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## **Modernity and Charisma in Contemporary Israel: The Case of Baba Sali and Baba Baruch**

by

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Close-up of Baba Sali from a [National Religious Party](#) election campaign poster from 1977. From *Contest of Symbols: The Sociology of Election Campaigns through Israeli Ephemera*, by Hanna Herzog, 1987. Harvard University Library, p. 51.

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### **Introduction**

**RABBI ISRAEL ABU-HATZERA ("BABA SALI")**, a renowned and pious sage and scion of a most virtuous Jewish family from southern Morocco, passed away in January 1984 at the ripe old age of 94. In the years that have elapsed since his death, Baba Sali's grave-site, located in the southern development town of Netivot, has swiftly become a national monument and a major pilgrimage centre. The celebration on the rabbi's death anniversary (*hillula*) draws to Netivot between 100,000 and 150,000 followers. In a country like Israel, which is replete with holy sanctuaries and age-old pilgrimage traditions, the emergence of this celebration as the second most popular religious gathering in the country (second only to the congregation in Meiron) is at the very least impressive.

The *hillula* at Netivot represents one rather dramatic indicator of a much wider process by which Baba Sali was established as a *tsaddiq* (saint) for our time, the saint of Israel of the 1980s. In Judaism, in contrast to Catholicism,<sup>1</sup> saints have never undergone formal canonization. Despite this, the strength of popular sentiments clearly indicates that Baba Sali has been placed on the most exalted level in the Jewish pantheon of pious personages, reaching the stature of such charismatic sages as Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yohai and Rabbi Meir Baal Ha-ness. In almost any urban settlement one may find a street or a synagogue bearing his name. His picture appears in more Israeli houses than any other Jewish figure, and his portrait adorns a surprisingly wide selection of holy artifacts and mundane objects (from prayer books and calendars to clocks and key-holders).

While Baba Sali was already considered a virtuous figure during his lifetime, his son and successor, Rabbi Baruch ("Baba Baruch") was far removed from his father's lifestyle of learning, piety, and asceticism. Though raised and educated by his father in Erfud (in Tafillelt, southern Morocco), in his youth Baruch spent many years in Paris disengaged from the traditional ambience of his Moroccan hometown. Having followed his father to Israel in the mid-1960s, he decided to pursue a political career, and was soon elected to the post of deputy mayor in Ashkelon (another southern town in which Baba Sali lived before moving to Netivot). It was in this capacity that Baruch Abu-Hatzera was accused of corruption and bribery, found guilty and sentenced to a long term in prison. After being paroled (he received an early release after serving five years in prison) he joined his father and was with Baba Sali during the last three months of the saint's life.

Yet despite the stigma that seriously corroded his public image and the existence of other (perhaps more) worthy contenders for succession within the Abu-Hatzera family, Baba Baruch has managed to take his father's mantle and to step into his shoes (in both cases figuratively as well as literally). He took possession of his father's big house in Netivot and arranged for his burial in the local cemetery (about half a mile from the house). Baruch did this despite the fact that Baba Sali had apparently already secured himself a resting place in one of the holiest spots in the country: the cemetery on Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. In a relatively short time he transformed the informal network of his father's supporters and adherents in Israel and abroad into a very efficient organization through which the institutionalization of Baba Sali's charisma has been carried on. Relying on the generous contributions of these supporters and adherents, he has built in and around the burial site a magnificent sanctuary and an elaborate precinct to cater to future pilgrims. He has also proposed and begun an ambitious project in the area spanning the sanctuary and the house by erecting a religious campus and a residential quarter (modelled on the Jewish *mellahs* of Tafillelt). While Baba Baruch's public image is still controversial and, in any event, falls short of his father, it appears safe to say that he has established his hegemony over wide circles of Moroccan Jews as his father's legitimate successor and as the leading contemporary representative of the Abu-Hatzera family's specially blessed, powerful character.

In this essay we would like to discuss two sets of questions related to the manner by which Baba Sali and Baba Baruch have been transformed into "modern saints." The first set focuses on the mechanisms underlying the genesis of Baba Sali as the holiest figure in present-day Israel. The intriguing quality of this process lies its swiftness and pervasiveness more than its course and direction. Having been consensually viewed as a worthy carrier of the Abu-Hatzera family's glorious tradition, Baba Sali was already considered a sainted figure in his lifetime. Yet for a contemporary rabbi, virtuous and venerable as he may have been, to transcend within

half-a-decade the bounds of historical reality to become a legendary figure (challenging comparison with the most popular luminaries in the Jewish pantheon of sainted personages) appears quite extraordinary. Charismatization<sup>2</sup> or "mythologization" of such magnitude are usually lengthy historical processes which prefer "a remote and malleable past to a recent one, perhaps too painful or too well known."<sup>3</sup>

The second set of questions centre on the emergence of Baba Baruch as his father's successor: in a word, given his precarious personal background, how could his claims for the legitimacy of his position receive such wide support and validation. The combination of a most unfitting personal history (lack of formal religious education, secular-political orientation, alleged adultery, conviction for corrupt practices) and the presence of other family members, enjoying an impeccable public image, makes these questions all the more intriguing.

## The Charismatization of Baba Sali

Close-up of Baba Sali from a Tami Party election campaign poster from 1981. From Herzog, p. 53.

Let us begin by making our analytical approach clear. In discussing the charismatization of Baba Sali we base our examination on a retrospective review of Baba Sali's life and sense of mission as these were presented and spread by his followers and particularly by his son. Needless to say, our interest lies in the "narrative truth" that produced the heavy mythological rearrangement of the late rabbi's life rather than in historically authentic life-events. We do not, however, assume that the transformation from mundane history to a mythologized story should be taken for granted. Rather, the very swiftness and pervasiveness of this transformation should be accounted for as a major factor in the process of charismatization.

Two important background factors appear to have been necessary conditions for Baba Sali's consecration to take place. First, it should be emphasized that the folk-veneration of saints was a major (if not *the* major) constituent in the collective identity of the Jews in North Africa.<sup>4</sup> Indeed as we have shown elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> these hagiolatric traditions have not been attenuated in Israel. For Moroccan-born Israelis and their descendants (now constituting the biggest single Jewish ethnic group in the country) the cultural idiom of saint worship is still viable, being ubiquitously employed to articulate a wide range of experiences. Second, within this "saint-fraught" ambience the Abu-Hatzeras stand out as the most virtuous of Jewish Moroccan families. Pious rabbis and sages adorn the family's genealogy through many generations and establish a strong sense of ascribed blessedness and divine grace (*zekhut avot*). As a living descendent of this holy family, Baba Sali thus provided a focus for the amorphous hagiolatric sentiments which were previously directed towards other Jewish Moroccan saints, whose tombs had been left behind,

and in a sense, "deserted" upon emigrating to Israel. These background conditions thus constituted a very advantageous starting point for both father's and son's quests for holiness. Yet, in the case of Baba Sali these factors cannot be cited as a satisfactory explanation for his meteoric ascent to saintly status. This is because his followers and believers include many people who are not first or second generation Moroccans living in Israel.

As we see it, Baba Sali's "lifestyle," as moulded and recreated by his son and by his adherents, has been turned into a public image marked by piety and sanctity. Baba Sali is depicted as an ascetic and, in a sense, passive figure, entirely devoid of mundane concerns. He is said to have seldom left his house, having his synagogue and ritual-bath located within its confines, and thus compelled his devotees to come to him. Having devoted much of his time to solitary praying and mystical learning, often accompanied by lengthy, almost week-long fasts, he radiated an image of humble self-sufficiency, constriction and contraction, inward orientedness and "invisibility;" when he participated in collective prayers in his house, he often did so, hidden in a small cell, adjacent to the synagogue. His external appearance reinforced this set of images, since Baba Sali, an exceptionally tall man in his youth, was very thin and seemed to shrink due to old age and excessive fasting. The traditional garments he wore covered his body completely, leaving only part of his face exposed. The basis of this image of asceticism, contraction, and resignation was clearly shaped by the rabbi's actual conduct during his lifetime. His withdrawn behaviour captured the imagination of the masses and produced a fertile matrix for mythologizing his figure.

For all this, however, for a private story to achieve the power of a national myth centred around the power of a unique individual, it has to "go public." Thus the details of what was hidden, invisible, and ineffable in Baba Sali's life, had to be highlighted and publicized. This was done primarily by Baba Baruch (and by his organization) through a coordinated effort to publish and spread information regarding the late rabbi's life and deeds. The painstaking promulgation of stories related to the major events of Baba Sali's life, together with the relentless manufacturing and marketing of artifacts bearing his portrait, began a process whereby the invisible was brought to the limelight and inscribed in the consciousness of the Israeli public. Though relying on primordial sentiments and promoting traditional values, this sophisticated and well-contrived undertaking has clearly taken advantage of the opportunities provided by modern technology, the media, and the state-apparatus. Thus the praise of the saint, his pious behaviour and miraculous feats were written down and published in nicely decorated brochures and books (in Hebrew and French), which were marketed in Israel and abroad. The same aggressive and skilful marketing is characteristic of the numerous objects carrying Baba Sali's image or that of his shrine. All these objects are produced in modern factories which utilize advanced technologies. Indeed, among the products marketed all over the country are video-cassettes of the saint's *hillula*. Could one ask for more than these mass, machine-produced objects in which the saint's charisma has been "sedimented?"<sup>6</sup> Along these lines, we would suggest that despite the use of traditional idioms involved in promulgating the image of the *tsaddiq*, the use of modern means has been indispensable in successfully "selling the saint." In Ling's terms, what was created around Baba Sali was a "synthetic charisma" controlled and manipulated by the institutional interests of Baba Baruch.<sup>7</sup>

But the promulgation and marketing in themselves, necessary as they may appear, cannot fully account for the phenomenon under discussion. Even if the late rabbi's lifestyle is exposed and minutely described, the crucial question that remains

is what meanings are ascribed to his solitude, asceticism, and mystical practices. The answer, superimposed on the rabbi's passive and reclusive image, is antithetical to this image, yet complementary to it at the same time. Each minor detail in the rabbi's most private behaviour assumes cosmic significance. The passivity and seclusion are thus portrayed by his followers as but misleading "surface" features, since any act of Baba Sali is said actually to transcend his individuality: to bear relevance for the State of Israel and for the Jewish People.

One striking example illustrating this causal link between private behaviour and public event was the rabbi's odd conduct before the Six-Day War in 1967. According to his son, during that tense period he closed himself up in his room, refused to eat in daylight and slept on a mat rather than in a bed. When these ascetic measures were questioned, he explained: "The People of Israel are in great trouble, so how can I eat or sleep in a bed." On the eve of 5 June he is said to have told his older son (Baruch's elder sibling now deceased): "Tomorrow morning the war will break out; I lock myself in the room. Don't let anybody knock on my door, or otherwise disturb me. You will come only to tell me that 400 enemy planes were destroyed." This example—"a well-known story," according to Baruch—accentuates the late rabbi's profound sense of responsibility for the Jewish people and its state.

Accordingly, every major event in Baba Sali's life was "mythologized" by rendering it meaningful on a mystical, other-worldly level and by linking it to a historical or meta-historical event from the Jewish collective heritage. Thus, the fact that he changed his place of residence many times in Morocco and in Israel was rationalized as a deliberate attempt on his part to embody the collective experience of *galut* (exile) which entailed wandering from one place to another. His final settlement in Netivot was accounted for as an emulation of Abraham the Patriarch, who erected his tent in nearby Gerar more than three millennia ago. Likewise, in both oral accounts of his deeds and in his written biographies, he is often straightforwardly compared with the greatest luminaries in Jewish history, from Moses and Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yohai (with whom he was said to have had particular affinity) to the *Besht* (Israel Baal-Shem-Tov), the 18th-century founder of the Hasidic movement. This transcendence of historical bounds was facilitated by the fact that Baba Sali was a practising kabbalist, deeply immersed in Jewish mysticism.

Another factor which facilitated the linkage between apparent passivity, seclusion, and withdrawal on the one hand, and cosmic significance and responsibility on the other, was the Abu-Hatzera family's traditional image as communal leaders deeply involved in public affairs. This image was conducive to interpreting the rabbi's private activities as bearing a general, collectively orientated message. Moreover, the rabbi's stance towards the Zionist endeavour and the secular State of Israel was known to be essentially favourable, despite his uncompromising condemnation of anti-religious values and norms (for example, abortions and activities desecrating the Sabbath). Given this generally positive stance, it was not difficult to depict him as genuinely concerned about the welfare of the country and its inhabitants and to transform him into a patron-saint on a national level. By contrast it would be much more difficult to ascribe such an empathic responsibility to an ultra-orthodox Ashkenazi rabbi, pious as he may be, who is anti-Zionist and dissociated from the State.

## The Legitimation of Baba Baruch

While Baba Sali's lifestyle lent itself quite easily to aggrandizement and mythologization, his son's notorious personal record as an ex-convict and an adulterer obviously was not the right stuff for sanctification. The intriguing question, then, is how could Baruch establish himself as his father's legitimate successor despite his problematic past. In what follows we seek to elucidate the reasons for this astonishing success.

Once again, the cultural assumptions underlying saint worship in the Maghreb should be taken as a favourable starting point in the search for legitimacy. The notions of *baraka* among Muslims <sup>8</sup> and of its Jewish counterpart, *zechut avot* (ancestral merit),<sup>9</sup> connote a strong sense of inherited blessedness and ascribed virtue. As mentioned earlier, the Abu-Hatzera family figured as a most important, if not prime, example of line ancestry in which such sanctity was ingrained. The family's accumulated *zechut* could thus prove a fortuitous starting point for Baba Baruch's claims.

Yet even against the backdrop of the Maghrebi notion of inherited virtue, *zechut avot* should be viewed as a potentiality which, under certain adverse conditions, may not materialize. Given Baruch's criminal record, it might be even argued that his impressive family background was a mixed blessing for him: rather than serving to downplay his frailties, it might have, by way of contrast, accentuated and dramatized them. As a result, some effective techniques of neutralization <sup>10</sup> had to be employed in order to reconcile his moral weaknesses, too widely known to be ignored, with the seemingly incompatible familial aura of holiness.

Baruch has chosen to deal with his problematic past in a peculiar way. While continuing to claim innocence regarding the specific accusations of fraud, corruption and bribery for which he was sentenced to seven years in prison, he admits that his involvement with the "impure" world of politics (against his father's explicit will) was reprehensible and worthy of punishment. Moreover, he does not deny his other moral failings, such as a lengthy extra-marital affair and some religious negligence. However, the emphasis in Baruch's discourse about his past is less on sin than on punishment. He minutely portrays the ordeal and tribulations that were his share in the two prisons in which he had served his term.

It appears that there are three interrelated messages that Baba Baruch is attempting to convey by dwelling upon rather than disregarding the darker aspects of his life. First, by constantly emphasizing an idea of retribution, he stresses that he has paid fully for his misconduct. Second, having lived with killers, rapists, and drug addicts, Baruch presents himself as a person most fitting to deal with the wide scope of human misery addressed to him by those seeking his help. Time and again he plays up the idea that, following his prison experience, nothing human is foreign to him. Finally, he stresses the fact that his religious faith and moral commitment have been strengthened in prison rather than attenuated. According to his story, he was the prime agent responsible for a wave of religious revivalism there, having served as a ray of hope and comfort for the other inmates. Using a Biblical metaphor, he likens the prison to a furnace in which the drosses were separated from the gold and eliminated from his soul. By highlighting the moral integrity he demonstrated under the harsh prison conditions, Baruch seeks to make virtue out of his failings. Furthermore, the dire consequences of his short-lived political career are presented as a Heavenly trial, part of a mystical plan to test and purify him in order to transform him into the worthy heir of his sainted father. In this sense the prison

served as a penitentiary in the literal sense of the word.

This articulation of the past appears to be informed by a model of conversion emphasizing self-reconstitution through a dramatic life transformation. Given his past reluctance to follow his father's footsteps into the world of learnedness and mystical piety, it is hardly surprising that Baruch espouses this model. Notwithstanding his personal characteristics, it might be speculated that as the younger son, he had never considered himself as his father's successor. Since Baba Sali's eldest son, Baba Meir, did seem to follow his father's path, having dutifully adopted his ascetic lifestyle and mystical learnings, young Baruch could find it quite natural to move in other directions. The dire aftermath of his political career could easily make this drift away from the family tradition irreparable. The drift could be countervailed, however, due to two events (also portrayed as part of the heavenly scheme to mould Baruch in the spiritual cast of his father): the premature death of Baba Meir and the clemency granted to Baruch by the President of Israel after some years in prison.

The death of his brother had left Baruch as Baba Sali's potential heir. Moreover, the old rabbi's despondency following the death of Baba Meir, that threatened to fatally aggravate his ailing condition, was mentioned by the President of Israel as the main reason for granting Baruch a parole. The timing of these events proved critical, since Baba Sali passed away three months after his son's release. It appears inconceivable that Baruch could stake a claim for his father's mantle while still in jail. Out of jail however, Baruch could stay by his father's side until the latter's last moments, and thereby strengthen his position within the inner circle of relatives and disciples in Netivot. He portrays that three-month period as one of the most critical in his life because of the special and intimate relationship he formed with his father. That intimate bond with the father had reached its climax with Baba Sali's death at age of 94. To further accentuate this bond, Baruch enshrouds it within a mystical aura by pointing out that he was released exactly 94 days before his father's death.

Baruch's ultimate transformation or symbolic rebirth, contingent upon Baba Sali's death, is articulated in terms of spirit possession. Implicitly using the mystical idiom of the transmigration of souls Baruch argues that his father's soul now inhabits his own body. Thus in an interview we held with him, Baba Baruch said, ". . . I felt that something new penetrated my body . . . I felt that I became an altogether different person that even my voice became his voice." For an audience well-acquainted with the cultural notions of inherited blessedness and transmigration of souls it is hard to conceive of a more impressive narrative to convey the idea that Baruch now possesses his father's spiritual gifts.

A number of factors appear to have facilitated the dissemination and propagation of Baruch's new image as born-again, as reconstituted in his father's mould. First, the importance of the physical proximity between the burial site of the father and the residence of his son cannot be overstated, since it has enabled Baba Baruch to monopolize his father's "qualities" and to utilize the cultural-religious resources he embodied. The fact that Baruch could take possession of his father's house was a vital step in this direction, but more critical was his success in bringing him to eternal rest in Netivot rather than in the Mount of Olives cemetery in Jerusalem. Due to this physical proximity, Baruch exerts close control on the activities in and around the shrine. His strong presence is manifested all year long, and even the most minute changes in the site are initiated or endorsed by him. Needless to say, he monopolizes the sale of "sacred artifacts" related to Baba Sali.

The second factor conducive to the propagation of Baruch's image as his father's inheritor has to do with the cultural practice of visitational dreams. In the context of

Jewish Moroccan hagiolatric traditions, this psycho-cultural mechanism has been deemed *the* vehicle for transmitting knowledge and instructions from deceased sainted figures.<sup>11</sup> Against this background, Baruch's claims that his father frequents his dreams, providing him with reassurances that he is his legitimate heir, cannot be dismissed by Baba Sali's adherents as a mere calculated fabrication. Indeed, Baruch has employed this psycho-cultural resource quite unparsimoniously. On various occasions he has stated that his father lavished on him four times more blessedness and prowess than he, the old patriarch himself, used to command during his lifetime.

The third factor is associated with the realization of the blessedness putatively promised in the dreams. The distinctive healing tradition of the family, based on uttering a special incantation over water which is thereby endowed with healing qualities, has long been one of the factors underlying their popularity and renown. As stated before, the reliance on personal charisma was essential to Baruch's plea for legitimation, since he did not possess other bases for piety and virtue. Particularly in the realm of healing, he could thus facilely adopt the family tradition without special preparations. Long-time devotees of the family have accepted this particular move uncritically, even with a sense of relief, since the death of Baba Sali, the great healer, threatened to create a vacuum that non-family alternatives, let alone medical agencies, could not fill.

Indeed, Baruch's first activities as his father's successor were in the role of a healer. Thus within the seven days of ritual mourning after his father's death, aptly dramatic and miraculously unexpected (for example, a paralytic rising from a wheelchair) stories of his power began to spread by word of mouth and through newspaper reports. The unprecedented publicity gained by these first cures should be carefully noted. In part, this publicity may have reflected a genuine need to find an effective substitute for the legendary healer; but more pertinent to our theses, it may be viewed as a manifestation of Baruch's skills in creating favourable public relations and manipulating the media.

The three factors mentioned above—the physical proximity between the house and the shrine, the cultural practice of visitational dreams and the adoption of the family's healing tradition—all emphasize the similarity and continuity between father and son. Indeed, we believe that for maintaining an image of piety and devotion, Baruch is critically dependent on this perceived similarity. As long as he is able to convince his followers that he is an "extension" of his father, his position is secured. Therefore he invests considerable efforts in spreading the notion that every move of his is inspired and closely monitored by his father (for example, through dreams). To give this notion visibility Baruch hastened to wear his father's mantle and he sports a beard just like that of his father. For the common believer this similarity in physical appearance, together with the adoption by Baruch of the title "Baba" (father), has a very strong impact further enhanced by the idea that Baba Sali's soul now inhabits his son.

## The Israeli Context

Close-up of Baba Sali from an election campaign poster for Flato Sharon's bid for the 11th Knesset, 1984. From Herzog, p. 54.

Yet while the importance of the bond between Baba Sali and his son cannot be overstated, the notion that Baruch seeks to become a replica of his father is oversimplified. We would like to argue that behind the painstakingly elaborated facade of similarity and identity, striking differences exist between the two. These differences amount to a set of contrasts which implicitly set up each of the two figures as a mirror-image of the other. In emphasizing differences we are not concerned with the obviously divergent careers that the late rabbi and his son have undertaken, but rather with divergent lifestyles. We assume that these contrasting lifestyles radiate distinct images of piety and virtuousness, each emanating from an altogether different socio-cultural context.

In analyzing Baba Sali's lifestyle, we emphasized constriction, humility, asceticism and invisibility as cardinal features in his perceived character. By contrast, Baba Baruch radiates expansion, dominance and activity. He is extroverted and assertive rather than inward-orientated and meek. Unlike the purely spiritual image of his father, fashioned by his repugnance for mundane concerns and his reluctance to leave his home, Baruch cultivates an image of a strong-willed entrepreneur, always seeking to actively expand his territory. With a big entourage he travels up and down the country, participating in festive meals in which he aims to collect contributions for ongoing projects, or visiting the religious institutions bearing his father's name which he has already established in various towns. Every two or three months he goes abroad, touring the big communities of Moroccan Jews in the diaspora, from where most of the financial support for his undertakings is coming.

Ambitious, opinionated and overbearing, Baruch is deeply involved with matters clearly extending beyond the religious realm. His involvement with municipal and national politics, manifested through his short-lived liaison with Agudat Israel (an ultra-orthodox party) in the 1988 elections and his controversial preachings for talks with the PLO, are salient illustrations of these concerns. Unlike his father, then, who was the embodiment of the traditional image of sacredness, bespeaking of a pure, almost transparent spirituality, Baruch is mobile, visible and involved. Even though he is dressed like his father, he altogether lacks the ascetic appearance of Baba Sali. Full-bodied and unabashedly attracted to alcohol, good food, and imported cigarettes, he appears indulgent and self-gratifying even after his spiritual reawakening.

Baba Baruch's active and expansive style, so radically different from his father's, is curiously reminiscent of the pattern of "movement and energy," adopted by the traditional Moroccan monarchs seeking relentlessly to build and maintain their charisma under politically adverse conditions.<sup>12</sup> While the analogy with royal peregrinations, even in Morocco, should not be overemphasized, we find the terms employed by Geertz to be illuminating in one central respect. The compelling need to stress the connection between the symbolic value possessed by certain individuals and their relation to the active centres of the social order indicates that this

connection is tenuous. In Geertz's analysis this potential fragility of charismatic authority is particularly salient in Morocco. Coming back to the Abu-Hatzera family, we assume that Baruch's style of "movement and energy" reflects, or rather disguises a basic problem from which his father, the exemplary personification of piety and virtuousness, was altogether exempted. Unable to emulate his father's spiritual lifestyle, passivity and withdrawal on his part might have proved destructive to his claims for legitimation. In other words, he must impress people through doing rather than being.

Yet viewing Baba Baruch's entrepreneurial and expansionist style as a defensive manoeuvre to make up for a preliminary inferior position in the pursuit of legitimation constitutes a cogent but still partial explanation. Such a thesis ignores the different social realities in which Baba Sali and his son emerged as sources of spiritual authority. Baba Sali's image as a sainted figure germinated in the traditional Jewish society of southern Morocco and was sustained in Israel, frozen in time, as an exemplary model of a past lost and idealized. Baba Baruch's road to sacredness was paved in the modern setting of contemporary Israel. As a "child" of the Israeli political system, he seems to patently espouse and expertly employ "the rules of the game"—the values, norms and symbols—that govern public life in Israel. In focusing his attention on the Jewish Moroccan diaspora as a potential source of financial support, for example, he clearly moves in a path well trodden by most political figures in Israel. In relentlessly seeking to change the topography of Netivot and other places by erecting various institutions bearing his father's name, he utilizes the monies contributed from abroad in accord with the Zionist ethos. His excessive "doing" thus reflects a mode of assertion that makes perfect sense to a large following deeply rooted in present-day Israeli social reality.

In this essay we have focused on the processes that underlie the charismatization of two prominent members of the Abu-Hatzera family: Baba Sali and Baba Baruch. As we have shown, while the mythologization of Baba Sali has been only indirectly affected by the ongoing political and social trends in contemporary Israel, the manner by which Baba Baruch has sought to legitimize his position is firmly grounded in the present historical moment. Yet these two processes are not only interrelated, they are mutually reinforcing: the creation of Baba Sali's image as a "saint for our time" has been facilitated by the deliberate and sophisticated efforts of his son, whose own status and prestige have been, of course, steadily augmented by the father's continued popularity.

Close-up of Baba Sali from a [Shas Party](#) election campaign poster from 1984. "Our master and teacher Yisrael Abu-Hazeira Baba Salli, Netivot" From Herzog, p. 55.

## Notes

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