

Rabbi convicted of sexually assaulting boy nine years ago



Aryeh "Larry" Dudovitz sexually assaulted a boy during a Jewish holiday in 2006, a judge found Nov. 16, 2015.

(Chicago Police Department)

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Cook County judge convicts rabbi of sexually assaulting 15-year-old boy nine years ago

When her 15-year-old son began to question the Orthodox Jewish faith he was raised in, his mother turned to a trusted rabbi from their West Rogers Park community for help.

But Aryeh "Larry" Dudovitz instead betrayed the family's trust by sexually assaulting the boy during a Jewish holiday nine years ago, a Cook County judge found Monday.

His bench trial Monday at the Leighton Criminal Court Building offered a glimpse into the sometimes-insular Orthodox community. Several prominent rabbis testified that they responded to a report of the abuse by convening a special session of a religious court.

The assault took place in October 2006, but it wasn't until May 2013 that criminal charges were brought against Dudovitz. The victim's family said that part of the reason for the delay was because relatives wanted the victim to first receive counseling to be better prepared for the emotional strain of a trial.

During the two-hour trial, Dudovitz, now 48, sat slumped in his seat at the defense table in a long black coat and a black yarmulke. He showed little reaction when the judge ruled. The married father of nine had rejected a plea deal that called for five years in prison and now faces up to 15 years in prison at sentencing.

The boy, now 24, testified Monday that he had begun feeling strange around Dudovitz, who frequently pressured him to go a bath house with him for a ritual purification before prayers. But no sexual wrongdoing occurred until Dudovitz came to the family's home for the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, he said.



West Rogers Park rabbi charged in sexual assault

After singing, dancing and talking for hours with the boy and his family, the night ended with Dudovitz alone with the boy, plying him with beer and vodka until the teen became ill in the sukkah, a hut set up for the festival in the boy's backyard.

The boy testified he went to his bedroom, fell asleep and awoke to find Dudovitz performing a sex act on him. Dudovitz returned to the home the next day to apologize, but the victim said he didn't understand what had happened.

"I grew up with no sexual education at all — none whatsoever," he testified. "... It wasn't spoken of and, unfortunately, it still isn't."

But when Dudovitz returned to the house the following December while the teen was again home from school for Hanukkah, the teen realized the rabbi was taking advantage of him.

Dudovitz, wearing a prayer shawl, came into the teen's bedroom and began to embrace him and kiss his neck, the man testified. He kicked Dudovitz out of the house and told his mother what had happened.

"He said, 'Don't ever let (Dudovitz) in our home or near any of the kids again,' " his mother testified Monday about her son. "He was crying ... and he started to tell me what happened."

At a hearing organized by the Chicago Rabbinical Council, rabbis Zev Cohen and Shmuel Fuerst testified that Dudovitz admitted performing the sex act on the teen.

An investigator for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, tipped to the abuse by a psychologist who attended the rabbinical hearing, testified that Dudovitz admitted sexually assaulting the teen to her as well.

The rabbis set up guidelines for Dudovitz to follow, including a ban on being around minors, but prosecutors and one witness said that he didn't follow through. The victim's family said Dudovitz by then was affiliated with a small offshoot of the Orthodox faith in Chicago.

Ruling from the bench after hearing two hours of evidence and argument Monday, Judge Evelyn Clay found Dudovitz guilty of aggravated criminal sexual assault and ordered him taken into custody until he turns over his passport. Clay said she would then release him on electronic monitoring until his sentencing.

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