# Rabbi Raphael David Saban, A Sage of Modern Turkey

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Rabbi Naftali Haleva serves as a rabbi in Istanbul. He received his rabbinic ordination from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University.

Rabbi Raphael David Saban, one of the wisest men of his time, once consulted Rav Benzion Uziel, the rabbi of Israel, in order to find a solution to interfaith marriage in Judaism which is a controversial matter to this day. Their communication can be found in Mi?pete Uziel. It is of utmost importance that Rafael Saban is recognized by everyone both for his service to the community and because he was the first official rabbi of the Turkish Republic.

Rabbi Raphael David Saban (1873-1961)

The first official Chief Rabbi of the Turkish Republic (1940-1960)

Published responsum kidu?in al tenay ( 1923)

Rabbi Rafael Saban was born in Kuzguncuk, Turkey, in 1873. His father Nesim was a trader. Rabbi Saban began his Torah studies when he was a very young boy, under the tutelage of Rabbi Yosef Akohen, Rabbi Yomtov Akohen and Rabbi Konerte Dison.

At the age of nine, he became a very successful Talmud and Bible student and got his moel certificate when he was 15. He also received his shohet certificate at the age of 16.

When he was only 18 he became the secretary of the Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire. Despite his young age, he was elected as the general secretary of Bet-Din of that time. On that year he married Roza – Rabbi Hayim Nasi's daugher in Hasköy.

Four years later he started his career as a grand Bet Din member. After his father in law Rabbi Hayim Nasi died, he became the head of the Jewish court and remained in this position for 8 years. He later became the rabbi of Galata, Beyo?lu, Kas?mpa?a, ?talian and Ashkenazi communities and was their leader from 1912-1953.

?n addition to this difficult and demanding mission, he represented Rabbi Moshe Alevi, Hayim Nahum and Rabbi Hayim Becerano in finding a solution to serious halakhic issues that were confronting the community.

?n 1923 he published a responsum under the name of Kidushin al Tenay which covered religious divorce issues. He presented a clear-sighted and far-reaching approach to solving the agunah problem.

He became the offical Chief Rabbi of Turkey in 1923.

In one of his speeches during the 500th year of ?stanbul's conquest, he reminded the audience that since the day Jewish people were accepted in this land, they had been living their religious lives freely and happily.

In July 1953 Chief Rabbi Saban and his team went to Ankara and visited President Celal Bayar, Parliament head Refik Koraltan and also were received by Adnan Menderes – the vice president of that time.

Despite his old age, he attented Mustafa Kemal's,the founder of the Turkish Republic, funeral as an offical guest. He was the first offical Chief Rabbi of the Turkish Republic.

He passed away in 1961 – 7 Kislev 5721 – when he was 87.

Among his writings is the book "Midrash Laperushim" This book was about Bible and Rashi's explanations. This book was published in Jerusalem in 5765 (2005). In his halakhic writings, he sought tolerant ways to deal with contemporary issues, such as intermarriage and conversion to Judaism.

He argued that those Jews who married out of the faith were deficient in their religious observance, but that didn't mean that they rejected the Torah and the Jewish community. They see themselves as Jews and want to be included in the Jewish community. They want to raise their children as Jews, and seek to have their baby boys circumcised by a proper mohel. Rabbi Saban sought an acceptable solution under the sacred light of our Torah ( 13 Nisan 5711). Knowing that conversions done for the sake of marriages are not halakhically ideal, he asked advice from Rav Benzion Uziel, the great Sephardic rabbinic scholar in Israel. Rav Uziel noted that intermarriages were increasing; it was important to convert the non-Jewish partner for the sake of maintaining Jewish households and Jewish children. Rav Uziel supported his views with Talmudic passages and references to great halakhic authorities.

Rav Saban, like Rav Uziel, sought reasonable halakhic solutions to contemporary problems. Voices like theirs are very much needed today.

| **Chief Rabbis of Turkey** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Under the Ottoman Rule and the Republic (1454-2007)** | | | |
| Compiled by Mathilde A. Tagger | | | |
| **Surname** | **Given Name** | **FunctionPeriod** | **Title** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Capsali | Moshe | 1454 - 1497 | HakhamBashi |
| Mizrahi | Elia | 1497 - 1526 | HakhamBashi |
| Comitano | Mordekhai | 1526 - 1542 | HakhamBashi |
| | Tam ben Yahia | 1542 - 1543 | HakhamBashi |
| Rosanes haLevi | Eli | 1543 | HakhamBashi |
| | Eli ben Haim | 1543 - 1602 | HakhamBashi |
| Bashan | Yehiel | 1602 - 1625 | HakhamBashi |
| Mitrani | Yosef | 1625 - 1639 | HakhamBashi |
| Benyaes | Yom-Tov | 1639 - 1642 | HakhamBashi |
| Benyakar | Yom-Tov Hanania | 1642 - 1677 | HakhamBashi |
| Kamhi | Haim | 1677 - 1715 | HakhamBashi |
| Benrey | Yehuda | 1715 - 1717 | HakhamBashi |
| Levi | Shemuel | 1717 - 1720 | HakhamBashi |
| Rosanes | Abraham | 1720 - 1745 | HakhamBashi |
| Alfandari | Shelomo Haim | 1745 - 1762 | HakhamBashi |
| Yitshaki | Meir | 1762 - 1780 | HakhamBashi |
| Palombo | Eli | 1780 - 1800 | HakhamBashi |
| Benyakar | HaimYaakob | 1800 - 1835 | HakhamBashi |
| Levi | Abraham (Pasha) | 1835 - 1839 | HakhamBashi |
| Haim | Shemuel | 1839 - 1841 | HakhamBashi |
| Fresko | Moshe | 1841 - 1854 | HakhamBashi |
| Avigdor | Yaakob | 1854 - 1870 | HakhamBashi |
| Geron | Yakir | 1870 - 1872 | HakhamBashi |
| Levi | Moshe | 1872 - 1909 | HakhamBashi |
| Nahum | Haim (Effendi) | 1909 - 1920 | HakhamBashi |
| Levi | Shabetay | 1920 - 1922 | HakhamBashi |
| Ariel | Isak | 1922 - 1926 | HakhamBashi |
| Bejerano | Haim | 1926 - 1931 | HakhamBashi |
| Saki | Haim Isak | 1931 - 1940 | HakhamBashi |
| Saban | Rafael David | 1940 - 1960 | HakhamBashi |

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|---|---|---|---|
| Asseo | David | 1961 - 2002 | HakhamBashi |
| Haleva | Isak | 2003 - | HakhamBashi |