

## Death Of The Chief Sephardic Rabbi Of Jerusalem

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Jerusalem's Chief Sephardic Rabbi and Morocco's retired Chief Rabbi HaRav HaRashi Shalom Messas זס"ל, passed away Shabbat HaGadol, in Jerusalem. He was Head of the city's Rabbinical Court. Born in 1913 to HaRav Mimoun Messas and Rachel Soudry, he grew up in Morocco. There, Messas attended an *Alliance Israélite Universelle* school. He was a promising Torah prodigy at a very young age, and was a leading student of Morocco's Chief Rabbi HaRav Yehoshua Berdugo. As a young man, he was said to be a very handsome and in his eyes one could see a high level of intelligence as well as kindness.



The Messas family is an old one, with roots deep within Spain and Portugal. A scion of old Moroccan rabbis, in contemporary times his cousin HaRav Yosef Messas was Haifa's Chief Rabbi, and his son HaRav David Messas, is currently the Chief Rabbi of Paris. Shalom Messas was appointed Chief Rabbi of Casablanca at the young age of 36, he later served as Chief Rabbi of all Morocco.

In 1978, then-Israeli Chief Rabbi HaRav Obadiah Yossef shlita asked HaRav Messas to come to the holy city and become its chief Sephardic rabbinical authority. When he departed for Israel, HaRav Messas was escorted to the airport by Morocco's King Hassan himself, who requested that the Rabbi bless him one last time before his departure, and with that was his last official act in Moroccan.

White bearded and distinguished looking, the 90-year-old rabbi had worked on important matters of Halacha right up to his last days. He was said to be very exact in preserving Sephardic customs, and would work full days and nights to try to find a Halachic way to solve the issue at hand. As an author of many books, he wrote his first significant scholarly work, "Mizrach Shemesh" in 1930, and his last work, "V'Cham HaShemesh" on the Five Books of the Tora, which was published just last week.

Messas served as Jerusalem's Chief Rabbi for a quarter of a century. He fought to preserve the customs of Moroccan Sephardim in Israel, even intellectually disputing his colleague HaRav Obadiah Yossef on more than one occasion. It was said he, "staunchly defended" the unique customs of Morocco's Jewish community among the differing groups of Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in Eretz Israel.

Upon news of his death, Rabbi Eliyahu Aberjil, a student of Messas told the Israeli media, "it's a tremendous loss, there can be no replacement for him." HaRav Messas was laid to rest in the holy city of Jerusalem's Har Menuchot cemetery Sunday 11 Nisan, April 13. His funeral was accompanied by many thousands of teary-eyed mourners who made the journey in order to pay their respect to the departed leader. May the memory of HaRav Messas זס"ל be a blessing for Klal Yisrael, and may his merit speed our ultimate redemption.

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