Hamekubal Harav Mordechai Sharaby, z”l

Weekly Biography

Harav Mordechai Sharaby, the famed mekubal, was born in Tzfat. Already at the youngest of ages, he was seen by the Rabbbanim to be the up and coming Torah header of Yemenite Jewry.

Shortly after his wedding, Rav Mordechai moved to Erets Yisrael. He settled in Yerushalaim, where he became close with many of the holy city’s mekubalim. He joined the Yeshiva of Harav Yerucham Osher. Later, he founded his own yeshivah, Nahar Shalom, named for his grandfather the Rashash.

Rav Mordechai was also known for his many mishmash and yeshivot. He was very active in drawing many back to the Torah, never despairing from any lost soul.

He was niftar on 20 Cheshvan 5744/1983, and was buried on Har Hamenuhot.

Phenomenal Mind

Harav Mordechai Sharaby, a grandson of the famed Mekubal the Rashash, was born in 5672/1912 in Tzfat, Yemen. The Rashash’s family name Sharaby came from the city Sharab in which the Rashash was born in Yemen. His father was Rav Yehuda Sharaby.

It is tradition that the Yemenite Jews descend from Shlomo Yaakov Yehudah, who was born in the towns of Zorah and Peretz. In the family of Rav Mordechai Sharaby it is known that they were descended from the Rashash, both from his father and his mother.

His grandfather was Rav Yehuda Sharaby, who served for many years as Rav in Sharab. Rav Yehuda Sharaby was known for his kavanah. He was one of the outstanding talmei chachamim of his time. Rav Yehudah was niftar before his son was born. His grandson, Rav Miriam, was niftar when he was just four years old, leaving him an orphan.

When brought to the home of his grandfather, Rav Yehuda Sharaby, who tended to him as a father to a son.

Rav Mordechai first went to school in the local yeshivah. Since he was very bright, and realizing he could deepen his learning, his grandfather set aside several hours a day to teach him. Afterward he learned in the yeshivah of Rav Chaim Shmuel Samuni, and later in the yeshivah in Aden.

Even as a young boy, Mordechai Sharaby displayed teaching abilities caught the attention of his teachers, who appointed him — when he was only eight years old — to be a maoir, a teacher. His style was to make things palpably clear. When he was nine, he was ordained as a Shabbos, dealing with the melachah of weaving, he brought his class to the home of a relative who was a weaver and explained the Mishnayos while pointing out on the loom the relevant parts and actions. Some of his students were twice his age, but he succeeded in his role.

At the bar mitzvah, which was attended by the leading Rabbbanim of the city, Mordechai Sharaby expressed his love to the drasha that he expounded on all the seventy sorts of trophys that are possessed by the animals, clearly detailing each one.

It was then that the Yemenites of Yemen realized the great potential this young boy had. At the age of just fifteen, Rav Mordechai took a public test on the fourth section of Shulchan Aruch and the Ramah, by all the Rabbbanim of Yemen. It was clear from this test that he was fluent in all of Shas as well.

Rav Mordechai’s scholarship, kodesh and success in teaching brought him to the attention of Harav Salim Sa’di, then Av Beis din of Sharab. Rav Sa’di prevailed upon Rav Mordechai to move to the city of Aden. There, Rav Mordechai assisted Rav Sa’di in responding to the halachic queries he received from all corners of Yemen and in administering the needs of Alcha’s large local kehillah. That same year, he was sent by Rav Sa’di to be a moir in the city of Jebel Chabashi.

Rav Mordechai passed away in 1983.

Rav Mordechai’s family lived in Rechovot, where he was forced to work in the orchards, a work that he wasn’t accustomed to. Therefore, he left Rechovot and settled in Yerushalaim.

His family name was originally Yefet, but when he reached Yerushalaim he began to use the name Sharabi, explaining that it was a acronym for the phrase Shalom rav of Eretz Yisrael. This was also the name that his grandfather the Rashash went by, as mentioned earlier.

As the Rashash, Rav Mordechai, too, hid his ways from public eyes. He lived a very lonely life. Dr. Wallach, of the Shaarei Tzedek hospital, who recognized his greatness, supported him with one lira a month.

Rav Mordechai became close with the leading mekubalim in Yerushalaim, among them Harav Shalom Hazeida.

His daily schedule, which he maintained for decades, through illnesses, poverty and countless other hardships, was a lesson in dedication and singularity of purpose. He rose before dawn, and began his ‘day’ with Tikkun Chatzos, followed by learning in the sefer Eitz Chaim, which he learned until Shacharis at the nof.

Rav Mordechai’s dedication in teaching Shas. When he was young, his father used to bring him to the yeshivah in Aden, where he studied with his grandfather. When he was old enough, his father sent him to study in the yeshivah in 1912.

His deep love for Torah and his dedication to study has earned him the title of "The Rashash." He was known for his devotion to learning and teaching the laws of Torah. His teachings were widely respected and sought after.

Rav Mordechai’s scholarship, kudos, and success in teaching brought him to the attention of Harav Salim Sa’di, then Av Beis din of Sharab. Rav Sa’di prevailed upon Rav Mordechai to move to the city of Aden. There, Rav Mordechai assisted Rav Sa’di in responding to the halachic queries he received from all corners of Yemen and in administering the needs of Alcha’s large local kehillah. That same year, he was sent by Rav Sa’di to be a moir in the city of Jebel Chabashi.

Rav Mordechai went to Yeshivas Beit El, in the Old City, which was headed by the mekubal Harav Shalom Hazeida, who saw in Rav Mordechai the leading mekubal in the next generation.

Rav Mordechai later founded his own yeshivah, Nahar Shalom, named for his grandfather the Rashash, in his minyan davening was intended to be with the kavanos of the Arizal as explained by the Rashash. Saying each word only after mentally working through the kavanos takes time and pro- ficiency, and Rav Mordechai frequently said he would open his mouth only after having thought clearly about what he was going to say. Rav Mordechai’s Shemoneh Esrei took about an hour, and during the shaliach tzibbur’s repetition, which also took about an hour, Rav Shulchan Aruch insisted that people hold their own kavanos and listen intently to the words being read aloud.

Thus, when Rav Mordechai, he taught Torah hanahar and Torah hanisar for decades and was a magnetic force in the Machaneh Yehudah neighborhood.

Expert in Nigliah and Nisar

Aside for his expertise in Kabbalah, Rav Mordechai was also known for his outstanding knowledge in Torah halakhah. He initiated a shirah in Ramah in which he explained those topics gener-ally known that the Yemenite Jews passed according to the Ramah.

When later the Rambam, they would learn the relevant Tur, Beis Yosef and Shulchan Aruch. Although he was not the first to do so in those years, Rav Mordechai’s books in these topics were today Roshei Yeshivah and Roshei Kollel. He was a tzaddik in his own location, and he truly served as a magnet drawing people.

Later Years

When the Rebbetzin passed away in 1957, Rav Mordechai’s health began to decline sharply. Racked with illnesses and a weak heart, he retained his demanding schedule and managed to conceal his physical pain he often suffered. Walking became first difficult and later impossible. When nec-essaries were poured over him, he would carry them. Six difficult years after his wife’s passing, Rav Mordechai suffered a heart attack.

It is related that in the beginning of the week that the Rav Rebbe spoke in the Baba Sali turned to the people who were in his room and said, “I see a terrible thing that’s going to happen, I see a lot of Jewish blood will be spilled, children and adults, plain people and great people.” And indeed, and davened that entire day, which was 17 Cheshvan, the Baba Sali prayed and occasionally sighed. Even though he was now 90 years old he fasted the entire day.

The people in his home knew that the word was measured and yet they were very scared. The next morning after Shacharis, the Baba Sali stood up and said in a sign of relief: “Baruch HaShem, the terrible calamity was averted; one of the rebbirim of the generation spoke for the generation.” The people listened, not knowing that he was talking among, some thought he was speaking to someone else.

As they were wondering — the

Please turn to page C42 ▶
The Man Behind the Revolution

In 1977, he began teaching for an organization called Moreschet Avot that ran outreach programs for nominally observant Bnei Akiva girls. It was Rabbi Moshe Reiss of Moreschet Avot who came up with the idea of arranging a full-length seminar geared specifically toward completely secular people. The idea was unheard of.

"My good friend Dr. Shalom Spreenik and I were invited to lecture," says Rabbi Inbal. "Over the course of the seminar, we discovered that a fundamental difference existed between us and the seminar's administration. The secular academic background of Shalom and I shared part of us at a unique position. Whereas other educators were teaching from the texts, we emphasized speaking to the secular world in their own language, making a revolution from the inside out. We decided to put together our own seminar."

Thankfully, Rabbi Avraham Becker was also excited by their vision. Rabbi Becker, who had been running a small organization that gave classes for secular adults and teens, believed that what Rabbi Inbal and Rabbi Spreenik described could take the world of Jewish outreach to a whole new level. He was right. With great mesirah nefesh, Rabbi Becker put in the necessary legwork to find funding for the revolutionary new enterprise.

The rest is history. "One of our students during that very first Arachim seminar was Rabbi Yosi Wallis," notes Rabbi Inbal. "Today, Rabbi Wallis serves as the CEO for Arachim's international outreach ventures."

The blessings of Hakadosh Barukh Hu and the emphatic support of the Gedolim continued to accompany the organization to this day. Rabbi Shalom Spreenik and Rabbi Tzvi Inbal's vision has led to Arachim outreach centers in cities around the world, from Hong Kong to Los Angeles to Johannesburg. The impact the organization has had on all strata of Israeli society is legendary. The number of lectures, seminars, workshops, and other outreach services the organization has run to date are too many to enumerate.

"Where would thousands of Jewish people be without the antireligious upbringing and other challenges that formed Rabbi Tzvi Inbal's life?" The Gemara assures us that there are many messengers to bring people to the One above, but Rabbi Tzvi Inbal was the one who stepped up to the plate and grabbed his opportunity. Now he's one of the greatest spiritual billionaires of our generation.

Imagine yourself in his shoes. Now imagine yourself in yours.

To learn more about Arachim and to seize your opportunity to participate in its success, call (718) 633-1409/310 in the USA, (03) 579-6035 in Israel, or e-mail arachim@thejnet.com.