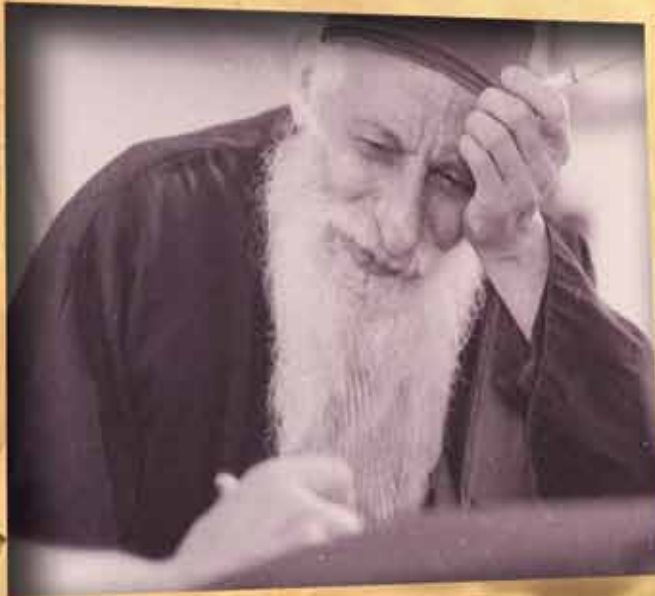


Hamekubal Hacham Yizhak Kaduri z.s.l. (5654–5766/1894–2006)

Marking the five year anniversary
of the passing of one of the last great
Kabbalists of the past generation on
29 Tevet 5771 (January 5, 2011)



YEHUDA AZOULAY

Though he passed away only five years ago, Hacham Yizhak Kaduri belonged to an earlier and greater generation. Born on Hol Hamoed Succot, 1894/5654, into the world of 19th-century Baghdad, he was exposed to a bustling city that was home to hundreds of great Torah scholars. He learned in the Zilka Yeshivah in Baghdad and was a student of the Kerem Shelomo (Hacham Salman Eliyahu, 1878-1940), the Bet Lehem Yehudah (Hacham Yehuda Fetaya, 1859-1942), and, most notably, the Kaf Hahayim (Hacham Yaakov Hayim Sofer, 1870-1939). When Hacham Yizhak was still a young boy, the city's legendary leader, the Ben Ish Hai (Hacham Yosef Haim, 1834-1909), often gave him the job of finding the *sefarim* that the siddik needed. The young boy would quickly pull the books from the bookshelves and hurriedly bring them to the sage.

As Hacham Yizhak grew older, he supplemented his studies of Gemara and halacha with the study of the great works of Kabbalah. In 1911, at the age of 17, he delivered a public lecture in front of a large group of scholars. They were so impressed with his knowledge that they implored him not to lecture publicly again, as he might bring an *ayin hara* (evil eye) upon himself.¹

That same year, Hacham Yizhak left Baghdad and moved to

Israel, where he quickly earned a reputation as an outstanding Torah scholar. His teachers said of him, “*Ari ala mi’ Bavel* – A lion has ascended from Babylonia [Iraq],” borrowing a phrase from the Gemara (Bava Kama 117a) referring to the arrival of a great sage from Babylonia to Israel.

Throughout most of his life, Hacham Yizhak was known by the humble title, “Yizhak Korech – Yizhak the bookbinder.” When someone would bring him a book to bind, he would ask permission to learn the contents of the sefer while binding its exterior. When he returned the book to the owner, often after a month or so, he would apologize for the delay, explaining that he had just finished learning it. He committed many of these books to memory, including some ancient handwritten manuscripts.

Following the Arab capture of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1948, Yeshivat Porat Yosef moved to Jerusalem’s Geulah neighborhood, where Rav Yizhak studied and also began to teach *kabbalah*. He astounded both his students and his peers with his extraordinary talents, quick mind, and broad intellect. Hacham Yizhak came to be known as an expert in the writings of the Arizal (Hacham Yizhak Luria, 1534-1572) and the *kavanot* (thoughts) of the Rashash (Hacham Shalom Sharabi 1720–1777). His memory was legendary. When people asked Hacham Yizhak for the location of an obscure statement of the Arizal, he was able to answer them immediately, without any hesitation.

¹ The Pele Yoess (Rabbi Eliezer Papo, z.s.l., 1770-1828), in the “Derushim” section, suggests that delivering Torah lectures could bring about *ayin hara* if others are jealous of the brilliance of the speaker. He therefore advises public speakers to use a *sefer* while lecturing so it should seem that they are merely repeating what it is in the book and thus avoid *ayin hara*.

Sending the Wine on Time

Hacham Yizhak's concern for others drove him to go to great lengths to assist his fellow Jews in need. Once, before Pesah, Hacham Yizhak was notified that the Jews of Iran were in very short supply of kosher wine; and due to the expense and bureaucratic delays involved in bringing wine across the border, they had little chance to obtain an adequate supply in time for the holidays. The rabbi was distressed over the prospect of Jews being unable to recite *kiddush* or drink the four cups of wine at the *seeder*. So he devised a plan and set it into action. Hacham Yizhak approached an Iranian government official who held him in high regard and would often come to request a blessing from him. He told the official that he wanted to make a gesture to the Jews of Iran. Hacham Yizhak explained that he had special bottles of wine that he "blessed" and then distributed to other Jews. If the Iranian Jews could receive the blessed wine, it would lift their spirits. The rabbi thus requested from the Iranian government official to arrange for the shipment of this wine from Israel to Iran.

The government official relished the opportunity to show off his official authority and power. Within a short time, and without bureaucratic delays, a shipment of wine arrived in Iran and was distributed among Jewish families in time for Pesah.

Food for the Journey Ahead

Hacham Yaakov Hillel, *shelita*, presently the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Hevrat Ahavat Shalom, once recalled a conversation he had with Hacham Yizhak.

"Five years ago," he said, "Rabbi Kaduri gave me an envelope filled with shekels and dollars. The shekels were for Hacham Yizhak's yeshivah, and he called the dollars 'sedah laderech – food for the journey ahead.' He explained, 'When I go up to heaven, I want some merit to accompany me.' He wanted the money to be distributed to charity after he left this world, so that the extra *mitzvot* would bring him merit.

"He needs extra?! Imagine – such a great *talmid hacham*, and he is concerned that he does not yet have enough merits to accompany him to Heaven!"

By the time Hacham Yizhak passed away, Rav Hillel had accumulated approximately 50 such envelopes from the Hacham, containing cash totaling some \$100,000! Each envelope had a handwritten note inside stating, "This money is from Hacham Yizhak Kaduri, to be distributed as *sedah laderech*."

The Merit of His Kameiyah

Once, a father traveled to Israel with his son to meet with Hacham Yizhak. Three weeks earlier, the boy had undergone surgery to remove a brain tumor and the doctors were still unsure of his chances for recovery. It was not easy for the father to arrange a meeting with the renowned sage, but, desperately seeking Hacham Yizhak's blessing, he expended great efforts and eventually succeeded.

They arrived for their scheduled appointment, and only the boy was allowed in to see the rabbi. He handed Rabbi Kaduri the note his father wrote describing his ordeal. After reading the paper, Rabbi Kaduri reached over to a pile of *kelafim* (sheets of

parchment) that was on the table and wrote something on it. He then wished him success in Arabic, followed by the blessing of "yevarechecha Hashem veyishmarecha..."

The boy was then given a *kameiyah* (amulet) along with a paper containing instructions. Twice a day for ten days, he was to dip the *kameiyah* in water and then drink the water. After ten days, he was to roll it up from left to right, wrap it in plastic, sew it in a cloth, and attach it to a string. He was told to wear it, but was not told for how long.

The boy returned to the United States and underwent the necessary chemotherapy treatments, making a full recovery. He recounted that after his meeting with Hacham Yizhak, he and his father consulted with Hacham David Abuhatzera of Nahariya. "He told us that he was skeptical about most *kameiyot* – except those from Rabbi Kaduri, especially if he had written it himself. He said that I must wear the *kameiyah* as a *zechut* [source of merit] for me. I resolved to wear it every day since."

Several years later, the boy, who was by then a young man, was driving, when he blacked out and crashed into a utility pole. "Baruch Hashem I walked away unscathed," he later recalled, "but I immediately realized that I had forgotten to put on the *kameiyah* that day."

Today, that young man has a beautiful family and spends his time learning in a kollel.²

Mystical Knowledge

There was a school in Jerusalem that was frequently victimized by theft. The problem grew progressively worse and spiraled out of control. It became clear that one of the students was committing the thefts, but the principal could not find the culprit. Finally, he decided to ask Hacham Yizhak for help.

"Write down the names of all the students in the school on pieces of paper," the rabbi instructed. "Take every individual name, crumple it up, and bring all the papers to me."

The next day, the principal gave a little bag filled with all the students' names to the Hacham. Rabbi Kaduri then took a bowl of water and spilled out all the pieces of paper into the bowl. He recited a certain verse under his breath three times, and all the papers floated to the top of the water, except one, which sank to the bottom.

Rabbi Kaduri told the principal, "Put your hand in the water and take that paper out; it will tell you which student is causing all the mischief in the school." When the principal returned to the school, he investigated the matter and caught the thief red-handed.

Hacham Yizhak left this world on 29 Tevet, 5766/2006, at the age of 111. The *yom hilula* of the fifth year since his passing will be on January 5, 2011.

The eulogies at his funeral described him as a man who needed very little for himself, yet never hesitated to pray that others should have everything they desired. May his memory serve as an inspiration to our generation.

Yehuda Azoulay is the author of A Legacy of Leaders, a groundbreaking English series containing biographies and stories of Sephardic hachamim. More information and articles can be found on his website at www.Sephardiclegacy.com

² This story was personally told to the author by the subject, who today learns in kollel in Lakewood.