut that I am religious today, and my children are shomer Torah and mitzvot."



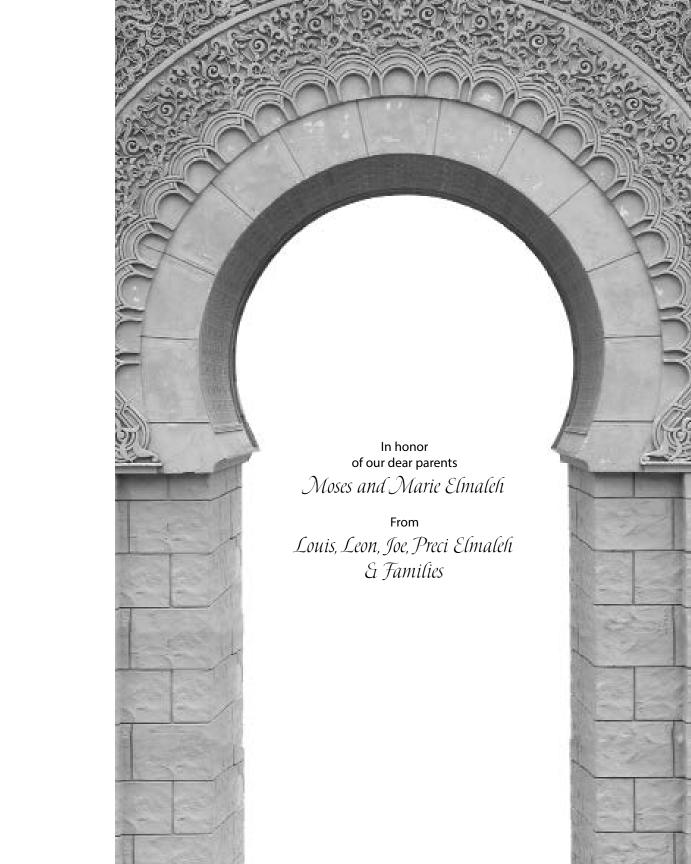
R' Matzliach Mazuz



## HACHAM MANSOUR BEN-SHIMON

SEFAT, ERETZ YISRAEL

5674 - 5758 / 1914 - 1998



# HACHAM MANSOUR BEN-SHIMON

acham Mansour Ben-Shimon *zt"l* was born in Sefat, Eretz Yisrael, in 5674/1914. His father R' Raphael Aharon Ben-Shimon had been born in Rabat, Morocco, and moved later with his family to Eretz Yisrael. A short while later he was asked to serve as the Chief Rabbi of Cairo. R' Raphael was the son of the famous R' David Ben-Shimon (known as *Tzuf Devash*), who served as *Av Bet Din* in Morocco and Yerushalayim.

At a very young age R' Mansour left his home to study Torah at the *Tiferet Yisrael Yeshivah* in Haifa. In 5694/1934 *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* was inaugurated in the Old City of Yerushalayim. R' Mansour arrived in the old city with his close friend R' Raphael Abbu, and the two were warmly received by one of the greatest *hachamim* of the generation, R' Ezra Attiah (1887–1970). The two friends shared a small room so they could study at *Porat Yosef*, but they were satisfied with their opportunity to study with the great rabbis of the time.

At twenty years old, R' Mansour was delivering *shiurim* as a substitute when other teachers were away. He was soon offered a full-time position. He taught *Gemara* in the mornings, and *Tanach*, *Aggadah*, *Mussar*, biographies of Sephardic Sages, and other topics in the afternoons. His students were only a few years younger than him, and today many of them are renowned *hachamim*. Some of his more well-known students were R' Ben-Sion Abba Shaul *zt"l*, R' Yosef Ades *zt"l*, R' Ovadia Yosef shlita, R' Ben-Sion Mutzafi shlita, and R' Shalom HaKohen shlita.

Above all other qualities, R' Mansour's affection for each and every one of his students stood out. He always took the

trouble to ensure they were not lacking in their spiritual or physical needs.

Aside from teaching in the yeshivah, R' Mansour would deliver local *shiurim* at night to working men. He was a member of the High Rabbinic Authority of Yerushalayim, and was appointed to test people applying for positions as rabbis.

R' Mansour was extremely diligent, learning late into the night and sleeping only a few hours. He was humble and patient and rarely got angry even when arguing a point in learning Torah. Respect for the bet hakneset was very important to him. He would pronounce the words of the tefillah and berachot as carefully as one who is counting pearls. There was an aura of holiness about him which one felt just by being in his presence. R' Shelomo Zalman Auerbach (1910–1995) said about him, "Merely looking at R' Mansour brings a person closer to having yirat Shamayim."

Many handwritten pages of his *hiddushei* Torah exist, but others were burned in a fire. His family is in the process of publishing his interpretation on the Torah, called *Shemen Hamor*. R' Mansour Ben-Shimon was one of the greatest Sages of Yerushalayim in our generation.

R' Mansour had four sons, all *talmidei hachamim* in their own right. His son R' Mordechai Hizkiah passed away during his father's lifetime. His other sons are R' Shelomo, R' Nissim, and R' Masoud. His only daughter married R' Shalom HaKohen, the Rosh Yeshivah of *Porat Yosef*, who is the son of the *mekubal* R' Ephraim Menashe HaKohen (1886–1957). R' Mansour Ben-Shimon passed away on the second of *Shevat* 5758/1998, and was laid to rest on *Har Hamenuchot*.

## Angel from Above

Mansour used to lecture at a *bet hakneset* named after the Hida (R' Yosef Haim Yosef David Azoulay, 1724–1806) in Bayit Vegan. His conduct in the *bet hakneset* was certainly one which should be imitated. As soon as he entered the *bet hakneset*, he would not move his hands or feet as he would sit with fear and awe as a servant before his master.

One Shabbat, there was a terrible infestation of mosquitoes in Yerushalayim, when R' Mansour was scheduled to give his weekly Shabbat *derashah*. A certain individual from the *bet hakneset* told R' Mansour's son, R' Shelomo, "I mention my sins before you today, since you are the son of R' Mansour. Instead of paying attention to the *shiur*, I was looking to see how the mosquitoes would attack R' Mansour, since the *hacham* doesn't move any limb of his body when he speaks. I paid attention and I witnessed something truly amazing. Many mosquitoes approached R' Mansour, but when they reached him they stopped and flew around him; not one touched the *saddik* throughout his lecture. When I saw this I thought: this is an angel from Above."

## Setting Time for Torah

r. Mizrahi,<sup>41</sup> a wealthy American man, came to Yerushalayim to receive a *berachah* from R' Mansour Ben-Shimon. When it was Mr. Mizrahi's turn to approach the *hacham*, the man nervously kissed R' Mansour's

<sup>41</sup> The name Mr. Mizrahi is not the original name of the character in this story.

hands. He told R' Mansour, "I am content with my life, with one exception — my wife and I have been married for eleven years now, and we have not yet been blessed with a child. I approached many *hachamim*, *mekubalim*, and all sorts of great scholars to receive *berachot* and I felt that I got nowhere with it."

R' Mansour felt the man's intense pain, and said, "Firstly, the blessing of all *hachamim* will eventually come to be. Secondly, are you religious?"

"Of course," answered Mr. Mizrahi.

R' Mansour asked, "Do you put on *tefillin* each morning with a *minyan*?"

"Of course!" the man answered again.

R' Mansour then asked, "Do you set time for learning Torah daily?"

Mr. Mizrahi sadly said, "No, I'm sorry, *Hacham Mansour*, I know it's important, but I do not set aside time to learn Torah."

R' Mansour responded, "In that case, you are not religious. A person who does not set aside time for learning Torah cannot possibly keep the Torah and *mitzvot* properly."

The man was stunned, but felt the *hacham*'s words were true. He responded, "*Hacham Mansour*, you are right. I have been feeling my *yirat Shamayim* fade away as I get older. The Torah will surely strengthen me."

R' Mansour said, "Set aside one hour each day, go to a *shiur*, or learn with a *havruta*. Then if you accomplish this with your full heart, *be'ezrat* Hashem, with the *zechut* of you learning Torah, I assure you that next year you will have a baby."

Mr. Mizrahi went back to America to share the great news with his wife. Mr. Mizrahi kept to his word and learned Torah in his community. Later that year, he and his wife were indeed blessed with a baby boy. Since the baby's arrival had happened

through the *zechut* of R' Mansour's *berachah*, the baby was given the name "Mansour."

## Trusting One's Rabbi

In the city of Bnei Brak lived an elderly couple who were close relatives to R' Mansour. The wife became severely ill with a liver infection. The doctors suggested immediate surgery, but there was a slim chance that the surgery would help. On Thursday, the couple came to R' Mansour filled with tears and told him what the doctors had said. The surgery was scheduled for Sunday.

R' Mansour told the couple, "There is no liver infection. You have nothing to worry about. I see that you are filled with *yirat Shamayim*, so trust that in the scan preceding the operation, the doctors will find nothing." The man left R' Mansour's home full of faith in Hashem, and he requested on Sunday that the doctor take another scan before the surgery. The doctor performed the X-ray and indeed found nothing. The doctor said to the man, "I see that you are a religious Jew. You should make a special *kiddush* on Shabbat for the miracle that just took place!" The husband told the doctor: "We already made a *kiddush* yesterday!" When the doctor asked why, the man explained that they knew what the outcome would be by trusting in their rabbi — R' Mansour Ben-Shimon!



Hagaon R' Rephael Aharon Ben-Shimon, father of R' Mansour Ben-Shimon (Chief Rabbi of Cairo, Egypt from 1891-1921)

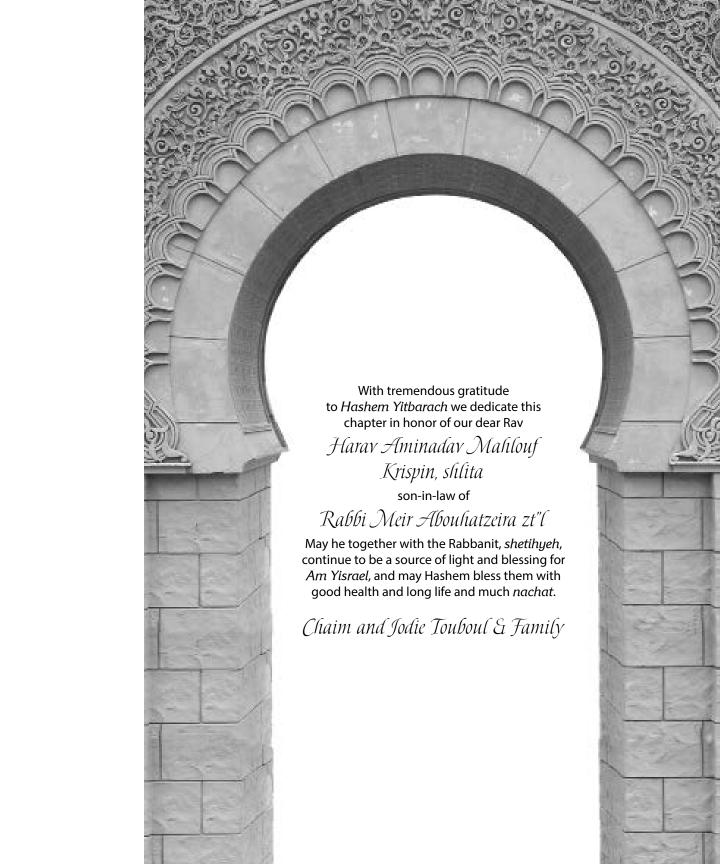


## HACHAM MEIR ABUCHATZERA

(BABA MEIR)

Sale, Morocco

5677 - 5743 / 1917 - 1983



## HACHAM MEIR ABUCHATZERA (BABA MEIR)

acham Meir Shalom Abuchatzera *zt"l* was born in Sale, Morocco, on the tenth of *Tevet* 5677/1917. His father was the great *mekubal* R' Yisrael Abuchatzera (Baba Sali) and his mother was Pricha. For his parents, many years were filled with heartache and anguish, for fourteen years passed before they had a surviving child. During these years, to their great anguish, they had more than one child who did not survive. Eventually, the Baba Sali had his first son, who he named "Meir."

Shortly before the birth of R' Meir, the Baba Sali had a dream in which he saw the vision of a man whose face shone. When he asked the man who he was, he answered, "I am a tanna," and then disappeared from before his eyes. The next day, the Baba Sali told his dream to his teacher, R' Moshe Turgeman. R' Moshe's interpretation of the dream was that the Baba Sali was about to have a great son who would have the stature of a tanna. He explained that the man in the dream did not need to reveal his name because "a nameless tanna is R' Meir Bal Haness — when a mishnah quotes a tanna without mentioning his name, it always refers to R' Meir." The Baba Sali listened to the words of his teacher and when his son was born, he named him Meir. 43

When the Baba Sali decided to move to Eretz Yisrael in 5693/1933, he suggested that R' Meir, at the age of sixteen,

<sup>42</sup> Masehet Sanhedrin (27:A)

<sup>43</sup> R' Massud Malul shlita has another version of this story. R' Massud said R' Meir was given the name "Meir Shalom" at his brit milah. This was because the night before the brit milah, R' Shalom Sharaby (Rashash) appeared in the Baba Sali's dream and asked him to name the child after him.

take over the reins of the yeshivah. The Baba Sali had led the community during its most difficult times, rehabilitating the community of survivors who had escaped the sword of Moulay Mohammad (Sultan of Morocco, 1927–1953). He knew very well that placing the yeshivah in the reliable hands of his son did not mean a lowering of the yeshivah's standards. Being acutely aware of the depth and clarity of his son's learning, the Baba Sali determined that R' Meir was most worthy of taking over leadership of the yeshivah, even though he was not yet married.

In 5705/1945, R' Meir was appointed *hacham* of Midelt<sup>44</sup> on the recommendation of the rabbinic leadership of Morocco. He fulfilled this task in a remarkable manner. A local resident, his trusty assistant R' Yehudah Turgeman, testified that not only was he held in high esteem by the Jewish community, but by non-Jewish residents as well. Everyone recognized that he was a very special individual, going so far as to kiss his robe as he passed through the streets of the city. Baba Meir was known to be exquisitely sweet — and it was this sweetness that drew unlearned people to him and made them want to do *teshuvah* happily, truly, and with all their hearts.

R' Meir Abuchatzera zt"l left this world at the age of sixty-six on the seventeenth of Nissan 5743/1983. He left behind a beautiful legacy, in which he honored the sacred Abuchatzera dynasty family name. His children today are admired by many, and thousands flock to them for berachot: R' David Hai Abuchatzera, R' Rephael Abuchatzera, R' Eliezer Abuchatzera, R' Yakutiel Abuchatzera, and R' Yehoshua Ve'Rahamim. They all follow in the path of their great Abuchatzera lineage.

hen the Baba Sali returned to Tafillalt and saw that his son R' Meir was full with Torah and *yirat Shamayim*, he decided that it was time to ordain him for the Rabbinate. R' Meir had no desire to be ordained and he consistently refused any tasks even remotely involved with the Rabbinate. His father, however, persevered until he could no longer decline, at which point he agreed to be tested by the *hachamim* of Morocco. He went to Rabat, the capital of Morocco, against his will, and sat in front of the Chief Rabbis, to be tested.

In truth, as the *hachamim* themselves admitted, had it not been for their great respect for the Baba Sali, they would not have been willing to administer such a broad test to someone so young. However, from the moment the test began and the answers began flowing with such clarity and authority, the *hachamim* realized that the Baba Sali had sent them a truly precious vessel. After the test, they expressed their amazement at all his vast knowledge and mastery of all the areas of halachah. One of the elderly judges even suggested that R' Meir remain in Rabat and replace him. The chief examiner, the *Av Bet Din*, R' Yehoshua Berdugo *zt"l*, went further, saying, "He came to be tested and he ended up being the tester."

A Precious Vessel

<sup>44</sup> A market town and former French administrative post in central Morocco.

## The Importance of Selichot

ne day during the month of *Elul*, R' Meir arrived in one of the major cities of Morocco. The community had invited him to strengthen its spiritual status. The first night of his stay, R' Meir asked his host what time the people gathered in the *bet hakneset*, since he wanted to recite the *selichot*. The host responded that the mayor forbade them to recite *selichot* because, he claimed, it disturbed the sleep of the neighbors.

It was clear that R' Meir was not happy with the situation, yet the people could not challenge a decision signed by the mayor himself. R' Meir asked his assistant to summon all the communal leaders immediately. He asked them if it was true that their fear of the mayor was preventing them from reciting *selichot*. They admitted that it was, to their disappointment. R' Meir instructed them to assemble all the Jews of the city that night in the local *bet hakneset* for the recitation of *selichot*. The midnight hour was fast approaching.

After two o'clock in the morning hundreds of Jews gathered in the *bet hakneset* with their *siddurim* in hand, in a mood of anticipation. R' Meir himself was to serve as *shaliach sibbur*. Before *selichot* he spoke, asking the congregants to pour their hearts out to *Hashem* and urging them to make up for all they had missed until that day. He then began to pray out loud, with the *kehillah* following. The sounds of *tefillah* radiated from the *bet hakneset*, to the shock of the non-Jewish neighbors, who immediately summoned the police.

The police officers, hearing about the Jewish prayer service led by R' Meir, made haste to the mayor's house for orders. The mayor listened intently to the police commissioner's report. Fuming, he ordered the police to halt recitation of the *selichot* immediately. One of the officers reported to him that Baba Meir was leading the group and was even serving as

their *shaliach sibbur*. The mayor, now furious, sneered: "Who is this Baba Meir and who appointed him to disobey the law?"

As soon as the words were spoken, the mayor suddenly found he was unable to continue. His body became paralyzed and his face became distorted. He sank helpless into his armchair while his racing eyes shouted that which he was unable to speak.

His trouble was caused by his disregard for the honor of the *saddik*. A messenger was dispatched to the *bet hakneset* to appeal to R' Meir. As the messenger entered the *bet hakneset*, the worshippers held their breath. There was utter silence as he quickly made his way to R' Meir. R' Meir, however, motioned that he was unable to interrupt even for the emissary of the mayor. To the *kehillah* he signaled that they should continue praying with still more enthusiasm.

At the end of *selichot*, R' Meir turned to the messenger to hear what he had to say. With some fear the man unfolded before him the story of the mayor in his mansion, lying like a stone. R' Meir said to him: "Go and tell him that he will return to full strength only if he promises not to persecute the Jewish people and permits them to practice according to their religious beliefs."

Later, when the messenger told this to the mayor, he agreed by blinking his eyes to accept these conditions. In a matter of minutes his strength returned as if nothing had happened.

The mayor trembled as he waited for R' Meir at his host's house. The door opened and he fell at R' Meir's feet, begging his forgiveness. Taking advantage of the moment, R' Meir demanded that the mayor sign an explicit commitment not to obstruct the Jewish community in observing any traditions down to its finest detail. From that day on, the Jewish

residents of the city encountered no more troubles in leading a Jewish life.

#### Baba Meir the Sandak

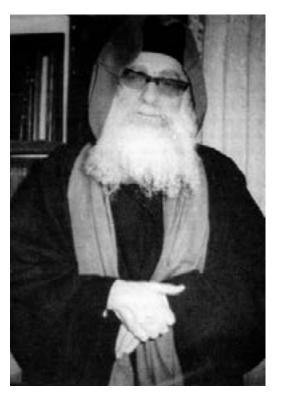
local resident entered the rabbinic court wishing to divorce his wife, for they had been married for several years and were not blessed with children. When R' Meir heard the despondent man, he interrupted him saying, "Listen! Until today you had not come to me for any *berachot*. Why not try seeking my help as well? Wait precisely one year to the day before invoking this drastic measure." One year later to the day, the man invited Baba Meir to officiate as *sandak* at his son's *brit milah*. In the *zechut* of Baba Meir the man named his son after the *saddik*.

## Respecting One's Teacher

R'indir's esteemed father, the Baba Sali, oversaw his Torah learning, his character, and his good deeds. A fierce debate broke out among the students of the yeshivah regarding how to explain an opinion in *Tosafot*. The students and their teachers strove to find the correct interpretation. One of the teachers in the yeshivah, R' Yaakob ben Hamu zt"l, a leading halachic authority as well as an expert in matters of marriage and divorce, disagreed with R' Meir regarding this *Tosafot*.

The disagreement continued for three days, neither budging from his interpretation. When he heard of this, the Baba Sali came to the *bet hamidrash* and rebuked his son for having the audacity to argue with his *hacham*.

R' Meir was so taken aback by his father's reprimand that he stepped back in fright and hit a pillar, making his head bleed. A few days later the Baba Sali summoned R' Meir and R' Yaakob ben Hamu to his private room and asked each of them to present the way he understood the *Tosafot*. Then the Baba Sali dismissed R' Yaakob ben Hamu and asked R' Meir to remain behind. Only then, not in the presence of his teacher, did he say to R' Meir, "Although your interpretation of the *Tosafot* is the



R' Meir Abuchatzera (Baba Meir)

correct one, as I saw at once, nonetheless you should not have argued with your teacher in front of the students, lest this diminish his value in their eyes." So R' Meir went back to the yeshivah and no longer got involved with the dispute. He felt that *kavod* to his teacher is greater than knowing that he was correct.

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## Shmirat Ayin

of his son-in-law in Paris. His return flight to Eretz Yisrael was scheduled through Zurich, arriving in Israel at four-thirty in the afternoon. Due to various delays, the Baba Sali left his son-in-law's home very late, leaving his passport and other important papers behind. The staff at Orly Airport in Paris permitted the entire group to board the plane even without all the necessary papers, but in Switzerland, he was not permitted to board the plane to Eretz Yisrael. His assistants made frantic telephone calls in an attempt to resolve the issue. A non-Jewish clerk who passed by and saw the commotion asked what the rabbi was doing in the airport offices.

When he was informed of what was happening he began to shout: "You fools! You are preventing the great rabbi from continuing his journey because of some piece of paper?" After he spoke, things began to move quickly and the Baba Sali was put on the next flight, with the papers to be settled in the Swiss Consulate in Eretz Yisrael. When they came to thank the clerk, he had disappeared before their eyes with no one having any idea who he was.

At four-thirty in the afternoon, members of the family and close followers arrived at the airport in Lod to greet the Baba Sali as he descended from the plane. Among those waiting was Baba Meir, who had left his home in order to honor his saintly father. When the plane landed exactly on time, the family members were informed that their leader had remained behind, and the next flight was scheduled to arrive only a few hours later. They would need to spend the next few hours waiting at the airport terminal.

Baba Meir spent the entire time greatly distressed by the improper dress and behavior at the airport. Closing his eyes

was not enough, so he asked those in his company to surround him and thereby to guard his eyes from any sight while he sat on a bench in a corner. Although his eyes did not see anything, it was painful for him to remain in a place with no standards of modesty. His righteous brother-in-law R' David Yehudayoff *zt"l*, who was with him at the time, heard him saying to himself, "Had it not been for the *mitzvah* of honoring my father, I would never have left my house. What am I doing here? Only in honor of my father am I willing to accept such suffering with love."

A number of years later Baba Meir asked his brother-in-law, "Do you remember the time we traveled to Lod to greet my father? I have not yet completed all the necessary *tikkunim* [repentance] to repent for that incident."

#### Kavod Bet Hakneset

Ben-Sion Mutzafi was once visiting Baba Meir. R' Ben-Sion was discussing *divrei* Torah with him, and it was soon time for *Minchah*.<sup>45</sup> R' Meir told him they were going to walk to the *bet hakneset*. They walked and continued their discussion of *divrei* Torah the entire way. When they got close to the *bet hakneset*, R' Meir started to shake and sweat, and fear was visible on his face. All of a sudden he stopped talking, so R' Ben-Sion assumed something had happened. R' Meir entered the *bet hakneset* and his hands were shaking as he touched the *mezuzah* and kissed his fingertips.

As he entered with great fear he bowed down and his head

<sup>45</sup> R' Ben-Sion Mutzafi shlita (son of R' Salman Mutzafi zt"l) said that "the fear and respect Baba Meir had for the bet hakneset was something to see."

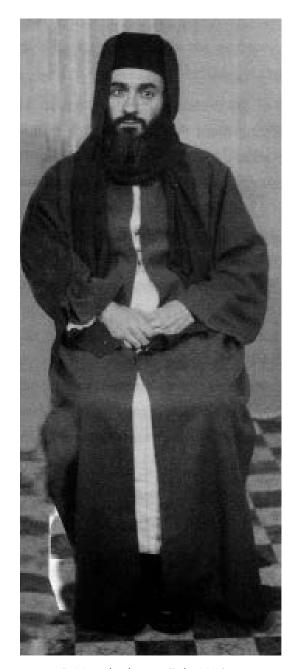
almost touched the ground. As he got close to the *Aron Kodesh* he kissed the *parochet* (curtain) three times. He then walked backwards out of the *bet hakneset*, and signaled R' Ben-Sion to come outside, where they continued speaking *divrei* Torah.

## Zechut of Baba Meir

hen R' Meir came to bless a city, the whole community gathered to welcome him. The large assembly displeased a non-Jewish neighbor, one of the wealthiest people in the city. He sent a servant to disperse the crowd. This caused a great commotion, which did not subside until R' Meir's entourage arrived. When the heads of the community reported to R' Meir how the non-Jew tried to get the Jewish community in trouble, R' Meir waved his hand dismissively as if to say there was no need for them to get involved in this nonsense.

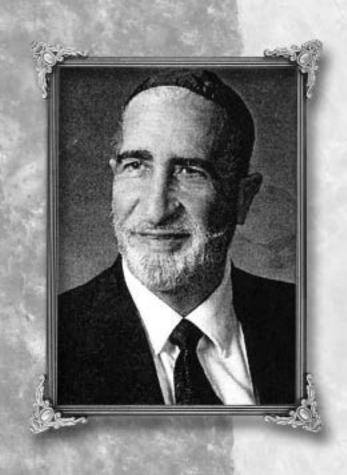
Later that evening, R' Meir entered his host's home accompanied by the singing and dancing of the entire community, when the gentile neighbor fell to the ground, writhing with pain. His family realized that this was the result of the degrading manner in which he had treated the Jewish community.

They immediately rushed to where R' Meir was staying to ask his forgiveness. Here as well, R' Meir extracted a promise from the wicked man not to intimidate another Jew. Only when the man agreed to mend his ways and improve his relations with the Jewish residents, did R' Meir bless him with an end to all his suffering. The Jewish community praised the greatness of Baba Meir and recognized the *zechut* of such a *saddik*.



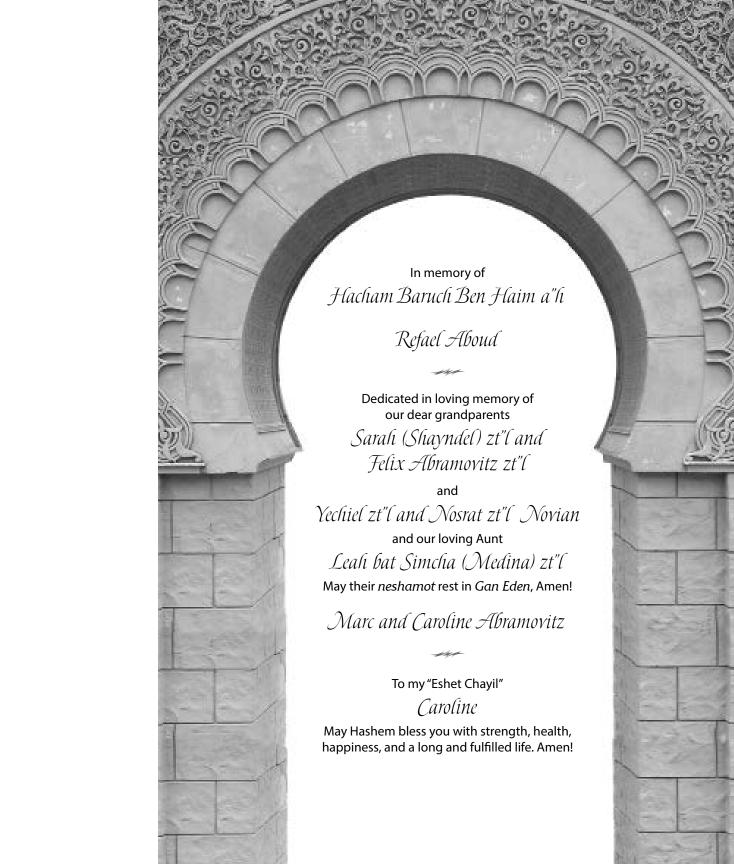
R' Meir Abuchatzera (Baba Meir)

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# HACHAM BARUCH BEN-HAIM

YERUSHALAYIM, ERETZ YISRAEL 5681 - 5775 / 1921 - 2005



# HACHAM BARUCH BEN-HAIM

acham Baruch Raphael Ben-Haim zt"l was born in Yerushalayim in 5681/1921. His parents, Haim and Miriam Mizrachi, were originally from Baghdad, Iraq. In 1951, R' Baruch's father passed away, and the family decided to change their name from Mizrahi to Ben-Haim in his honor.

R' Baruch grew up in Yerushalayim. Since his family was poverty-stricken, the nine children and two parents shared three small rooms and one bathroom. R' Baruch was enrolled in school and at the age of three learned *alef-bet*; at four, *Chumash*; at five, *Mishnah*; and at six, began studying *Gemara*.

When R' Baruch and R' Ovadia Yosef were very young they lived far away from *Yeshivat Porat Yosef*. There was no transportation to the Old City, so they had to walk back and forth every day. The walk was approximately forty-five minutes long, and they would walk together. On their walks they would review one *daf* of *Gemara* on the way to school, and another *daf* coming back. This went on for many years. They reviewed approximately six hundred *dapim* of *Gemara* over the year just walking to and from yeshivah.

When R' Baruch was eleven years old, he studied with R' Yehudah Sadkah in *Yeshivat Porat Yosef*. R' Sadkah had an immense influence on R' Baruch, who often mentioned how indebted he was to his *rebbi*.

R' Baruch was ordained by the great *hacham* Ezra Attiah, the Rosh Yeshivah of *Yeshivat Porat Yosef*, and by the Chief Rabbi of Israel, R' Ben-Sion Meir Hai Uziel (1880–1953). He served as a member of the Sephardic *bet din* in Yerushalayim with R' Yehudah Shako and R' Ezra Attiah. He was also the

librarian of Yeshivat Porat Yosef, and this intense training was to serve him well in the future.

R' Ezra Attiah used to send R' Baruch to lecture in different places throughout Yerushalayim as a means of training him for future roles. In 1947, R' Baruch left Eretz Yisrael to become the rabbi of an Ashkenazic community in South Africa. He remained there for two years, and after learning of the death of his brother in an unfortunate accident, he returned to Eretz Yisrael, despite the pleas of his community, who begged him to stay.

In 1949, after spending a few months in Yerushalayim, R' Baruch decided once again to leave and become a community rabbi. He was offered positions in Holland, Iran, and in the Syrian community in New York. In 5709/1949, Mr. Isaac Shalom, president of the *Magen David* congregation, sent a letter to R' Ezra Attiah asking him to send another rabbi to the Syrian community in Brooklyn, New York, to serve as an assistant to Chief Rabbi Yaakob Kassin.

Before leaving Eretz Yisrael, R' Baruch went to visit the two Chief Rabbis of Israel, R' Ben-Sion Meir Hai Uziel and R' Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog (1889–1959), to receive a *berachah*. R' Ben-Sion felt bad that R' Baruch was leaving Eretz Yisrael, and told him the position of Chief Rabbi would soon be filled either by R' Baruch or by his worthy friend R' Ovadia Yosef. R' Herzog walked him down the block as one walks a *talmid hacham*.

On his teacher's command, R' Baruch left for America. He left in December of 1949 by boat, a journey that lasted nearly three weeks. He finally arrived in early January 1950, and went straight to the home of Chief Rabbi Yaakob Kassin. Within two months he was engaged to the Chief Rabbi's daughter. In May of 1950, R' Baruch married his wife, Charlotte. R' Baruch served as rabbi of the New York Syrian community for fifty-six years.

R' Baruch established the *Shaare Sion Torah Center*, where many of the community members study on a daily basis. He spent much of his time bringing people closer to Torah.

R' Baruch's knowledge and ability to quote pages from *Gemara, humash*, and *Tehillim* with ease was incredible to witness. He was a pillar of the Sephardic community for many years, and left an unforgettable mark on the future generations. His legacy lives on through the many lives he touched with his loving *hessed*, wisdom, and compassion.

R' David Yosef (son of R' Ovadia Yosef) says in the name of his father, "On many occasions my father told me that the best friend he ever had in his entire life was *Hacham* Baruch. If R' Baruch had remained in Eretz Yisrael, he would have undoubtedly been among the greatest of the *hachamim* in Eretz Yisrael."

Hagaon R' Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), met R' Baruch

numerous times and dealt with him on many occasions. R' Moshe told one of R' Baruch's children: "His teshuvot are pleasurable to read, he writes like a Rishon: Gemara, Rishonim, sevara, and pesak halachah."

When R' Baruch was very sick, a young man in his community fasted so that he should get better. His fast lasted for forty days, until the great leader



Hacham Haim Mizrahi, father of Hacham Baruch

R' Baruch regained consciousness. R' Baruch lived a selfless life of never-ending dedication, always looking out for his community members. Upon his passing, thousands of people paid their respects, acknowledging his decades of sacrifice and commitment to his beloved community.

R' Baruch was modest about being a *talmid hacham*. He hid his greatness behind a simple and humble lifestyle. Eulogies were carried out for R' Baruch in Brooklyn, New York; Deal, New Jersey; and *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* in Yerushalayim.

R' Baruch Raphael Ben-Haim *zt"l* died on *Rosh Hodesh lyar* 5765/2005. R' Baruch's legacy continues today with his four sons: R' Eliyahu Ben-Haim, R' Yaakob Ben-Haim, Dr. Yehuda Ben-Haim, and R' David Ben-Haim, all of whom follow in their father's footsteps.



Hacham Ovadia Yosef conversing with Hacham Baruch Ben-Haim and R' Halfon Savdie. (Ahava ve Ahba 1974)

# Money for the Maid

ach Purim, R' Baruch would distribute envelopes with money to all his grandchildren. One year R' David Ben-Haim's wife brought a maid to wash the dishes in his house. The maid was new to the family, so prior to leaving the house his wife discreetly checked the maid's purse, to find there was nothing inside. Upon returning home, R' David's wife rechecked the maid's bag and found a twenty dollar bill. She asked the maid where the money came from, but the maid did not know. The wife confiscated the twenty dollars, and told the maid to leave the house immediately.

A few days later, while at R' Baruch's house, his son asked him if he had given the maid anything. R' Baruch was surprised by the question, when his son explained that twenty dollars had been found in the maid's purse, and that they had fired her. R' Baruch put his hand on his head in grief. He explained that he gave the maid the money, but made her promise never to tell anyone. His son asked why he had given her the money. R' Baruch explained that the maid had seen the kids getting their envelopes, and he did not want her to be jealous. Amazingly, even the maid recognized R' Baruch's greatness, and preferred to lose her job rather than break her promise to him.

# Caring for Everyone

Baruch always arrived early for funerals. He once took a long time writing a poem for a funeral. His son R' David then drove him to the funeral, and he arrived just barely

on time. His son asked why he had insisted on writing the poem. R' Baruch said that one week earlier, he had written a poem for a wealthy person who had passed away. He told his son that the grandson of the man who was being buried that day had driven him home, and on the way commented on the beauty of the poem. R' Baruch felt that if he did not honor this poorer person with a poem, the eighteen-year-old grandson would think he wrote the poem the previous week because of the man's wealth. Therefore R' Baruch made sure to write a special poem for that day's funeral as well.

# Hand of the Almighty

young couple, who had no children, were advised by a doctor to do things that were halachically questionable in order to have a child. The couple approached R' Baruch and sought his advice. R' Baruch advised them to ignore the doctor's orders and follow halachah, and promised that Hashem would help them. R' Baruch also told them they were certain to see *yad Hashem*. That same month the wife became pregnant. Nine months later, just hours after R' Baruch passed away, they had a baby boy. The couple named their son Haim, life, in honor of R' Baruch's death.

# Shabbat - the Essence of Blessing

man from the Syrian community sat *shivah* for his father. Toward the end of *shivah*, R' Baruch sat on a chair next to him and said, "You are a disappointment to your father, rest his soul." The man asked why, and R' Baruch answered, "Because you work on Shabbat." The man answered, "But I have to support my family." R' Baruch asked him, as a personal favor, not to work on the *Shabbatot* of the thirty days from his father's passing. The man agreed. Ever since, the man has not worked on Shabbat; he and his family became *shomer* Torah and *mitzvot*.

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### World Trade Center

In Spring 2001, Jerry Natkin of William Barthman Jewelers wanted to take a retail jewelry store in the World Trade Center. He went to R' Baruch to arrange a Shabbat contract with a non-Jew, as was required by the landlord that the store remain open on Shabbat. R' Baruch asked him, "Can you put food on the table without the store in the World Trade Center?" Jerry answered, "Yes."

"Then I advise you not to take the store." The *hacham*'s advice may have saved his life, since he was nowhere near the building for the 9/11 attack. Jerry still keeps a copy of the lease for the ground floor space — which was completely wiped out — as a reminder of the great miracle.

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### Listening to a Hacham

man from R' Baruch's community came to one of his children after his death and told the following story: "When my wife was pregnant, the doctors found that there were many complications with the baby due to my preexisting medical condition and my wife's age, and that an abortion would be necessary. We already had children *bli ayin hara*, but wanted another child. I didn't know what to do. We went to see *Hacham* Baruch. He sat down and listened to all we had to say, and replied: 'Don't abort the baby, do not abort! There is no need to worry. I take full responsibility, and your daughter will be fine *b'ezrat* Hashem." The couple listened to their hacham, and in the merit of R' Baruch the couple had a healthy daughter.



Left to right: R' Ovadia Yosef, R' Baruch Ben-Haim, R' Yaakob Kassin

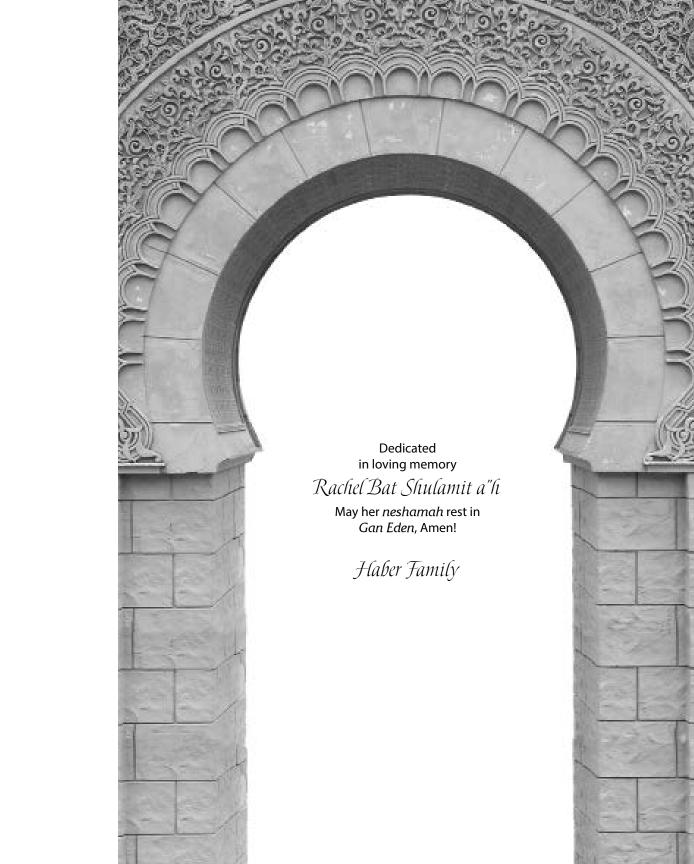
# The Pleasure of a Mitzvah

Rishouse, and he asked his son to take the bag upstairs. His son asked what was in the bag. He replied, "Nothing important, it belongs to someone else." When his son persisted the *hacham* replied, "There is a hundred thousand dollars in cash in the bag." The son asked in amazement why his father was keeping that much money in a bag in the house. His father replied that there was a transaction between two people, a buyer and seller, and the buyer gave R' Baruch the money for safekeeping until the merchandise arrived. The son asked his father what he was getting out of this transaction. The *hacham* replied, "I am getting a *mitzvah* for helping people."



# HACHAM YOSEF MOSHE ADES

Yerushalayım, Eretz Yisrael 5684 - 5753 / 1924 - 1992



# HACHAM YOSEF MOSHE ADES

acham Yosef Moshe Ades zt"l was born on the twentieth of Tishrei 5684/1924 in Yerushalayim. His father, R' Yaakob Ades, was Rosh Yeshivah of Porat Yosef, as well as a member of the Yerushalayim bet din, and his mother was Haya Esther, daughter of the famed hacham, R' Ezra Harari-Raful. He was also the grandson of the mekubal R' Abraham Haim Ades.

From a very young age, R' Yosef Ades was careful to adhere to every stringency and wanted to lead a life based on Torah. When he became engaged, he said that the most important thing was that his bride would agree that he would study Torah all his life.

For close to forty years R' Yosef taught in *Yeshivat Porat Yosef*. In addition, he taught a class for adult men in the Bet Yisrael neighborhood of Yerushalayim. For twenty-five years he taught a morning class at the Kotel as well. He kept his eye on the clock while teaching, careful to begin and end exactly at the scheduled times. R' Yosef's attention to such details is a lesson in ethics, exemplary of how a religious person should serve Hashem.

One of the past *Roshei Yeshivah* of Mir Yeshivah in Yerushalayim, R' Beinish Finkel (1911–1990) *zt"l*, used to say about R' Yosef that all of the *mussar* books do not compare with the "walking *mussar* book which was R' Yosef." He added: "If we could only reach the level of R' Yosef's humility when it comes to giving *sedakah*."

R' Yosef taught Torah faithfully. He began his day at two thirty in the morning to immerse in the *mikveh*, and went out to the Kotel, where he would teach Gemara, halachah, and mussar, and then would pray vatikin at sunrise. He always prayed vatikin, summer and winter, in peace and at wartime. Later in the morning, he went to Yeshivat Porat Yosef, where he taught Gemara, and then he would go to the Bet Yisrael neighborhood, where neighborhood men were thirstily awaiting to hear words of Torah from his mouth. Some of them heard his shiur for forty years. He ended his session with teachings from Kabbalah, from eight to ten at night.

He taught a *shiur* in *mishnah* for two hours on Friday nights for over thirty years, and never gave up a session, despite possible harm to his health when he was feeling sick or weak. On top of his full schedule he was able to learn dozens of chapters of *mishnah* each day.

R' Yosef was especially close with the Rosh Yeshivah, R' Ezra Attiah, which was not well known until R' Yosef's father (R' Yaakob) passed away. When he did, R' Ezra consoled



R' Yosef Ades in his younger years giving shiur

him, "From now on, you will call me father, and I will call you son."

In his later years R' Yosef would speak of the importance of those who departed from this world on Hoshanah Rabbah. If people only knew how great are the value of these people, they would all desire to depart this world on that day. And so it was. R' Yosef Ades merited that his funeral take place on the eve of Hoshanah Rabbah.

On Friday afternoon and Hol Hamo'ed Sukkot, on the ninteenth of *Tishrei* 5753/1992, R' Yosef Moshe Ades passed away at the age of sixty-nine. His legacy continues today with his two sons, R' Yaakob Hai Ades, and R' Aharon Ades, who started a yeshivah in Yerushalayim in their father's memory called Ma'alot Yosef.



Left to right: R' Ben-Sion Abba Shaul and R' Yosef Ades

#### Hessed Shel Emet

Rosh Hashanah, and there was no one to be found to tend to him. R' Yosef went to the cemetery that night, dug a grave with his own hands, and buried the deceased that very night. All of the paperwork was missing, but R' Yosef would not delay honoring the dead for these reasons. He said if the authorities complained, he would gladly deal with them and take responsibility.



Hacham Ovadia Yosef with R' Yosef Ades

# The Value of Learning Torah

or twenty-five years, R' Yosef gave a Gemara shiur for working men at the Kotel before sunrise. When one of the working men in his shiur told him that his daughter was engaged, he asked if the boy was religious. The man answered, "Of course." R' Yosef then asked, "Does he have set times for learning Torah?" The man answered that he didn't. R' Yosef said, "Then he's not religious. If a person doesn't have a set time for learning, he can't possibly keep the Torah and mitzvot properly."

# The Voice of an Angel

rive years by the Kotel, before dawn. One student who attended regularly once failed to show up for two weeks. When R' Yosef asked about him, he discovered that the student was badly hurt trying to fix a flat tire on the bus he drove, and he had not regained consciousness for two weeks. R' Yosef came to the hospital, and when he saw his student he called him: "Raphael." He awoke at the sound of his teacher's voice, and R' Yosef said: "You're not going to die. You shall live!" The student himself told R' Yosef's family this story at his *shivah*, and added, "When I heard R' Yosef's voice it was like a *malach* [angel] whispered into my ears, 'Wake up, Raphael.' And so I did."

# His Loving Kindness

R' Yosef was involved in matchmaking and brokering the related financial agreements between the two sets of parents. On one occasion, the parents agreed to split the cost of the young couple's expenses. But when R' Yosef suggested the figure of \$10,000, which would allow the couple to live just above poverty level, the boy's father initially declined, stating that he simply could not afford to pay his share of this sum. R' Yosef persisted, and the father eventually agreed to give the prescribed amount, sealing the deal.

Later, the father asked R' Yosef why he insisted so forcefully that he agree to an amount that may exceed his financial means. R' Yosef explained, "The other side can easily afford their share. I will give you \$5,000 and the couple will end up eventually with \$10,000." He voluntarily donated this enormous sum from his own pocket for the sake of a young bride and groom, all the while preserving the pride of this father!

# Great Diligence

n 5752/1992, just a few months before R' Yosef Ades passed away, there was a heavy snowfall in Yerushalayim. This obviously caused big traffic problems, so it was not surprising that attendance at the yeshivah was very low and the lectures did not go on as usual that day. One of the rabbis walked around the building to see how things were going. Indeed, he saw that only a small number of students

had shown up and that therefore, the lectures were not given. However, when he arrived at the room where R' Yosef gave his *shiur*, the rabbi was stunned to see the room filled with students listening to their teacher, whose face shone as he taught. They knew R' Yosef would not miss a lesson even in that weather and therefore they all made an extra effort to come.

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#### Peace In The Home

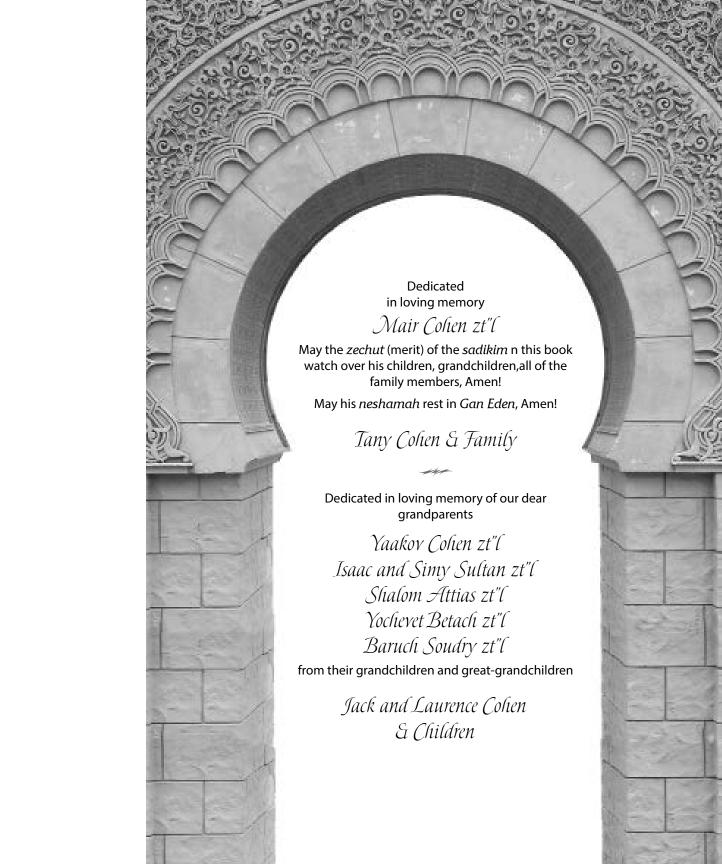
uring the *shivah* for R' Yosef, the wife of one of his students came to comfort the mourners. She told the family that she was married for twenty years and that the harmony in her home was all due to the tireless efforts of the *hacham*. She told them that after her marriage there were people who convinced her that her husband was not worthy of her and she wanted to go to *bet din* to request a divorce. She decided to first consult with R' Yosef before taking such a drastic step. With great patience, he spent hours talking to her and convincing her to abandon her plan. After much effort on his part he restored peace to their home.

# Acts of Kindness After Death

here was an old, lonely, childless widow who lived near R' Yosef. She once came to the *hacham* and said, "Rabbi, please pray that I should die." He obviously did not agree

to her request and instead gave her a new life full of hope and contentment. From that day on, she was a permanent Shabbat guest in his home, where she would hear him recite the Kiddush and speak about the parashah. R' Yosef even changed his schedule and came home earlier to make Kiddush, just for her sake. On the bitter night that the hacham was taken from this world — Hoshanah Rabbah 5753/1992 — she waited for the masses returning from the funeral. When she saw them coming close she called out bitterly, "Who will make Kiddush for me? Who will tell me divrei Torah on Shabbat?" Heartbroken, she begged R' Yosef in Shamayim to take her with him to the next world because without him, her life was not worth living. Indeed, just a few days later on the day after Sukkot, her soul departed this world. Part of the large crowd that had gathered at the home of R' Yosef to comfort the mourners made their way to her home and prayed for her soul to be uplifted. In this way, R' Yosef continued to perform acts of kindness even after his death.

# BRIEF HISTORY OF SEPHARDIC YESHIVOT



# BRIEF HISTORY OF SEPHARDIC YESHIVOT

#### Abir Yaakob

stablished by R' Yaakob Abuchatzera in the mid-1800s. The yeshivah was later passed on from one generation to the next all the way to R' Yisrael Abuchatzera (Baba Sali) and then to his son R' Meir Abuchatzera (Baba Meir). Today many batei kneset, yeshivot and other institutions carry the name of this great saddik — Abir Yaakob.

#### Baba Haraabi

The early seventeenth century, Yeshivat Baba Haraabi was founded in Tunis and named after its Rosh Yeshivah, R' Abraham HaKohen — Baba Rebbe or Baarbe (the father of Rebbe).

#### Ahava Ve'Ahva

uring World War I, Hacham *Ezra* Attiah moved to Cairo, Egypt to evade conscription into the Turkish army. There, he established Yeshivat Ahava Ve'Ahva as well as a kollel called Keter Torah. The yeshivah taught over one hundred *talmidim*, many who transferred from secular schools. Many who entered barely knew how to read Hebrew, but within a few years, they were all studying Gemara. Thanks to the fact that so many people were learning, the wider Jewish community, who were not living a Torah lifestyle, became more aware of Torah and *mitzvot*.

#### Bet El

ounded in the Old City of Yerushalayim in 1737 by the great *mekubal* R' Gedalyah Hayun. The yeshivah revolved around *tefillot*, which were intended to bring the *mekubalim* who studied there into mystical communication with Hashem. The *tefillot* were held in accordance with the *kavanot* of the Arizal. In the 1740s, a gifted young man named R' Shalom Sharaby arrived in Yerushalayim from Yemen. He studied in Bet El and over time became an outstanding *hacham* and *mekubal*.

There were forty *hachamim* in the Bet El yeshivah and R' Shalom formed a special group of twelve corresponding to the number of the tribes of Yisrael. This group was called the *Hevrat Ahavat Shalom*, and its members bound themselves together through intense study. R' Shalom's notable students included R' Haim Yosef David Azoulay (Hida), R' Yom Tov Elgasi, R' Haim de la Roza, and R' Gershon of Kitov. The Hida describes

R' Shalom as a holy person who knew all the *sefarim* that dealt with Kabbalah, and used all the *kavanot* written by the Arizal.

In the 1930s, when the illustrious Hazon Ish was on his way to the Kotel, he made a point of stopping by the yeshivah to study there, stating, "I have a great zechut to see the place where such great and holy people learn and



Yeshivat Bet El

pray." The current Rosh Yeshivah of Bet El in the Old City is R' Yisrael Avihai. The current Rosh Yeshivah of Bet El on Rehov Rashi is R' Shalom Mordechai Haim Hedaya.

Bet HaLevi

n 1863, R' Yitzhak Ben-Gualid established this yeshivah in Haifa.

#### Bet Yaakob

he Bet Yaakob yeshivah in Yerushalayim was one of the most important yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael. The Rosh Yeshivah was R' Yisrael Yaakob Hagiz who was born in 1620. While he was in Leghorn, Italy, publishing his *Etz Haim* commentary on the *mishnah*, he was approached by the wealthy Vega family. They wanted to establish a yeshivah in Yerushalayim, with R' Yaakob as its Rosh Yeshivah. R' Yaakob accepted their offer, and around 1658 he established the Bet Yaakob Yeshivah in Yerushalayim. The Vega family continued to show a strong interest in the dealings of the yeshivah. At one time, R' Yaakob persuaded Mr. Abraham Yisrael Vega to establish a fund for prizes designed to motivate poor students to continue their studies and to pay for their annual clothing costs.

R' Moshe Galante II, R' Yaakob's father-in-law and Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim, contributed generously to Bet Yaakob's development into an outstanding yeshivah. He described the students of the yeshivah in the following way: "Many of them are well versed in the entire Gemara and are able to recite by heart, as one would read the *Shema*." (*Encyclopedia L'Gedolei Yisrael* Vol. III, p. 861). In 1674, R' Yaakob travelled to Constantinople to publish his *Lechem HaPanim* commentary on the *Shulhan Aruch*. However, he died there at the young age of fifty-seven before he was able to publish. At that time R' Moshe Galante assumed leadership of the Bet Yaakob Yeshivah.

Toward the end of R' Moshe Galante's life, the level of the yeshivah began to slip. Plague and famine caused the deaths of many of the scholars and donations from the local community decreased. In 1689, the year of R' Moshe's passing, Cuprilizada Mustafa Pasha was appointed as vizier of the Ottoman Empire. The Pasha introduced a new taxation which even the poorest citizens of Yerushalayim were now required to pay. In those

trying times, the yeshivah was unable to survive the death of its illustrious Rosh Yeshivah, and after decades of glorious service it closed its doors.

(See the article L'Toldot Batte Ha'Midrash B'Yerushalayim B'Meah Ha'Yudzayin, by Benayahu, Vol. 21, pg. 10 and an article on the same topic by Havlin in Shalem, Vol. 2, pg. 131, regarding the suggestion that the end of the yeshivah was caused by the infiltration of students loyal to Shabbetai Tzvi.)

#### Bet Zilka

Abdallah Somech was the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Midrash Abu Menashe (established in 1840 by R' Heskel Menashe Zebaida). The yeshivah was later expanded and renamed the well-known *Midrash Bet Zilka*, and remained in operation until 1951. Many great *hachamim* attended this yeshivah, which was located in Baghdad, Iraq. Some of the more well-known *hachamim* are: the Ben Ish Hai, Kaf Hahaim, R' Yitzhak Kaduri, R' Yehuda Fetaya, R' Abraham Ades, R' Shaul Kassin, R' Ezra Harari-Raful, R' Ephraim Menashe HaKohen, R' Haim Shaul HaKohen Dweck, and R' Salman Mutzafi.

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#### Etz Haim

R' Haim Abulafia was born in Hebron in 1660. He was a renowned *mekubal* and Rabbi of Izmir, but eventually moved to Eretz Yisrael. R' Haim settled in Tiberias, and was appointed *Av Bet Din* for the community's judicial court. R' Haim Abulafia reestablished an important yeshivah in Tiberias called *Etz Haim*. Many of his great works are also called Etz Haim, named after his prominent yeshivah.

#### Kneset Yisrael

stablished in 1741 in Yerushalayim, by R' Haim Benatar (Ohr Hahaim Hakadosh), and supported by donations from abroad. The yeshivah focused its study mainly on halachah.

#### Kissei Rahamim

amed after R' Matzliach Mazuz's teacher, R' Rachamim Hai Havita HaKohen. With minimal funds of 100 Tunisian dinars, he started the yeshivah. Slowly but surely, the yeshivah attracted students from all over. R' Matzliach was very strict about his students not studying secular studies until they were filled with *Shas* and *Poskim*. Today, more than 800 students study at the yeshivah, which includes programs ranging from

kindergarten to post-high school education. It is headed today by R' Matzliach's son, Hagaon R' Meir Mazuz *shlit"a*.

#### Mordechai Taluk

ounded by R' Yonah Navon, who was a student of the Hida (R' Haim Yosef David Azoulay). The yeshivah was supported by philanthropist Mr. Mordechai Taluk.

#### Neve Shalom

he Rosh Yeshivah of this yeshivah was R' Raphael Moshe Bulah, author of *Sefer Get Mekushar*. The yeshivah was supported by philanthropist Mr. Isaac di Maya of Constantinople. The yeshivah studied halachah in the mornings, *Reishit Hochmah* in the afternoons, and *Tur* with *Bet Yosef* in the evenings.

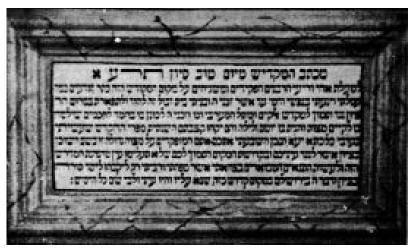
### Porat Yosef

acham Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai, measured sanctity by its closeness to the site of the Bet Hamikdash. In his work, sefer Od Yosef Hai he writes that the closer a bet hakneset (or bet hamidrash) is to the Temple Mount, the holier it is.

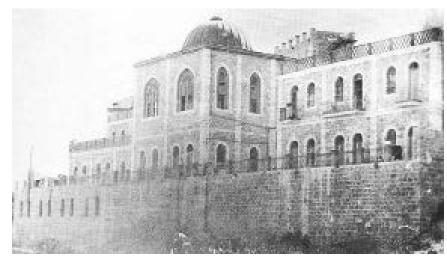
"Surely a *bet hakneset* or *bet hamidrash* built closer to the Har Habayit is superior and holier, since it is closer to the Gateway to Heaven. This is all the more true if the worshippers within it can see from its windows the ground of the site where Bet Hamikdash stood. This is superior to all! Fortunate is the one who merits praying in such a *bet hakneset* and studying in such a house."

In keeping with this opinion, the Ben Ish Hai convinced the devout philanthropist, R' Yosef Abraham Shalom, who lived in distant Calcutta, India, to set aside money to build two *yeshivot* in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, close to the Kotel. The one, *Yeshivat Porat Yosef*, famous to this very day, was destroyed by the Arabs in 5708/1948 and has since been rebuilt. This yeshivah was dedicated to the study of *Shas* and *Poskim* while the other, *Yeshivat Oz Ve'hadar*, was founded on the study of Kabbalah. Here the *nusach* of *tefillot* followed that of the Arizal (R' Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi, 1534/1572) and the Rashash. This yeshivah served as a lighthouse for students of Kabbalah for close to thirty years.

R' Yosef Abraham also urged the members of the wealthy Sasson family of Bombay to become steady supporters of



Letter written by R' Yosef Shalom engraved upon the podium of the Yeshiva's sanctuary



Pre-1948 facade of Yeshiyat Porat Yosef

Yeshivat Porat Yosef. R' Yosef Abraham Shalom intended to invest his money in the establishment of a large hospital in the Old City. However, when he sought the Ben Ish Hai's advice, he wrote:

"Others besides you can take care of physical health. I do not, however, see too many people concerned with spiritual well-being. Therefore my suggestion is that you establish a yeshivah that is a healing station for all ailments of the soul..."

Indeed, this yeshivah and others that followed in its footsteps produced many great *talmidei hachamim* for Sephardic Jewry over time.

The cornerstone for the yeshivah was laid in 1914, but the First World War delayed its construction. The yeshivah was finally inaugurated in 1923 and consisted of a large *bet hamidrash*; two smaller study halls where married men studied; and fifty additional rooms including dormitories, offices, and a library.

Yeshivat Porat Yosef had an extravagant library, with priceless books and manuscripts. There were writings of R' Eliyahu Mani,

the Chief Rabbi of Hebron; a commentary on the *mishnah* by R' Yosef Haim (Ben Ish Hai), and many writings by Hacham Ezra Attiah. All these were unfortunately burned and lost.

During the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, the building was destroyed, and a new yeshivah was opened in the Geulah neighborhood. After the Six Day War, architect Moshe Safdie rebuilt the Old City complex on the original site. The new building, based on the original design, evinces a present-day look, blending "traditional" with "modern." In both texture and color, the stone walls echo the dominant building material of Yerushalayim. The *bet hakneset* itself is a substantial structure of six stories, allowing seating for 450 people. The edifice is covered by a large semi-transparent dome which permits light to enter by day, while at night it glows from interior illumination.

Mr. Yosef Abraham Shalom himself did not get to see his yeshivah, but it was his *zechut* that built the beautiful building that was to be enjoyed by the students for years to come. Before he died he left a letter of intent, which hangs over the yeshivah to this day:

#### Dated the 17th of Sivan 5671/1911

"For my brothers and friends, hachamim, officials and inspectors in this holy establishment. Those who are honored with knowledge of Torah know how hard I worked, body and soul, to build this bet hamidrash for the hachamim who will study here, in order to fulfill the commandment 'And you shall dwell on her [the Torah] day and night.' They shall take their yearly stipend from the money I have set aside in Calcutta. I give you this oath – you who are in charge of this great mitzvah – in the name of He Who Dwells in Zion, who is before your eyes is this holy place [the Western wall], that you shall not rest in your leadership of this place, and you shall follow the conditions in

my last will and testament, to glorify the name of G-d, to create Torah in Sion, and the word of G-d in Yerushalayim in such a holy place, about which it was stated: 'My eyes and heart will be there for all days.' Indeed, thanks to Yeshivat Porat Yosef, we merited to see Yerushalayim return to her glory days."

Alumni of the yeshivah include: R' Ovadia Yosef, R' Ben-Sion Abba Shaul, R' Yehuda Sadkah, R' Yitzhak Kaduri, R' Sion Levy, R' Baruch Ben-Haim, R' Saadya Lofes, R' Mordechai Eliyahu, and many other great *talmidei hachamim*. The legacy of *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* lives on today.

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#### Rehovot Hanahar

n 1896, after devoting many years to Yeshivat Bet El, R' Haim Shaul HaKohen Dweck founded a new yeshivah in the Bucharian quarter of Yerushalayim. The yeshivah was supported by the philanthropist R' Nissim Nahum.

Sdei Hemed

n 1899, R' Haim Hizkiah Medini (Sde Hemed) established this yeshivah in Hebron.

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#### Shoshanim LeDavid

In 1909, the Kaf HaHaim (R' Yaakob Haim Sofer) moved to a newly founded *bet hamidrash* in Yerushalayim. In the *hakdamah* to his *sefer Kaf Hahaim*, R' Yaakob Haim Sofer, the author, mentions that he himself spent most of his days learning and writing *hiddushei* Torah in the attic of the *bet hamidrash*.

# Talmud Torah Magen David

ounded in Yerushalayim in 1920 by R' Ezra Harari-Raful, of an illustrious family from Aram Soba. He was the *dayan* of the *bet din* in Aram Soba at the time. The yeshivah was supported financially by the contribution of philanthropist Eliyahu Franco from Aleppo, Syria. Talmud Torah Magen David was later run by R' Ezra's son, R' Aharon Harari-Raful. Today, the yeshivah continues to spread Torah under a different administration and teachers. *Yeshivat Succat David* continues in its study of Torah the way it was run by *Hamekubal* R' Menachem Basri *shlit"a*.

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#### Yafa'er Anavim

he renowned R' Abraham ibn Asher served as Rosh Yeshivah of this fine institution. The yeshivah was founded by Joseph and Raphael Franco of Leghorn, Italy.

Note: In the past few thousand years, Sephardic Jewry has created numerous influential yeshivot, many of them are unknown to date. The list brought above is but a small glimpse of the Sephardic yeshivot that are known to us today.



Glossary

Aharonim - Torah scholars and *poskim* who lived after the era of the Rishonim. The literal word means "latter ones."

Ahavat Yisrael - Love of fellow Jews

Alav hashalom - May peace be upon him/her.

Al kiddush Hashem - Sanctifying Hashem's name

Amidah - Another word for *Shemona Es're* — literally means standing. This is the term we use for the prayer we recite silently three times daily while standing in one place.

Amora'im - Torah Scholars of the two centuries following the era of the *Tanna'im* Who finalized the discussions known today as Gemara and who are considered the authors of the *Talmud Bavli* and *Talmud Yerushalmi*.

Anivut - Humbleness

Arbit - Prayer recited every night

Aron Kodesh - The Torah Ark

Aseret Hadiberot - Ten Commandments

Ashkenazi - Jews originally from Northern and Eastern parts of Europe and Russia

Av Bet Din - Head of the religious court

Aveirah (Averot) - Sin

Avinu - Our father

Avodah - Service, such as in avodat Hashem — service of G-d

Baale teshuvah - Returnees to Judaism

Baale batim - Working men

Baal tzedakah - One who gives charity

Bachur - Unmarried student

Baruch Hashem - "Blessed is G-d"

Bat kol - Heavenly voice

Batei kenesiyot - Synagogues

Bavel - Babel, in the Torah, the name of Babylon, modern day Iraq

Ben Torah - A student of Torah

Berachah - Blessing

Bet din - Religious Jewish court

Bet Din Hagadol - Highest religious court

Bet Hamikdash - The Holy Temple

Bet hakneset - Synagogue

Bet hamidrash - Study room

Bet Yosef - Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of the Shulchan Aruch

B'ezrat Hashem - God willing

Bikur holim - Aiding the sick

Birkat Hamazon - Blessing after meals

Bitachon - Trust in God

Blatt - A page of Gemara

Brit Milah - Circumcision

Brit Yitzhak - Also called Zohar. The night before a brit milah the family gets together and invite ten men to learn Torah (Zohar), have a *seudah* for the boy and sing *zemirot*. Yet this is only a Sephardic custom.

Hinuch - Education

Humash - Torah (Bible)

Dapim - Pages

Dayan(im) - Judge(s)

Dinne Mamonot - Monetary judgments

Din Torah - Judgment according to the Torah

Divre Torah - Talks on topics relating to a section (parashah) of the Torah — typically the weekly Torah portion

**Drashot - Sermons** 

Emunah - Faith

Emunat Hachamim - Faith in the Sages

Eretz Yisrael - The Land of Israel

Eshet Hayil - A woman of valor

Esther Hamalka - Queen Esther

Etrog - Citron

Gadol ba'Torah - Great in Torah

Gadol - (Great) Referred to the most revered rabbis of the generation

Galut - Exile

Gaon - Medieval Jewish scholar

Gedole Yisrael - The leaders of Israel

Gemara - Talmud

Gematria - A system of assigning numerical value to an alphabet

Gemilut Hasadim - Acts of kindness

Get - Divorce document

Geula - Exile

Goyim - Non-jews

Hacham(im) - Sage(s)

Haftarah - A series of selections from *Nevi'im* ("Prophets") from *Tanach* 

Hakadosh - The Holy One

Hakdamah - Introduction

Halachah - Jewish law

Halachic - A hypothetical theocracy based upon Jewish law

Hallah - Bread meant for Shabbat

Hamekubal - The kabbalist

Haskamah - Approbation

Hashem - Literally, "the name" - God

Hashem Yitbarach - G-d may his name be blessed

Har Hazetim - Mount of Olives

Havdalah - A ceremony that marks the symbolic end of Shabbat and holidays

Havruta - Study partners

Hazal - Our Sages of blessed memory

Hazzan - Cantor

Hebra Kadisha - Burial society

Hechal - Sacred container

Heder - An elementary school for Torah study

Hesed - Loving kindness

Hesed Shel Emet - True kindness

Hespedim - Eulogies

Hiddushim - Original Torah ideas

Hillul Hashem - Profaning Hashem's name

Hillulot - Anniversary of a hacham's passing

Hok Le'Yisrael - For the past several hundred years, it has been customary for Jews the world over to study the Hok Le'Yisrael everyday. The Hok Le'Yisrael is based on the teachings of the Arizal, who taught that it is essential for the soul to study a specific order of Torah each day.

Humash - Five Books of Moses, also known as the Pentateuch or Torah

Idra Rabbah/ Idra Zuttah - Kabbalistic works

Kabbalah - Esoteric teachings of the Torah

Kaddish - refers to an important and central prayer in the Jewish prayer service

Kashrut - Food in accord with halachah

**Kavanot - Intentions** 

Kavod - Respect

Kedushah - Traditionally the third section of all Amidah recitations

Kedushah - Holiness

Kehillah - Congregation

Keber - Grave

Ke'zayit - A Talmudic unit of volume approximately equal to the size of an average olive. The word itself literally means "like an olive."

Kiddush - is a blessing recited over wine or grape juice to sanctify the Shabbat.

Klal Yisrael - The Jewish people as a nation

Kollel - Yeshivah for married men

Kol Nidre - An Aramaic declaration recited in the synagogue before the beginning of the evening service on *erev* Yom Kippur.

Kotel - The Western Wall

Lashon hara - Evil speech, such as gossip, slander, talebearing

Lashon kodesh - Holy Tongue is distinguish from the Aramaic dialect or other "secular languages" spoken by the Jewish people (Masechet Sotah).

Malach(im) - Angel(s)

Malbish arumim - Clothing for the needy

Maggid - Teacher

Maggid shiur - Lecturer

Masechet (ot) - Tractate on Gemara — *Talmud Bavli* and *Talmud Yerushalmi* 

Mashiah - Messiah

Matzah - is a cracker-like flatbread made of white flour and water. Matzah is the substitute for bread during the holiday of Pesach.

Me'arat Hamachpela - Tomb of our Forefathers who are buried in Hebron.

Meforshim - Explanations

Mekubal (Mekubalim) - Kabbalist

Melamdim - Teachers

Mesirut nefesh - Self-sacrifice

Mezuzot - Scrolls with specific Torah verses, placed on doorposts

Midot - Character traits

Midrash - *Aggadic* material. The word sometimes refers to a passage teaching how a specific halachah is derived from the verses of the Torah. Midrash can be authored by the Tanna'im, the Amora'im, or later Torah Sages.

Mikvah (Mikvaot) - Bathing house

Minhah - The afternoon prayer

Minyan - A quorum of ten Jewish men

Midrash - Compilation of homiletic teachings (commentaries) on the Tanach

Mishnah - Halachic statements that comprise the earliest transcription of the Oral Torah, compiled by R' Yehudah Hanasi

Mitzvah (mitzvot) - A commandment from the Torah

Mohar habetulot - Helping poor brides

Mohel - A Jewish man who performs the Jewish ritual of Brit milah (circumcision)

Motzae Shabbat - Saturday night

Mussar - Ethical teachings

Neshamah - Soul

Niftar - Passed away; died

Nisim - Miracles

Olam Haba - The World to Come

Parashah - The weekly Torah reading

Pasuk - Verse

Pidyon haben - Redemption of the firstborn

Pidyon nefesh - Redemption of the soul

Pikuah nefesh - The principle in Jewish law that the saving of a human life is paramount, overriding virtually any other religious consideration

Posek (Poskim) - Rabbinical authorities in the area of halachah who rendered halachic decisions

Rabbanim - masters; teachers

Rabanit - Rabbi's wife

Responsa - a sefer (book) containing a collection of a *hacham's* written responses to halachic queries. The Hebrew term for such books is *she'elot utshuvot* (See *she'elot utshuvot* for details).

Ribono Shel Olam - Master or Teacher of the World

Rishon LeSion (Hacham Bashi) - Chief Rabbi

Rishonim - leading talmidei hachamim of the Middle Ages, from almost one thousand years ago until the generation of the Spanish Expulsion, somewhat more than five hundred years ago. Literally the term means "first ones."

Rosh hamekubalim - Head of all the mekubalim

Rosh Yeshivah(ot) - Head(s) of a yeshivah(ot)

Ruach hakodesh - Divine inspiration, a lesser form of prophecy

Saddik (Saddikim) - Righteous man or people

Sadeket - Righteous women

Sandak - The individual who holds the baby during the circumcision

Safek terefah - Doubtful of any food, food product, or utensil that, according to kashrut, is not ritually clean or prepared according to law and is thus prohibited as unfit for Jewish use

Sedaka - Charity

Seder - Order

Sefat - A holy city in northern Israel

Sefer (sefarim) - Holy, Jewish texts, book(s)

Sefirat Haomer (Sefirah) - The counting of the Omer, the fortynine days between Pesah and Shavuot

Selihot - special prayers recited on certain occasions for the purpose of arousing the people to repent and ask Hashem for forgiveness for their sins

Semiha - Rabbinical ordination

Seudah - Meal

Seudah shelishet - Third meal on Shabbat

Shabbat - The seventh day of the Jewish week and a day of rest

Shalom Bayit - Peace in the home; marital accord

Shammash - The caretaker of a synagogue or rabbi

Shamayim - Heavens

Shas - A record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, customs, and history. The Talmud has two components: the Mishnah and the Gemara.

Shehinah - The Divine Presence

Shehitah - Kosher slaughter of an animal

Shelot utshuvot - Known also by the acronym 'shut,' are the written decisions and rulings given by eminent rabbis, teachers, or heads of academies to questions addressed to them in writing over the ages

Shiur - Torah lesson

Shivah - Seven days of mourning when someone passes away

Shmira - to protect

Shochet - Ritual slaughterer

Shofar - Ram's horn

Shulchan Aruch - Table of laws written by Rabbi Yosef Karo

Shuvu banim - Returning of the chidren

Shevatim - Tribes

Siddur - Prayer book

Sifrei Torah - Torah scrolls

Sofer - Scribe

Sukkah - The temporary dwelling used on Sukkot.

Talmud Bavli - Transmitted orally for centuries prior to its compilation by Jewish scholars in Babylon in about the 5th century CE.

Taanit - Fast day

Taanit Dibbur - Refraining from speech

Talit - Prayer shawl

Tanna'im - Torah Scolars who lived in the period beginning one hundred years before the destruction of the Second Bet Hamikdash and until 150 years after the destruction. The *Tanna'im* are the authors of the Mishnah and the *baraita*.

Takanah - Enforcement

Talmidei hachamim - Wise men

Tanach - A Hebrew acronym formed from the initial Hebrew letters in three traditional subdivisions: The Torah, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim* — hence *Tanach*.

Tefillah (Tefillot) - Prayer

Tefillin - Phylacteries

Tehillim - Psalms

Teshuvah - Repentance

Teva - Nature

Tikkun - Repairing or perfecting

Tikun Hatzot - The midnight prayer mourning the destruction of the Temple

Torat HaSod - Secret wisdom - mysticism

Tosafot - Mediæval commentaries on the Talmud

Trumot u'maasrot - tithes

Tzelem Elokim - Image of God

Vatikin - Sunrise

Yerushalayim - Jerusalem

Yeshivah - A school of Torah study

Yetzer hara - Evil inclination

Yishuv - Settlement

Yirat Shamayim - Fear of Heaven

Yisrael - Israel

Yom Toy - A festival

Zechut - Merit

Zohar - The primary text of Kabbalah. It's authorship is attributed to the *tanna*. R' Shimon Bar-Yochai.

Zt"l - An acronym for "zecher saddik livrachah - may a saddik be remembered for blessing."

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Note: Many more sources do exist and are documented with the author.

"May this book be a merit for the Sephardic communities' world wide.

To grow and to learn from our wonderful Sephardic Hachamim and may this especially benefit all of Klal Yisrael."

Yehuda Azoulay