

HACHAM YISRAEL ABUHASSERA BABA SALI^{Z.T.L}

TAFILLALT, MOROCCO 5650 – 5744 / 1890 – 1984

Hacham Yisrael Abuhassera, zt"l, was born on Rosh Hashanah, 5650/1890 in Tafilalt, Morocco, to the noted Torah scholar Hacham Messod Abuhassera. His mother, wanting to ensure her child was raised in an atmosphere of pure sanctity, allowed only Jewish attendants to touch the infant, and she brought his cradle to the study hall so he could absorb words of Torah and be infused with their holiness.

Under the tutelage of his brother Hacham David, who was twenty-four years his senior,

young Yisrael blossomed and very soon became widely recognized for his extraordinary wisdom and ability to facilitate miracles, earning him the Arabic epithet "Baba Sali" – "our father who prays." His reputation gradually spread throughout Morocco, and many people flocked to him to receive his blessing.

At the age of sixteen, young Yisrael married Pirchah, a pious, devoted woman who enabled Hacham Yisrael to commit his life to intensive *avodat Hashem*. Three years later, when Hacham Yisrael was but nineteen years old, his father

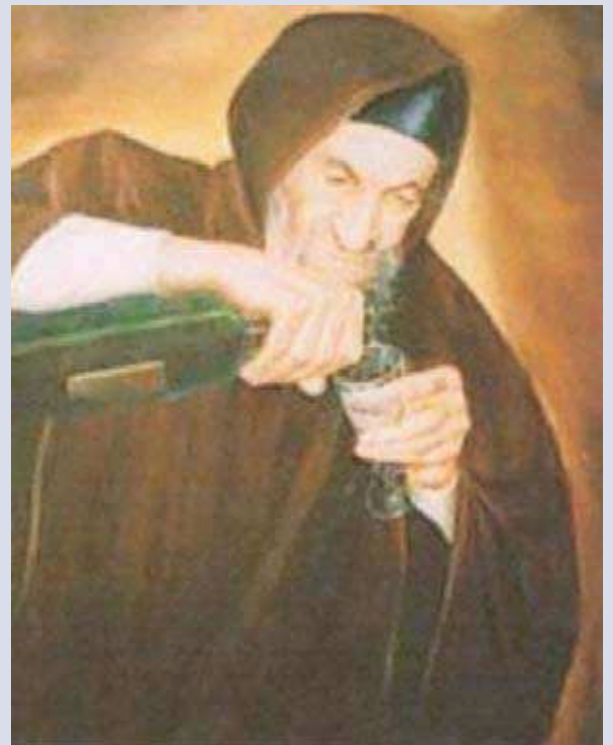


FILLING THE NEW MIKVEH

During the Baba Sali's tenure as rabbi in Morocco, the community constructed a new *mikveh*, but the scarce rainfall during the summer months made it impossible to fill it with the requisite rain water so it could be used. Hacham Yisrael prayed, "Master of the world! You commanded us to live with holiness and purity, and we want to do Your will. We did our job, now You do Yours, for the sake of Your Holy Name!" At that very moment, clouds covered the sky and rain began to fall, ending only once the *mikveh* was filled.

Hacham Yisrael thereupon examined the *mikveh* and noticed that although it generally met all halachic specifications, one pipe had been constructed in a manner that failed to conform to the minority opinion of the *Bet Yehudah*. The community was hesitant to rely on a second miracle to fill the *mikveh*, but Hacham Yisrael insisted that the *mikveh* be acceptable according to all halachic opinions. He therefore demanded that the water be emptied from the *mikveh* and the pipe be altered in accordance with the view of the *Bet Yehuda*.

The rabbi again turned to the Almighty to beg for rain to fill the *mikveh*. This time, he also appealed to the soul of the *Bet Yehuda*: "You know I did this not for my own honor, but rather for the sake of the purity of the Jewish people. Please, go pray to Hashem on our behalf, because I did it to fulfill your opinion!" Sure enough, rain once again fell from the skies and filled the new *mikveh*.



THE DOCTOR WHO BELIEVED

Hacham Avraham Elbaz, a Moroccan-born *talmid Hacham* who studied in France and, later, in the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, developed a serious illness in his eye, toward the end of his life, that severely impaired his vision. The prognosis was far from promising, and one doctor indicated that Hacham Avraham would soon lose his vision entirely.

A friend who was visiting Eress Yisrael went to Hacham

Yisrael Abuhassera, and received the rabbi's blessing on behalf of Hacham Avraham. The Baba Sali also recited a special blessing over some water, which he sent with the friend and instructed Hacham Avraham to apply to his eye. After a week, the eye had regained normal vision. The doctor, who had all but despaired from Hacham Avraham's recovery, exuberantly declared, "There must be a Gd!"

passed away, and the Baba Sali, despite his youth, was chosen to become the leader of his father's yeshiva. In addition, he was invited to assume the prestigious position of Morocco's Chief Rabbi, a post he reluctantly accepted in response to the impassioned pleas of his many ardent supporters. Upon accepting this role, Hacham Yisrael and his family moved to Arpud, capital of the Risani district in southern Morocco.

In 1920, the Baba Sali visited the Saba Kadisha - Hacham Shelomo Eliezer Alfandri z.t.l., who was ninety-five years old at the time. (The Saba eventually lived until the age of one hundred and five.) When the Baba Sali entered the room, the Saba Kadisha stood from his chair to honor the young sage who was 65 years his junior, and even asked him for

a blessing. Hacham David Laniado z.t.l. witnessed this remarkable incident, the news of which quickly spread throughout Torah Jewry. The great honor afforded to the Hacham Yisrael by the Saba reinforced the Baba Sali's reputation as one of the great *sadikim* of the generation.

In 1964, Hacham Yisrael left his prominent position in Morocco and emigrated to Israel, to a small and modest home in the remote city of Netivot. His wisdom and piety attracted tens of thousands of Jews of all ages and backgrounds from across the world, who came to his home to receive his blessing and counsel. In order to accommodate the huge number of visitors, the Baba Sali moved into a bigger house, which also served as a synagogue.

Through his blessings and prayers,

hundreds of Jews credit Hacham Yisrael with saving their lives in one way or another. His house was constantly bustling with visitors, and Hacham Yisrael welcomed all of them with warmth, kindness and respect regardless of their background or religious level. He listened patiently as his visitors described their problems and concerns, offered sound advice, and prayers on their behalf.

Hacham Yisrael passed away on the fourth of Shevat, 5744/1984, at the age of ninety-four. He was buried in his hometown, in the city of Netivot. Thousands attended his funeral and mourned the loss of a *tzaddik* who had helped so many fellow Jews through his *tefilot*. Hacham Yisrael left behind a beautiful family who continue to perpetuate his legacy of piety and sincere love for all Jews.

Excerpted from the book Legacy of Leaders

TRUE EMPATHY IN PRAYER

In 1968 Palestinian terrorists hijacked a plane and held the passengers hostage in the Jordanian desert. Among the captives was Hacham Yosef Raful, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Ateret Torah. His nephew, David Raful, went to Hacham Yisrael to ask him to pray for his uncle and the other hostages. When David arrived at Hacham Abuhassera's home, he saw the table set for a big meal with a large number of guests. Hacham Yisrael had just washed his hands but had yet to eat when David brought the news of the hijacking. The rabbi motioned to the guests to wash their hands, but they instead broke down in tears upon hearing of the hijacked plane.

After he began eating, Hacham Yisrael said, "Do you think I had to wait until you came here to do something about the situation? I have been fasting and have not slept since the plane was hijacked. Last night, I lit a candle for the righteous and saw a strong light come from the candle. I knew my prayers were answered, and I am making a *seudah* to celebrate this occasion. Don't worry - they will be home before Rosh Hashanah."

As Hacham Yisrael predicted, Hacham Yosef landed in America one hour before the onset of the holiday.

Before the guests arrived, someone had overheard the Baba Sali declare during his prayers, "The pain I have for each passenger is greater than the pain felt by the passengers themselves." Quite possibly, it was this genuine empathy felt by the rabbi as he prayed that was the source of his prayers' success.



THE DEATH DECREE

A yeshiva boy from Netivot once came to Hacham Yisrael to receive a *berachah*. Much to his horror, he received instead the rabbi's scathing criticism, right in front of everyone else present in the home: "You get up late for morning prayers ... You don't learn with all your effort!"

The boy left the rabbi shamefaced, and on the trip back to yeshiva, the car in which he was traveling flipped over. The other passengers sustained serious injuries, but the boy emerged from the accident unharmed.

Wondering why all these things had happened to him, the student traveled back to Netivot to ask the rabbi for an explanation.

As soon as Hacham Yisrael saw the boy, he rushed to hug him and exclaimed, "*Baruch Hashem*, it worked! When you walked in the other day, I saw a death decree written upon your forehead. I tried to think how I could save you, so I decided to embarrass you in public, which our Sages say is equivalent to killing. The humiliation you suffered that day saved you from actual death!"

THE BABA SALI'S FORGIVENESS

During the Lebanon War, an Israeli soldier was notified that his child had taken ill and needed an operation. The soldier took three days leave, but before returning home, he stopped in Netivot to receive the Baba Sali's blessing for his child.

"Your son doesn't need an operation," Hacham Yisrael informed him. "He'll be in good health." Sure enough, the boy's illness suddenly vanished.

When the soldier returned to his post, his officer inquired into the son's condition. When the soldier told him about the events of the past three days, the skeptical officer retorted, "You and your Baba; stop with that nonsense!"

That night, the officer could not sleep. Throughout the night, an old man repeatedly appeared to him and tormented him relentlessly. The next morning, the officer ran to the soldier and asked him, "Who was that holy man whom you visited? Tell me where I can find him!"

The soldier told him where to find the famed *talmid Hacham*, Harav Yisrael Abuhassera, and the officer left immediately and drove non-stop from Lebanon to Netivot. When he arrived, he found scores of people standing outside the *Hacham's* home waiting to meet with him. But at the precise moment that the officer approached the door, the rabbi's *shamash* (attendant) walked out and said, "I have a message for the person who just arrived from Lebanon. Hacham Yisrael said he forgives you, but in the future, do not laugh at something you do not understand."



A MIRACLE AT SEA

Hacham Yisrael visited Eress Yisrael in 1921. During his return voyage a violent storm erupted at sea. Terrified passengers crowded into one corner of the ship and prayed for their lives. Hacham Yisrael, however, went up to the ship's main deck and approached its railing. As the ship swayed side to side, he removed a cup from his pocket,

bent down and drew a bit of the rising seawater. Then, while reciting several *pesukim*, he slowly poured the water back into the sea. Once all the water in the cup had returned to the sea, the storm subsided. A number of passengers witnessed this miracle and saw firsthand the salvation Gd brought in the merit of the great *sadik*.

THE POWER OF MISVOT

A young man once arrived at Hacham Yisrael's home in a wheelchair and told the rabbi his story. "I was injured by a bullet in my back during the Yom Kippur War. Although I underwent a series of operations, I am still crippled and unable to stand, and the doctors have decided to amputate one of my legs. A friend suggested that I visit the *Hacham*, who is able to bring miracles through his prayers. At first I refused, but out of desperation I have come to plead with the rabbi for help."

"Do you put on *tefillin* every day?" Hacham Yisrael asked.

"No," came the response.

"Do you keep *Shabbat*?"

"No."

"If such is the case," Hacham Yisrael replied, "then you should be thankful that only one leg is in danger. We believe that Hashem gives us healthy limbs so that we may serve Him. Those who don't keep the *mitzvot* should regard their healthy limbs as undeserved gifts."

At that, the young man burst into tears. Hacham Yisrael looked him in the eye and asked, "If I bless you with the ability to stand, will you then begin to observe the *mitzvot*?"

"Yes," the young man eagerly replied.

"Then give me your hand and may you have a complete recovery."

After the young man kissed Hacham Yisrael's hand, *Rabbanit* Abuhassera told him to try to stand. To the young man's sheer astonishment, he was able to stand up right there and then, and even took a number of steps without assistance.

Overcome by emotion, the young man burst out of the rabbi's house in search of a telephone. The nearest telephone was in Yeshivat Hanegev, a few feet away from Hacham Yisrael's home, and so the young man raced to the yeshiva, and called his family to tell them about the miracle. The yeshiva students overheard the conversation, took the man by his hands, and erupted in spontaneous, emotion-filled dancing. A short while later, the young man returned with a group of yeshiva students to Hacham Yisrael's house, where a special celebration was held in honor of the miracle. This man had a full, complete recovery – to the point where he could hardly remember ever needing a wheelchair. Needless to say, he fulfilled his promise to the rabbi and fully committed himself to strict Torah observance from that day on!