

Hamekubal Harav Mordechai Sharaby, *zt"l*

Harav Mordechai Sharabi, the famed *mekubal*, was born in Taiz. Already at the youngest of ages, he was seen by the Rabbanim to be the up and coming Torah leader of Yemenite Jewry.

Shortly after his wedding, Rav Mordechai moved to Eretz Yisrael. He settled in Yerushalayim, where he became close with many of the holy city's *mekubalim*. He joined the Yeshiva Beit El in the Old City. Later, he founded his own *yeshivah*, Nahar Shalom, named for his grandfather the Rashash.

Rav Mordechai was also known for his many *mofsim* and *yeshuos*. He was very active in drawing many back to the ways of Torah, never despairing from any lost soul.

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

Phenomenal Mjnd

Harav Mordechai Sharabi, a grandson of the famed *Mekubal* of the Rashash, was born in 5672/1912 in Taiz, Yemen. The Rashash's family name Sharabi came from the city Sharab in which the Rashash was born in Yemen. His father was Rav Yehudah Taizi.

It is tradition that the Yemenite Jews descend from Shevet Yehudah, from his sons Zorach and Peretz. In the family of Rav Mordechai Sharaby it is known that they were descended from Peretz ben Yehudah, both from his father and his mother.

His grandfather was Rav Yefes ben Avraham, who served for many years as Rav in Sharab. Rav Yefes Avraham was known for his *anavah*, and he was one of the outstanding *talmidei chachamim* of his time. Rav Yehudah was *niftar* before his son was born and his mother, Miriam, was *niftar* when he was just four years old, leaving him an orphan.

He was brought to the home of his grandfather, Rav Yefes Avraham, 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 from Harav Chaim Sanuani, and later in the *yeshivah* in Aden.

Even as a young boy, Mordechai's outstanding teaching abilities caught the attention of his teachers, who appointed him — when he was only eight years old — to be a *mori*, a teacher. His style was to make things palpably clear. When he taught *Mishnayos 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 his bar mitzvah, which was attended by the leading Rabbanim of the city, Mordechai mesmerized his listeners with his *drashah*, in which he expounded on all the seventy sorts of *treifos* that are possible in animals, clearly detailing each one.

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

Rav Mordechai's scholarship, *kedushah* and success in teaching came to the attention of Harav Salim Sa'id, then *Av beis din* of Sharab. Rav Sa'id prevailed upon Rav Mordechai to move to his own city of Alchada. There, Rav Mordechai assisted Rav Sa'id in responding to the halachic queries he received from all corners of Yemen and in administering the needs of Alchada's large local *kehillah*.

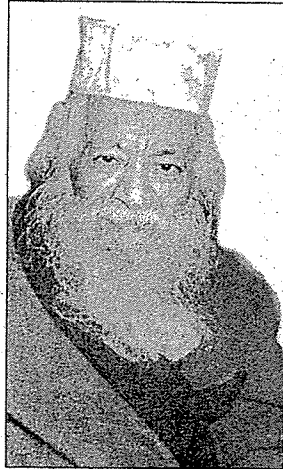
The following year, he was sent by Rav Sa'id to be a *mori* in the city of Jebel Chabashi.

When Rav Sa'id passed away, Rav Mordechai moved to Aden, where he was welcomed by Rav Meshumar, head of the *mekubalim* there. The latter offered him a teaching position in the local Talmud Torah but at the same time urged him to delve deeper into the study of *Kabbalah*. Rav Mordechai began to ascend the ladder of knowledge of *Toras hanistar*, aided by additional practices of *perishus* and self-affliction that he took upon himself during this period. Before long, Rav Meshumar insisted that Rav Mordechai deliver a regular *shiur* to the *mekubalim*.

When Rav Mordechai reached the age of marriage, he set out for Sharab. On the way he stopped at a small village named Achwiha, where a *shidduch* was proposed to him with a nine-year-old orphan girl — as was the prevalent custom at the time in Yemen, that the girls marry at nine years old — who was known throughout the village for her acts of *chessed*. Rav Mordechai agreed, and he married Rabbanit Leah. Every so often, Rav Sharabi would return to Aden to visit Rav Meshumar and to clarify with the *chachamim* there any questions he had.

To Eretz Yisrael

All his life, Rav Mordechai wished to be *zocheh* to move to Eretz Yisrael. In 5691/1931, soon after his marriage, he and his wife undertook the arduous journey to Eretz Yisrael. They had to be smuggled through the



border to Port Said in Egypt, and from there by boat to Yaffo. Upon arrival, Rav Mordechai kissed the earth of Eretz Yisrael.

Initially, Rav Mordechai and his 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 Yerushalayim.

His family name was originally Yefet, but when he reached Yerushalayim he began to use the name Sharabi, explaining that it was an acronym for the phrase *Shalom rav al Bnei 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 trying 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 Yerushalayim, among them Harav Yaakov Lopes.

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 *chatzos*; he began his 'day' with *Tikkun Chatzos*, followed by learning in the *sefer Eitz Chaim*, which he learned until *Shacharis* at the *neitz*.

After *Shacharis*, Rav Mordechai would go to Yeshivas Beit El, in the Old City, which was headed by the *mekubal* Harav Shalom Hadeaih, who saw in Rav Mordechai the leading *mekubal* in the next generation.

Rav Mordechai later founded his own *yeshivah*, Nahar Shalom, named after Harav Shalom Sharabi, the Rashash. In his *minyán* 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 proficiency, 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 Sharabi insisted that people hold their *siddurim* open and listen intently to the words being read aloud.

In his *yeshivah*, he taught *Toras hanigleh* and *Toras hanistar* for decades and was a magnetic force in the Machaneh Yehudah neighborhood.

Expert in Nigleh and Nistar

Aside for his expertise in *Kabbalah*, Rav Mordechai was also known for his outstanding knowledge in *Toras hanigleh*. He initiated a *shiur* in Rambam in his *beis medrash*, as it is generally known that the Yemenite Jews *pasken* according to the Rambam.

After the Rambam, they would learn the relevant *Tur*, *Beis Yosef* and *Shulchan Aruch*. As he read or explained the words, Rav Mordechai's eyes took in who was listening and who had just come in, and he had a way of reaching everyone. His words were *shaveh lechol nefesh* — the same explanation that made sense to a person with no background in Torah offered fiery *chiddushim* to scholarly participants of his *shiur*.

After his daily *shiurim*, all before eating anything all morning, at about 10 a.m. until noon, he went home to accept visitors.

One must visualize Rav Mordechai's home to understand what it was like during visiting hours. He lived in a one-room house with a small kitchenette. There were literally only *dalet amos* there. People would come for a *brachah* for recovery from illness, for children and for a host of other needs. In all matters, he gave advice and often led people back to the ways of the Torah.

People often gave Rav Mordechai money for *tzedakah* or in the form of a *pidyon nefesh*. These funds went immediately to the poor or to projects to strengthen Torah and *yiras Shamayim*.

Rav Mordechai was personally involved in starting a Shabbos study group for boys in a local shul. When the local girls became interested in such learning groups as well, his wife began organizing Shabbos study groups for girls.

Rav Mordechai really founded, funded and oversaw these and other such groups as they began to blossom in the Machaneh Yehuda area.

After visiting hours, he would eat a small meal, rest a bit and learn the entire afternoon with the *mekubalim*.

At nighttime, after *Maariv* he gave a *shiur* from the halachic works of the Ben Ish Chai. They

would complete the entire *sefer Ben Ish Chai* on the *parshiyos* of the week each year on Simchas Torah. He would also deliver a *shiur* in *mussar* from the *sefer Menoras Hamiaor*.

Slowly, however, Rav Mordechai's frequent fasts, including the *taanis hafsakah*, which extends from Shabbos to Shabbos, began taking their toll on his health.

Rav Mordechai's wife sometimes commented, "When I complain to my husband that he is ruining his health by fasting he replies, 'Is it for me that I do this? I do it for *Klal Yisrael*, and to atone for the generation.' People think that it's easy to reach the level of *ruach hakodesh* and spiritual achievements. No one knows how much Rav Mordechai afflicted his pure body to purge and protect it from the slightest trace of *tumah*."

Although Rav Mordechai had no children, they always had boys from the neighborhood eat with them. About ten local boys would eat their meals with them, and many of these boys are today *Roshei Yeshivah* and *Roshei Kollel*. He was a *tzaddik* planted in this location, and he truly served as a magnet drawing people back.

Later Years

When the Rebbetzin passed away in 5737/1977, Rav Mordechai's health began to decline sharply. Racked with illnesses and a weak heart, he retained his demanding schedule and managed to conceal the physical pain he often suffered. Walking became first difficult and later impossible. When necessary, his *talmidim* would help carry him. 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 Mordechai Sharaby was *niftar*, the Baba Sali turned to the people that 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 he stood and davened that entire day, which was 17 Cheshvan. The Baba Sali prayed and occasionally sighed. Even though he was over 90 years old he fasted the entire day.

The people in his home knew that every word was measured and yet they were very scared. The next morning after *Shacharis*, the Baba Sali announced with a sigh of relief, "*Baruch Hashem*, the terrible calamity was averted; one of the *tzaddikim* of the generation gave his life away for the generation." The people listening didn't know if he was talking about himself. Some thought he was going to die, or someone else. As they were wondering — the

The Man Behind the Revolution

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who thought that the good food was bad and the bad food was good. I realized that the problem wasn't with the religious people, it was with me." The conditioning of a lifetime was unravelling. The Inbal family was beginning to change.

"I remember sitting in the living room of our friends with the rabbi around this time. I was reaching for a cup of tea when I suddenly felt Rabbi Menat grab my arm and hold it back. My first thought was that maybe the tea was poisoned. I looked up curiously."

"Why don't you say a *brachah* on it?" the rabbi asked Tzvi.

"A lot went through my head. I finally admitted that it must be because I don't know how. The rabbi put a *kippah* on my head for the first time in my life and taught me how to say the *brachah*."

Making History

The Inbal family had finally come home. "Every year for years we made a *seudas hodaah* on the fifth of Adar. That was the day we moved to Kfar Chassidim to join the yeshiva," says the rabbi, beaming. Rabbi Inbal studied full time at Yeshivas Kfar Chassidim for nearly a decade.

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 C.E.O. for Arachim's international outreach ventures.

The blessings of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the emphatic support of the *Gedolim* continue to accompany the organization to this day. Rabbi Shalom Srebreinik 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

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Baba Sali went to find out who from the *tzaddikim* of Yerushalayim was sick. He found out that Rav Mordechai Sharabi was in the hospital and deathly sick.

On Wednesday, Rav Mordechai suffered a massive heart attack. The doctors tried everything, but nothing helped. All the Jews gathered to *daven*, but it seemed that the gates in heaven were closed. At night time his health got worse and the doctors were giving up. One of Rav Mordechai's *talmidim*, Rav Yosef Dayan, ran to the Baba Sali and asked him to *daven* for Rav Mordechai. He replied, "I prayed and did plenty of *tikkunim* for Rav Mordechai, but I feel like a wall is blocking in front of me and is

preventing my *tefillos* from going up to *Shamayim*.

"It seems that Hashem wants to take his *neshamah* and it's not possible to stop. Tomorrow Rav Mordechai will return his *neshamah* to Hashem."

And that's exactly what happened. Just like the Baba Sali said without even knowing that he was sick. He gave away his life just to protect the rest of *Klal Yisrael*.

Rav Mordechai was *niftar* on Thursday, 20 Cheshvan 5744/1983, at the age of seventy-two. He was buried on Har Hamenuchos in Yerushalayim. *Zechuso yagen aleinu*.

Much of the information in this article was pulled from material in a book called *A Treasury of Sephardi Gedolim* by Yehudah Azouli, currently being prepared for publication.

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