

# HACHAM REPHAEL BARUCH TOLEDANO

MEKNES, MOROCCO 5650 (1890) – BNEI BRAK 5731 (1971)  
YOM HILULA: 18 HESHVAN (WHICH FALLS THIS YEAR ON NOVEMBER 16)

**H**ACHAM REPHAEL  
BARUCH  
TOLEDANO ZT"l

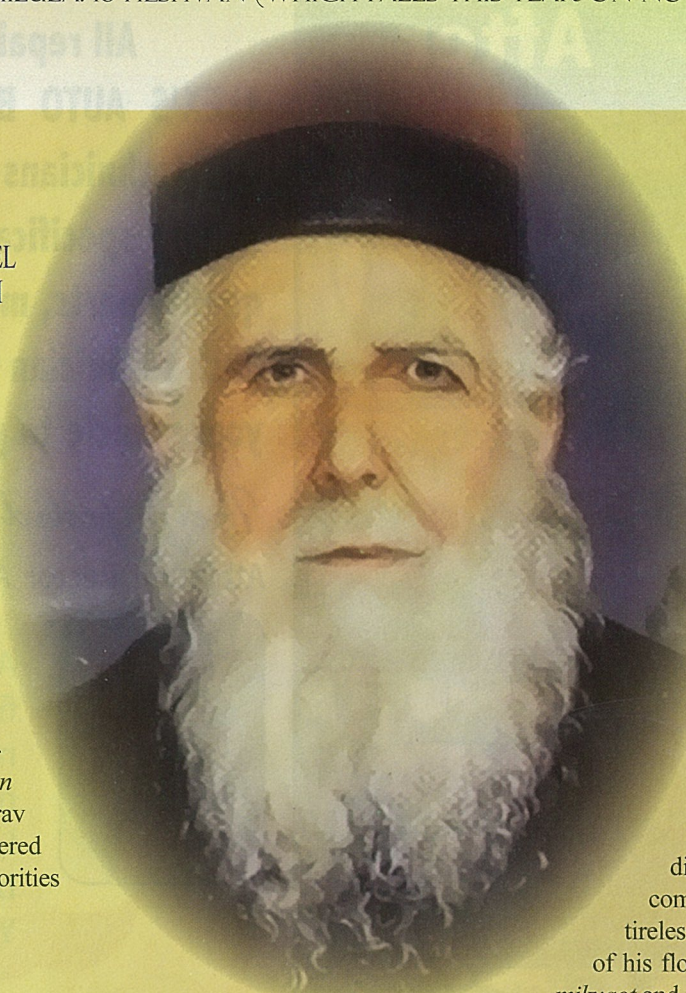
was born in Meknes, Morocco in 5690/1930. His father, Harav Yaakov, was a scion of the illustrious Toledano family that had produced forty generations of *hachamim*, and he himself served as a revered Rabbinic leader in Meknes. Young Raphael received his primary education from his father, who early on in Raphael's youth recognized the boy's sharp mind and extraordinary sensitivity to the needs of others. Raphael studied practical *halacha* under the *dayan* (Rabbinical judge) of Meknes, Harav Haim Mashash, who was considered one of the foremost *halachic* authorities in Morocco at the time.

## HONORING PARENTS

At the age of ten, young Raphael contracted a serious illness that caused him immense discomfort. At one point during his illness, Raphael's childhood friend, Hacham Yosef Mashash, who later served as Chief Rabbi of Haifa, came to visit him and found the boy groaning in pain. His father suddenly entered the room, whereupon Raphael immediately stopped groaning, tightly pursing his lips. When Hacham Yaakov left, Yosef asked Raphael why he had stopped crying, and he answered, "I did not want to upset my father." In order not to cause his father distress by displaying his intense pain in his presence, he instead restrained his groans and bore his pain silently whenever his father was in the room.

## ACHIEVING GREATNESS AT A YOUNG AGE

Gradually, Hacham Raphael forged close relationships with the great *hachamim* in Meknes, particularly with Hacham Haim Berdugo, under whose tutelage Hacham Raphael developed into a widely-acknowledged Talmudic scholar. Later, Hacham Raphael began studying *Kabbalah* with the renowned Kabbalist Rav Yosef Alkobi, and achieved mastery over the *Zohar*, *Sefer Tekunim*, and the



writings of the Ari'zal. Ultimately, Hacham Raphael was recognized as one of the leading sages of Morocco.

While still a young man, Hacham Raphael successfully established a system of social organizations geared to helping the poor in Meknes. His initiatives included a society to assist ill patients, a charity to provide clothing for the needy, and a fund for underprivileged brides.

Upon Hacham Yaakov Toledano's passing, Hacham Raphael succeeded his father and assumed the mantle of leadership in Meknes. Following his father's legendary example, Hacham Raphael distinguished himself as an influential communal leader who involved himself tirelessly in the religious and practical needs of his flock. He paid particular attention to the *mikvaot* and food establishments, ensuring that they adhered to the strictest standards of *halacha*. He also established a *yeshivah*, as well as an adult education program that attracted over 150 people each day. Hacham Raphael also exerted immense efforts in outreach, founding the *Shuvu Banim* organization to help non-observant Jews find their way back to authentic Torah Judaism.

Following the example of his ancestors, Hacham Raphael recited *Tikun Hassot* nightly and frequently observed fasts. Yet, despite the rigors of his demanding schedule of prayer, Torah study and communal activity, he still found the time to travel throughout the country to raise funds for the needy.

## AN UNPLANNED MISSION

Hacham Raphael once traveled to the Atlas Mountains to tend to an important communal need. During his visit, he observed the sorrowful state of poverty suffered by the Jewish residents of one of the towns. Most of this town's Jewish residents did not even have warm clothing for the approaching winter. Children roamed the

streets in tattered shoes, many without socks, and they often suffered from frostbite.

Postponing the original purpose of his visit, Hacham Rephael chose instead to make every effort to alleviate the suffering endured by these destitute Jews. He hurried back to his hometown and embarked on an intensive campaign to collect and deliver material so that the town's residents could be appropriately clothed during the winter months.

Though his fund-raising efforts were indeed successful, he found himself unable to obtain the required materials. This was during the tumultuous period of World War II, when many commodities were rationed. Material for winter clothing was in high demand for army uniforms, and Hacham Rephael could not acquire the materials he needed, for any price.

But as faithful Jews always do when confronted with "impossible" challenges, Hacham Rephael turned to Hashem for help, pouring out his heart in prayer over his sacred *Sefer Tehillim*. But in spite of his heartfelt prayers, the situation only became more difficult for Hacham Rephael.

A messenger soon arrived at the Rabbi's house with an order to come immediately to the governor's mansion. An informant had reported to the governing body that the Rabbi was violating the law with his fundraising activities, which, due to wartime conditions, were strictly banned. The public nature of the Rabbi's infraction rendered it an act of civil defiance, punishable with an extended prison term.

## AN ARRESTING KIDDUSH HASHEM

The governor questioned the Rabbi, asking him why he had committed such a grievous civil offense. Hacham Rephael vividly described to the governor the situation of the residents of the remote Atlas Mountains, depicting the pain and suffering of innocent children during the harsh winter months. He then rose from his chair and placed a sack full of money on the table and, addressing the governor with a firm and confident voice, said, "Your Honor, please note that the entire fundraising campaign was actually done on your behalf. I

have no ties whatsoever to the Atlas Mountains. The only common bond between those people and me is your reputation, as you are the one who administers both districts. I, as a dedicated citizen, have done my civic duty in putting together the funds; I respectfully request that you do your part and make available the cloth that is necessary for immediate shipment to those unfortunate citizens."

The governor was touched and impressed by the Rabbi's courage, brilliance and sensitivity. As a politician, the governor knew that he could bolster his standing among the citizenry by performing this simple act of kindness. He immediately authorized the release of large quantities of the finest winter clothing and their immediate shipment to the affected towns. The clothing was obtained at a small percentage of the actual price, and all shipment costs were covered by the governor's office.

The incident was widely reported in the newspapers and resulted in a remarkable *Kiddush Hashem*, as it publicized the dedication and sensitivity of the Jewish community and its beloved *Hacham*.

## THE GOLDEN YEARS

In 5723/1963, Hacham Rephael immigrated to Eretz Yisrael and settled in Bnei Brak. Despite his advanced age, he traveled throughout Israel, visiting remote villages to bring their Jewish citizens closer to Hashem. He was also very active on behalf of Yeshivat Ohel Moshe, a *yeshivah* for students of Moroccan descent. Hacham Rephael also authored the Sephardic *Kitzur Shulhan Aruch*, a practical synopsis of the authoritative work by Hacham Yosef Karo.

Hacham Raphael Baruch returned his *neshamah* to his Creator on the 18<sup>th</sup> of *Heshvan*, 5731/1971, leaving behind a large family of great *talmidei hachamim*. His legacy continues today in Yeshivat Ohr Baruch in Bayit Vegan, a Torah institution led by his grandson, Rabbi Gavriel Toledano.

*Excerpted from the book  
'A Legacy of Leaders' by Yehuda Azoulay*

