

# Sulika *n.s.l.*

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Beside the graves of all the righteous *hachamim* buried in Fez, Morocco is the grave of Sulika Hasadeket, a young woman who was killed by the Muslim authorities. Who is Sulika, and why did she earn an eternal resting place among the *hachamim*?

Around the year 1830, a Jewish family by the name Hachuel lived in the Moroccan town of Tangiers. Sulika, the daughter of Haim and Simha, was very beautiful and remarkably modest. She became well known among the Jews of Tangiers for her *hesed*, kind heart and goodwill. Haim was a merchant by trade but was also very knowledgeable in Torah, even conducting Talmudic study groups in his home.

One day, a boy from one of the wealthiest neighboring Muslim families saw Sulika and desired to marry her. The young man's father threatened Sulika's family that if they would not allow Sulika to convert to Islam and marry his son, they would suffer bitterly. Overcome with fear, the family instructed Sulika to hide in the home of a close friend.

A short while later, soldiers came to the Hachuel home to arrest Sulika. When they did not find the girl there, they arrested the mother, instead, and kept her in confinement until Sulika would be found. Upon hearing what happened to her mother, Sulika immediately surrendered to the authorities who brought her before a Muslim judge. The rich neighbor accused her of having converted to Islam and the wanting to return to Judaism, a crime punishable by death under Islamic law. The court ordered Sulika to return to Islam or face execution. But Sulika remained defiant, "A Jewess I was born and a Jewess I wish to die"<sup>1</sup> she proudly proclaimed, prepared to die "al kiddush Hashem – for the sanctification of Hashem's righteous name".

The judge was furious and threatened Sulika with torture.

## Additional Sources:

- Malche Rabanan by Rabbi Yosef Benaim
- Netivot Hamarav by Rabbi Daniel Abitot
- Account from Marc Hazout a descendant of the Hachuel family
- Interview with Mrs. Bitton

Sulika replied "I will patiently bear the weight of your chains, I will give my limbs to be torn piece-meal by wild beasts...but I will smile at your indignation and the anger of your prophet. Since neither he, nor you have been able to overcome a weak female!"<sup>2</sup>

They placed Sulika in a lightless dungeon with an iron collar around her neck and chains on both her hands and feet. They then decided to send her to the Sultan to decide her fate.

The *hachamim* of Fez were inspired by Sulika's dedication. But they were ordered by the Sultan's judge to extract a confession from the girl that she had previously converted to Islam. The *hachamim* went to Sulika and explained that the Jews of Morocco could be endangered if the authorities don't get what they want. Sulika responded with firm resolve that she would maintain her steadfast commitment to Judaism until the very end and the *hachamim* rejoiced in their hearts.

At the final stage of the trial, one of the sons of the Sultan saw Sulika and, similarly taken by her beauty, made her a lavish offer. If she agreed to convert to Islam and marry him, the prince promised, her life would not only be saved, but she would live in wealth and honor. Without hesitation, Sulika rebuffed the offer and announced that she could not betray Hashem. In spite of his embarrassment by her initial rejection, the prince tried to convince her once more, but Sulika stood firm in her decision.

Her tragic fate was sealed, and the prince ordered her immediate execution. Just before she was killed the executioner offered her one last chance to convert. Sulika remained firm "do not make me linger – behead me at once – for dying as I do, innocent of any crime, the Gd of Abraham will avenge my death!"<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes:

1. Eugenio Maria Romero. *El martirio de joven Hachuel o la heroína Hebrea*, Gibraltar, Imprinta Militar, 1837, published as an anonymous English translation, *Jewish Heroine of the Nineteenth Century: A Tale Founded on Fact*, London, 1839
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

Alfred Dehodencq's "Execution d'une Juive au Maroc – Execution of a Moroccan Jewess", which was painted circa 1860



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## Seeking Salvation at her Grave

The body of Sulika Hasadeket was laid to rest in the city of Fez and she became a symbol of inspiration and sanctity for the Jews of Morocco. From then on, whenever Moroccan Jews confronted a crisis or situation of danger, they went to her grave to plead with Hashem and found remarkable salvation from their prayers there. To this day, thousands of Jews pray tearfully at the *kever* of Sulika, who has become known as the "Rachel Imenu of Morocco."

In May, 2008 a group of Moroccan Jews from Toronto, Montreal, and France, led by Hacham Amram Assayag, traveled to Morocco to visit the community that still remains there and the graves of great *sadikim* who are buried there. Among the group were Mr. and Mrs. Bitton, who had long been hoping for a second child.

Upon arriving at the holy cemetery in Fez. The group went to pray at the grave of the righteous Sulika. As the entire group approached the grave to pour out their hearts, Mrs. Bitton approached with even greater trepidation. After hearing about the wonders that had occurred from praying here, she wanted to make the most of the opportunity and pray for the *zechut* (merit) of bearing a child, in Sulika's merit. The prayers brought on a special feeling of *kedusha* for Mrs. Bitton, a feeling she continued to sense even after she returned back home. Nine months later, Mrs. Bitton gave birth to a baby girl... and named her Sulika, in memory of this virtuous young woman!