

# HACHAM MEIR ABUCHATZERA

(BABA MEIR)

SALE, MOROCCO

5677 - 5743 / 1917 - 1983



With tremendous gratitude  
to Hashem Yitbarach we dedicate this  
chapter in honor of our dear Rav

*Harav Aminadav Mahilouf  
Krispin, Shlita*

Son-in-law of

*Rabbi Meir Abouhatzeira zt"l*

May he together with the Rabanit, Shetihyeh,  
continue to be a source of light and blessing for  
Am Yisrael, and may Hashem bless them with  
good health and long life and much nachat.

*Chaim and Jodie Touboul & Family*



# HACHAM MEIR ABUCHATZERA (BABA MEIR)

**H**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 him 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 Mishna quotes a *tanna* without mentioning his name, it always refers to R' Meir.'<sup>1</sup> The Baba Sali listened to the words of his teacher and when his son was born, he named him 'Meir.'<sup>2</sup>

When the Baba Sali decided to move to Eretz Yisrael in 5693/1933 he suggested that R' Meir, at the age of sixteen, take over the reins of the Yeshiva. The Baba Sali had led the

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<sup>1</sup> *Masehct Sanhedrin (27:A)*

<sup>2</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 mila. This was because the night before the brit mila, R' Shalom Sharaby (Rashash) appeared in the Baba Sali's dream and asked him to name the child after him.*

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 Yeshiva in the reliable hands of his son did not mean a lowering of the Yeshiva'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 Yeshiva, even though he was not yet married.

In 5705/1945, R' Meir was appointed *Hacham* of Midelt on the recommendation of the Rabbinic leadership of Morocco.<sup>3</sup> He fulfilled this task in a remarkable manner. A local resident, his trusty assistant R' Yehuda 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 which drew unlearned people to him and made them want to do *teshuvah* happily, truly, and with all their hearts.

*Hacham* 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 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.

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<sup>3</sup> A market town and former French administrative post in central Morocco.

## *A Precious Vessel*

When 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



*Baba Haki sitting & second to right is Baba Meir*

*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 *halacha*. 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."



## *The Importance of Selichot*

One 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 *shliach 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 *kehilla* 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 *shliach 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.

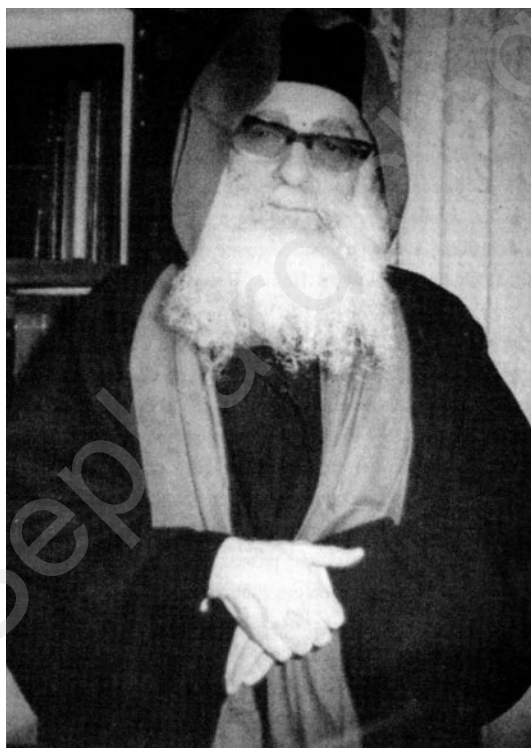
## *Baba Meir the Sandak*

A local resident entered 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 *zechut* of Baba Meir the man named his son after the *Saddik*.

## Respecting One's Teacher

**R**' Meir'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 Yeshiva 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 Yeshiva, 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



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came to the *bet midrash* 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 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 yeshiva and no longer got involved with the dispute. He felt that *kavod* to his teacher is greater than knowing that he was correct.



## *Shmirat Ayin*

**I**n 1973, on a visit to France, the Baba Sali stayed at the home 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, but 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*

**R**' Ben-Sion Mutzafi was once visiting Baba Meir. R' Ben-Sion was discussing *divre* Torah with him, and it was soon time for *Mincha*.<sup>4</sup> R' Meir told him they were going to walk to the *bet hakneset*. They walked and continued their discussion of *divre* Torah the entire way. All of the sudden 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 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 *divre* Torah.

## *Zechut of Baba Meir*

**W**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 scatter 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.

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<sup>4</sup> R' Ben-Sion Mutzafi *shlita* (son of R' Yaakob Mutzafi *zt"l*) said that 'the fear and respect Baba Meir had for the *bet hakneset* was something to perceive.'

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



*R' Meir Abuchatzera (Baba Meir)*

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*.

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