

[The following translation of Yitzhak Rafael's memorial biography of Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Even-Shmuel (Kaufman) is taken from the front of the fourth, posthumous volume of Even-Shmuel's Hebrew commentary to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. Footnotes, headings and bracketed material are my own. The reason for my translation is that R. Even-Shmuel is unknown in the United States, but should be better remembered. There is little available in English about this scholar and teacher. I hope this translation serves as a remedy. His commentary is the greatest modern commentary on the *Guide*. R. Even-Shmuel's commentary is invaluable, and used it for many years in the creation of my own English language essay-style commentary to the *Guide* (<https://www.maimonides-guide.com>). R. Even-Shmuel, as the biographical article shows, published a wide array of works, and was central to the cultural life of the State of Israel. In this essay, Rafael tells the story of a man who overcame his youthful socialism to become a great Jewish theologian.]

RABBI DR. YEHUDA EVEN-SHMUEL (KAUFMAN) IN MEMORIAM

by *Yitzhak Rafael*, for *Mossad haRav Kook Publishing*
(translation by *Scott Michael Alexander*)

Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Even-Shmuel (Kaufman), 1886-1976, was a man of culture in the widest sense of the term. He was a great scholar in every branch of Judaica, as well as an expert in world literature. As a publisher and writer, he produced many valuable works. He was also a teacher who instilled Torah in many pupils. He devoted himself to the organization of cultural activities, beginning in the United States [and Canada], and in Israel was the Minister of Culture of the National Council of the Jews of Palestine (הוועד-הללאומי), the pre-independence governing body.



Rare Photo of R. Even-Shmuel, speaking. (*Wikimedia Commons*)
THE ELECTED ASSEMBLY IN SESSION IN JERUSALEM.
דיון באולם המליאה של אספת הנבחרים הרביעית בירושלים.

From right to left: Dr. Yehuda Even Shmuel, Yitzchak Ben Zvi, Rabbi Isaac Herzog and David Ben Gurion. Dated December 9, 1944.

R. Even-Shmuel spent his youth in places of Torah and halls of learning. He studied in higher *yeshivot*, beginning in Kishinev, and then the *Etz Chaim* yeshiva of Rabbi Chaim Tchernowitz, who was known by his pen name “Young Rabbi,” (רב צעיר).¹

He went on to study at universities in Brazil, Paris, London, Montréal, New York and Philadelphia, earning his doctorate in literature at Dropsie College.²

¹ R. Tchernowitz, 1871-1949, was both a famous writer and the Crown Rabbi of Odessa, where he established a Hebrew speaking yeshiva.

² Dropsie was a respected Jewish college in Philadelphia.

Early Publications



Sefer HaNitzakhon, Alt Dorf, 1644

R. Even-Shmuel did not begin his literary journey as a specialist in any particular field. His writings were scattered in many areas, including questions of the day, as well as issues in education and philosophy. His essays were published in newspapers and various periodicals, in Hebrew and Yiddish, in particular *Ha-Toren* and *Zukunft*.³

His first book came out in 1926 in New York, about the scholar and cabalist known as the *Baal Nitzakhon*, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Mülhausen [c. 14th-c. 15th centuries].⁴ This volume consisted of an essay on the life, teachings and activities of R. Mülhausen, and included a critical edition of his famous work *Ha-Eshkol* (*The Cluster*, האשכול), together with notes, and included R. Mülhausen's commentary on the "Song of Unity" (שיר היחוד), which was called *The Book of Concentration in Prayer* (ספר כוונת התפילה).⁵

R. Even-Shmuel came to Israel in 1926, at the invitation of Chaim Nahman Bialik [1873-1934, famous Hebrew and Yiddish poet], the founder and head of the *Devir* publishing house. He devoted himself for several years to the compilation of a *Hebrew-English Dictionary*, allied in this effort with Dr. Israel Efros (1891-1981), and Benjamin Silkinder (1882-1933). At the end of the Hebrew introduction to the *Dictionary*, its editors expressed the hope that:

“Inasmuch as many and wide spheres of learning were employed in the creation of this dictionary, it will bring the benefit of broad dispersal of knowledge in both languages, Hebrew and English. It reveals Hebrew as a living language, and makes available resources for national renewal.”

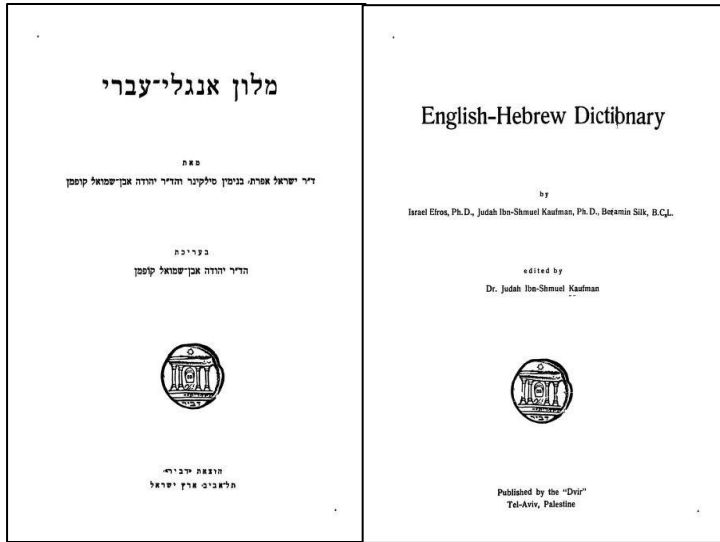
Since its publication in 1929, there been 25 subsequent editions including, in 1959/60⁶, the publication of an additional volume. It remains available on the internet.

³ צוקונפט and התורן, respectively “The Mast,” and “The Future,” the former was a Hebrew literary monthly issued from 1916 through 1921, and the latter was a socialist Yiddish literary journal from 1892 through 2013

⁴ The book is in Hebrew: ספר כוונת התפילה : בעל הנצחון : חייו תורתו ופעולת ספר האשכול : New York, 1926, 687 pages. There appears to be an English language version of the book: *Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Mülhausen, the Apologete, Cabbalist and Philosophical Writer and His Books Haeshkol and Kawwanath Hatefilah*, Philadelphia, 1926, where Even-Shmuel's name is shown as Judah Kaufman, 190 pages. It was Even-Shmuel's doctoral thesis at Dropsie College.

⁵ The *Eshkol* was Rabbi Mülhausen's chief cabalistic work. He was called the *Baal Nitzakhon* as the author of the *Sefer Nitzakhon*, ספר הנצחון, *The Book Of Triumph*. It dealt with issues in cabala, halachah, and philosophy. It included a famous anti-Christian polemic from the public disputation that R. Mülhausen was forced to enter into with church authorities. R. Mülhausen was superior to other rabbinic participants in these fore-doomed disputations in that he knew Latin and the Christian sources, so much so that the monastic Theodore Hackspan used *Sefer Nitzakhon* to train Christian scholars. R. Mülhausen was a devotee of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* who popularized it in Poland. He interpreted the *Guide* as a cabalist work dressed in philosophic trappings.

⁶ I provided the date range, as here, 1959/60, where I have insufficient information to determine the precise year. Yitzhak Rafael only uses the Jewish dating system in his essay, in this case, 5720. Since the Jewish New Year generally falls two thirds of the way into the secular year, it is impossible, without further guidance, to establish in which of the two consecutive years a date would occur. Wherever possible I provide the precise secular year.



This beautiful dictionary, 792 pages, is available online at <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.167440>



Encyclopaedia Hebraica

R. Even-Shmuel was the principal organizer for the *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* humanities section. In his editing work for different publishing houses, in 1938/39, he published with Berl Katznelson (1887-1944) a collection of the writings of socialist-zionist Nahman Syrkin (1864-1924). He brought out the *Book of the Holy Days* of M. Eli (מ. אילי of הגים וזמנים), from 1948-1955. He was also responsible for the Jubilee volume commemorating Rabbi Yehuda Avida (Zlotnick) titled *Offering of Judah* (מנחת יהודה) in 1944/45, together with Rabbi Dr. Simha Assaf (1889-1953) and Rabbi Benjamin [?]. He also published (1955/56) a corrected addition of Dr. A. Z. Ascoli's *Messianic Movements in Israel* (התנועות המשיחיות בישראל), based on Dr. Ascoli's literary bequest.

In 1943, R. Even-Shmuel brought out the first volume of his own *Redemption Midrashim* (מדרשי גאולה), an anthology of messianic and apocalyptic *Aggadot* from the close of the Talmud to the 13th century, taken from both printed and manuscript Midrashic sources. It was equipped with a general introduction, prefaces to specific chapters, commentaries, annotations, a bibliography, and tables reconciling different existing manuscript versions. The Israeli public received this excellent volume with unique appreciation, and it merited several printings. Its appearance had the effect of bringing R. Even-Shmuel before the nation as a Midrashic scholar, and it seemed as though he had found his destined direction.

Maimonides Scholarship

It soon became clear, however, that R. Even-Shmuel's love and soul were devoted to medieval Jewish philosophy. With the passage of years, the project, conceived with his professor at Dropsie, Henry Malter, 1864-1925, scholar of the works of Rabbi Saadia Gaon, to create critical editions of the Midrash, became for Even-Shmuel of diminished significance. Already, in the year 1934/35 he began to bring forth the first volume of his monumental enterprise, his commentary on *The Guide of the Perplexed* of Maimonides. Using the Hebrew translation from



Cover of *Redemption Midrashim*



The *Guide* commentary, 4 volumes



The *Kuzari* Translation

The original Judaeo-Arabic by Maimonides' authorized translator, Rabbi Shmuel Ibn Tibbon (c. 1150 - c. 1230), he provided comprehensive and clear commentaries, together with a general introduction titled "Maimonides and his Creation," (הרמבם ויצרתו). This volume contains 49 chapters from Book I of the *Guide*. Even-Shmuel finished his commentary on Book I with the publication of his second volume in 1937-38, according to plan. His third volume, containing Book II of the *Guide* up to chapter 24, and introduced by an essay that is like a book in itself (132 pages), was published only in 1958/59, by the *Mossad Ha-Rav Kook* publishing house, with the second printing of both of his original two volumes.⁷

The Kuzari Translation

Even-Shmuel proceeded slowly with this work, since he never focused his efforts on just one subject. While he was involved in Maimonides scholarship, part of his time and thought were also devoted to the *Kuzari* of Rabbi Yehuda haLevi. He devoted himself to the weighty mission of preparing a completely new critical translation of the *Kuzari* from Arabic to Hebrew. This volume was to be equipped with cross reference tables, annotations, and, in addition, prefaces to each section. In 1940/41, he published sample pages from this projected work in the Hebrew halachic journal "Sinai," as well as in the collection called *Rabbi Yehuda haLevi*. It was only with the passage of thirty years (1972/73) that his translation of the *Kuzari* was finally published, in a fully vocalized and punctuated edition. All who read and study this wonderful book have found true enjoyment and fulfillment.⁸

⁷ The memorial essay before us, by Yitzhak Rafael, for *Mossad Ha-Rav Kook*, fronts the final fourth volume of the commentary. It was published after R. Even-Shmuel's death. The 132-page essay just mentioned by Rafael is a fascinating and unique explanation of the origin and development of Hellenic philosophy, written specially for orthodox Jewish readers. It clearly seeks Jewish connections, and makes Jewish criticisms with respect to every stage of philosophical development from Thales through and beyond Aristotle. R. Even-Shmuel evidently felt that this development was too complicated and too essential to try to encapsulate in his actual commentary, requiring this separate introductory essay. The essay is a brilliant reorientation of our thinking, especially his religious reading of the early Greek philosophy. It appears to me that R. Even-Shmuel consciously directed much of this essay against Martin Heidegger's *Nazi* Aryanization of the Pre-Socratics.

⁸ In 1973 R. Even-Shmuel won the coveted *Israel Prize* for Jewish Studies for his production of the *Kuzari*.

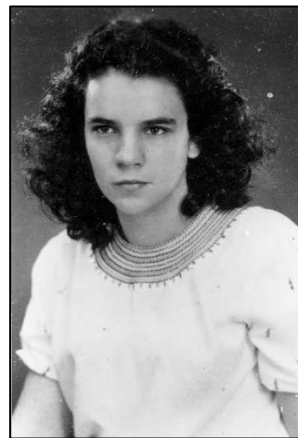
Tragedy Strikes

In 1947, there was a reversal in the private life of R. Even-Shmuel: the death of his beloved multi-talented son Shmuel Asher Kaufman (Even-Shmuel) in a training accident in the *Palmach*.⁹ His son's gifted fiancé and *Palmach* comrade, Zahara Levitov, was killed the very next year.

These events destroyed his spirit, and enveloped him in severe depression. He created a literary monument to them both, the volumes *In Memory of Shmuel*, in 1948/49, which included his son's writings; and, in 1951/52, *The Life and Writings of Zahara Levitov*.¹⁰



Shmuel Kaufman (Even-Shmuel)



Zahara Levitov

As a result of these events, Even-Shmuel cut himself off from his circle of friends, as well as from his old party comrades, shutting himself up in his home. He sought consolation in his literary work. He separated himself from any involvement with the community, devoting himself to Torah and scholarship. His work provided him the support and shelter that he needed. Every hour of the day, and most of the hours of the night, sometimes until the break of day, he studied and wrote, composing and copying, commenting and translating, proofing and correcting, revising and refining. He directed his greatest critical energy against himself, aspiring to perfection. This he regarded as the most important thing.

Baal Shem Tov Memorial

He declined to accept invitations to lecture, and refused to appear in public. Only on rare occasions did he deviate from this self-restriction. One of those occasions was his appearance at the opening session of the "Hasidic Assembly" (כנס ההסידות) on August 26, 1959, arranged by R. Yehuda Leib Maimon of the *Mossad ha-Rav Kook* publishing house, to commemorate the 200th

⁹ The *Palmach* was the elite underground unit of the *Haganah*, which was the pre-independence Israeli army.

¹⁰ Shmuel's death occurred on the eve of his release with Zahara from the *Palmach*, on May 2, 1947, as they went to a farewell party in their honor. The *Palmach* had just then called upon Shmuel to replace an ill squad leader to oversee explosives training. The accidental discharge of a grenade killed Shmuel and two of his *Palmach* comrades. Shmuel's fiancé, Zahara Levitov, participated with his father in the writing of *In Memory of Shmuel*, and a memorial monument for Shmuel and his comrades was erected at Kibbutz Tzuba. His father actually quotes from *In Memory of Shmuel* an essay Shmuel wrote on Plato's *Republic* (see page 57 of volume three of his *Guide* commentary). Zahara Levitov remains a national hero in her own right as a bomber pilot who flew successful combat missions for the *Palmach* against the Arab armies in the War of Liberation. She and her copilot died in a crash between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Deborah Omer memorialized their story in her book *Love to Death*, לאהוב עד מוות, and there was also a play, *Zahara's Shmulik*, שמוליק של זָהרָה. A street in Jerusalem bears her name as a memorial.

year of the passing of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. He could not decline the entreaties of his friend Rabbi Maimon. His wonderful lecture “From the Teachings of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov,” strongly impressed and excited his audience. A diverse crowd of Torah students and lovers of Hasidism came to hear R. Even-Shmuel, including the President and Prime Minister of Israel, the principal rabbis of the country, ministers, and civic leaders, who together lent the gathering a regal status.¹¹

The Greatest Baal Teshuva

In those days, days of seclusion and soul-searching, a change took place in Even-Shmuel’s thought as well as in the direction of his life. He deepened his faith in divine providence while devoting his life to performance of mitzvot. He was attentive to both the leniencies and stringencies of halakha. In all of this he became the greatest returnee to Judaism of our generation (החוזרים בתשובה), standing in the gallery of famous penitents, such as Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Nathan Birnbaum. But he was more rooted in Torah, more consistent, and a greater *Talmud Hakham* (Torah scholar) than all of them.¹²

Even-Shmuel made himself a fixture in the Yushurun synagogue in Jerusalem, near the home of Rabbi Yaakov Kalmas, Chief Rabbi of Moscow [1880-1953, a member of the Council of the Chief Rabbinate during the founding of the State of Israel]. One of the Rabbi’s friends and assistants, a lover of *mussar* (intense moral striving), directed a question through Rav Kalmas to R. Even-Shmuel. He asked why R. Even-Shmuel took so long to complete his daily prayers. His answer was, “I include in my prayers both myself, together with all the people of Israel, but also strive to repay all of the prayers that I missed in the days that I did not engage in prayer.”

With the passing of time, he opened his house to friends, thinkers and writers. It became a meeting place for intellectuals to engage in cordial discussion, learning, and hear pleasant words of Torah. At that time, I was not yet among his close friends, though sometimes I did get to hear his content-rich talks in the company of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon and his close friends.

Memorable Moments in the Life of a Great Scholar

From memories of my own personal contacts with R. Even-Shmuel, I would like to mention three occasions, where, in my eyes, in all his qualities, he revealed himself as a man inspired.

A. In the year 1939/40, the 900th anniversary of the birth of Rashi [greatest Bible and Talmud commentator, 1040-1105], R. Even-Shmuel, in his capacity as Minister of Culture of the National Council of the Jews of Palestine, conceived and arranged for a “Rashi Exhibition” (תערוכת רש"י). He took upon himself the organization of this exhibition, together with the bibliographer Baruch Shalom Shuchtman [1890-1956]. Even-Shmuel joined with us in the preparatory labors, and involved himself in every detail. He urged us on each day, always checking the measure of our progress. There was no limit to his enthusiasm and devotion to this mission. I saw a man happy in his labors.

¹¹ The lecture was published in *The Book of the Baal Shem Tov*, ספר הבעש"ט, 1959/60. Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, 1698-1760, was the historic founder of Hasidism. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon, 1875-1962, was Israel’s first Minister of Religious Affairs, and the founder of *Mossad ha-Rav Kook* Publishing.

¹² Cohen, 1842-1918, was founder of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism. Rosenzweig, 1886-1929, was the famous philosopher and author of *Star of Redemption*. Birnbaum, 1864-1937, was executive secretary of *Agudat Israel* from 1919 to 1922.

B. In the year 1946, during the struggle against the British Mandate's blockade of the coast, when it was sending back Jewish refugee ships, the mandatory government seized several ships carrying over 1200 survivors of the Holocaust at *La Spezia* harbor, off the coast of Italy. The refugees declared a protest fast to be observed on their boats until they could be admitted to Israel. In a sign of complete identification with this refugee fast, the National Council joined in this fast with several leaders of the *Yishuv* (settlement



Hunger Strikers at *La Spezia* Harbor

community), including Zalman Shazar (Rubashov, 1889-1974), Golda Meir (1898-1978), David Remez (1886-1951), Zalman Aron (1886-1970), Aaron Zisling (1904-64), David Werner Senator (1896-1953), Yaakov Riftin (1907-78), Nahum Lipshitz (1927-2006), and Israel Gur (Gurfinkel, 1853-1965). I was also among those fasting. The fast began on the 12th day of Nisan, and continued 100 hours until the evening of the end of the first day of Passover (April 13-16, 1946). The fasters prevailed upon the principal rabbis to allow this fast to continue in sanctification of the holy day, by arranging a “Seder of Fasting” (סדר הצמים): eating 27cc (כזית) of matzo and drinking four cups of tea in place of the usual measures of matzo and four cups of wine.

Rav Even-Shmuel agreed to be the leader of the Seder. As the youngest faster, I asked the traditional four questions. R. Even-Shmuel brought ancient Haggadas provided by the publisher Schocken, read selected sections and explained them with good taste and sense (תורב טעם ודעת). He gave inspired narrations, explained reasons for customary practices, and sung Hasidic melodies to encourage our spirits. He was the proper man in his proper place, using his power to strengthen our hopes in the coming redemption.

C. In the year 1944/45, we were involved on behalf of *Mossad haRav Kook* in the initial printing of the special one volume vocalized edition of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, combining all of Even-Shmuel's commentary volumes to date in one volume, with a comprehensive introduction, and concise annotations. He selected the best printer for it, *Ha-Aretz*, in Tel Aviv. Three times he organized the scattered material, but he was not satisfied. He always found something new to correct and improve. We paid for a room next to the printing house so that he could closely follow the printing day by day. Only after his fourth organization of the manuscript did he authorize the printing to go forward. We finally published this great volume, including an explanation of unusual words used by the original translator, R. Shmuel Ibn Tibbon, in 1946.¹³

In the production of this volume, I was conscious of the great care that was innate in this man: the strict precision he brought to the work, and especially his respect for the printed word and its appearance, manifested itself at every step of the literary and scholarly work. Even after the appearance of this volume, Even-Shmuel continued to attend to it, to proofread, fix and improve it, until he had readied it for a second printing by *Mossad haRav Kook*, which came out six years after his death, in the year 1981/82.

¹³ I have not been able to locate this volume.

Final Years

In those years of hard and intensive labor, he was able to complete his edition of his translation of the *Kuzari*, and even to write a special introductory volume, although that has yet to be published. In addition, he finished a translation from the Arabic, with commentary, of the *Sefer Yetzira* (*Book of Creation*) of Rabbi Saadia Gaon, which remains in manuscript form.¹⁴

He also continued his great commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, working on his fourth volume of that work, but, to our sorrow, he was never was able to arrive at its completion. The volume that is before us [what they were able to put together of this fourth volume] completes the commentary to the rest of Book II of the *Guide*, from chapter 25 to the end of Book II, together with 13 [of the 54] chapters from the final Book III.



Frontispiece to Fourth Volume of the *Guide Commentary*

In parallel to his work on his great commentary, R. Even-Shmuel was preparing a completely new translation of the *Guide* from Arabic sources, following the format he used for his translation of the *Kuzari*. This translation was also never completed. He had intended this new translation to be published in tandem with his commentary, but that project never made it to safe harbor. His work was done, though not yet complete, because on February 23, 1976, his soul returned to its Creator.

In his work on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Rabbi Dr. Even-Shmuel reached the peak of his scholarly achievements, since it is, as it has been called, the “book of books” of Jewish thought.

Mossad haRav Kook's library has set aside a special section dedicated to R. Even-Shmuel, which devotes itself to the publication of his great works. The production of the volume that is before us is yet another step in this task.

By *Yitzhak Rafael*



¹⁴ Apparently never published.

Wikipedia Article on the Author, Yitzhak Rafael

Yitzhak Rafael, 1914-1999, from Wikipedia: "...was an Israeli politician who served as Minister of Religion in the mid-1970s. Rafael was born in Sasiv in Galicia in 1914 at a time when the town was part of Austria-Hungary (now Ukraine), and attended high school in Poland. During his youth he was a member of the Torah and Work youth movement, and founded a local branch of the *Bnei Akiva* youth movement. He made *aliyah* (immigrated) to Mandatory Palestine in 1935 and worked as a teacher in Jerusalem. He attended the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, gaining an MA in Humanities. He went on to study at the New York Theological Seminary, where he was awarded a doctorate in literature.



Yitzhak Rafael

“He worked for the Jewish Agency and was director of the department of Craftsmen and Small Business. Between 1940 and 1947, he edited a small journal. He was a member of the *Hagana* and represented *Hapoel HaMizrachi* in the Assembly of Representatives in 1944. During the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, he was a member of the Jerusalem Emergency Committee. Between 1948 and 1953, he was a member of the Jewish Agency’s board, and headed its *aliyah* department, where he was responsible for the large influx of Jewish refugees (numbering over 685,000 between 1948 and 1951), rejecting calls to put a limit on numbers.

“In 1951, he was elected to the Knesset on the *Hapoel HaMizrachi* list. He was re-elected in 1955, 1959 (by which time *Hapoel HaMizrachi* had merged into the National Religious Party) and 1961. In November 1961, he was appointed Deputy Minister of Health, serving until David Ben-Gurion resigned as Prime Minister in June 1963. He was re-appointed to the post in July 1963, serving until March 1965.

“He was re-elected in 1965 and 1969, and, following Haim-Moshe Shapira’s death in July 1970, became the leader of the NRP. He was re-elected again in 1973, and was appointed Minister of Religions by Golda Meir in March 1974. However, when Yitzhak Rabin formed a new government in June 1974 following Meir’s resignation, the NRP were not included in the coalition and Rafael left the cabinet. When the party joined the coalition in October that year, Rafael was re-appointed Minister of Religions, serving until all NRP ministers were sacked in December 1976 for abstaining in a motion of no confidence vote. In the same year he lost the party leadership when Zevulun Hammer and Yosef Burg combined forces to oust him. He lost his seat in the 1977 elections and retired from politics. In 1979, Rafael was the co-recipient (with Yehuda Ratzaby) of the *Bialik Prize* for Jewish thought.”

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