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Followers of Israeli 'rabbi' accused of child abuse sentenced for complicity

The four were convicted of severely abusing eight children under Chen's orders two years ago; one of the children remains unconscious to this day.

By Nir Hasson | Nov. 23, 2010 | 1:29 PM | 5

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Elior Chen, second from right, with three of his followers (from left): Shimon Gabai, David Kugman and Avraham Mascalchi. Photo by Reproduction

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Jerusalem District Court sentenced Tuesday four disciples of self proclaimed Rabbi Elior Chen to lengthy prison sentences, after they were convicted of child abuse earlier this year.

The four were convicted in February of severely abusing eight children. David Kugman- the central defendant in the case – was sentenced to 20 years in jail; Avraham Mascalchi and Shimon Gabai were sentenced to 17 years in prison, and Ro'i Tzoref was sentenced to 30 months in prison after the court ruled that he played a minor part in the abuse.

The child abuse affair was uncovered two years ago, when a child Chen had been treating was taken to the hospital unconscious. Once the story became public, Chen fled to Brazil, which extradited him back to Israel. He is now on trial at the Jerusalem District Court.

Chen, who called himself a rabbi, told his disciples the abuse was necessary to "purify" the children, all

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members of one family. As a result, the children were severely beaten, burned, locked in suitcases and forced to eat their own feces, among other acts; one child remains in a coma to this day as a result.

In her ruling, Judge Nava Ben-Or called the case "incomprehensible," adding that Israel has never before known anything like it.

For instance, Mascalchi, 25, was convicted of burning the fingers of one child, taping his mouth shut, stuffing him into a suitcase and leaving him there for some time. Kugman, 24, was convicted of tying up the children and then beating them. He also held one child to an electric heater, causing burns so severe that the child needed a skin transplant.

Two of the four defendants denied all the charges against them. The other two admitted to some, but claimed that they were helpless under Chen's "magical" influence.

The mother of the eight children, who remains unnamed, was sentenced in May to five years in prison after pleading guilty to shaking, burning and tying up her children.

Chen's trial is currently taking place in Jerusalem.

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