


Safed rabbi sentenced to 7.5 years in jail for sexual assault

Ezra Sheinberg, ex-yeshiva head, confessed to using his position as spiritual leader to take advantage of 8 women

By **RAOUL WOOTLIFF** 

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Rabbi Ezra Sheinberg is brought for a court hearing at the Kiryat Shmona Magistrates Court on July 2, 2015. (Basel Awidat/Flash90)

A well-known rabbi and yeshiva head from the northern city of Safed was sentenced Tuesday to seven and a half years in prison for committing a slew of sexual crimes against eight women, including multiple counts of sexual assault.

Rabbi Ezra Sheinberg, 49, was convicted last July in Nazareth District Court as part of a plea deal over a series of crimes committed against women who came to him for advice and counseling.

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The specific charges were not publicized by the court. The criminal proceedings were under a gag order preventing publication of any details of the incidents due to the “egregious nature” of the crimes and to protect the privacy of the victims.

The prosecution had initially demanded that the former head of the Orot HaAri yeshiva receive a minimum of nine years in jail sentence after his conviction. But the defense provided “significant proofs which helped discredit some of the accusations,” according to a Tuesday Justice Ministry statement, prompting both sides to accept the plea bargain after several charges of rape were dropped.

Responding to the sentencing, Sara Markovich, who represented three of the victims, said they were “satisfied” with the ruling, despite having sought harsher punishment.

“Overall we are satisfied that this criminal who calls himself a rabbi is not immune from punishment under the law and is going to sit for many years in prison,” Markovich said. “This man abused the trust of these women in the most disgraceful way possible and deeply damaged them, some of them members of his own community.”

A total of 14 women made allegations against Sheinberg to a special investigation team and police suspect that many other victims were afraid to come forward. The victims were all religious women who had come to the rabbi for advice or help on various issues including health.



Rabbi Ezra Sheinberg, suspected of sexual abuse against several women, is seen at the courtroom of the Kiryat Shmona Magistrates Court on July 8, 2015. (Basel Awidat/Flash90)

Sheinberg had been a popular Kabbalist and respected figure in Israel's national-religious community and author of several books of Torah ideas.

He was arrested on July 1, 2015, as he attempted to flee the country as allegations against him emerged. He has been in prison since that time.

According to [prosecutors at the time](#), Sheinberg used his position of prominence and reputation as a powerful mystic to lure in and take

advantage of women who came to him for religious counsel and blessings for fertility when they struggled to conceive.

They alleged that the victims shared a number of characteristics: they were young religious women whose husbands, in most cases, were Sheinberg's students at the seminary.

Part of his modus operandi involved convincing the victims that only he could provide a solution to their problems, through a treatment he dubbed "relaxation."

During those sessions, Sheinberg fraudulently obtained his victims' consent to commit sexual acts, prosecutors said, adding that the defendant used innocent young women who trusted him as a tool to satisfy his sexual desires.

Some of the women had originally approached a rabbinic council with the allegations. A team of local rabbis, led by Safed Chief Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, began investigating the accusations in mid-June 2015, and later reported them to the police.

Sheinberg's wife told Eliyahu that she knew her husband had sex with the women, but that the sex was part of their therapy.

Sheinberg has eight children and several grandchildren.

Times of Israel staff contributed to this report.

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Jonathan Flax

Religious Fanaticism is the problem, it always is. Like the pedophile priests protected by the Vatican, deeply religious societies protect their own. In this case at least the complaints were investigated but was it first reported in 2015?

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Sha'ron Haviv · Outdoor adventure facilitator, group facilitator, shiatsu therapist and counselor at Self-Employed

Please don't look to blame his wife. I'm sure she was manipulated as were the victims and imagine what she is going thru. She is now trying to hold a big family together, 8 children and grandchildren. She needs support not vilification.

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Lesley Silver

Only 7 years ridiculous - and his wife for knowing???

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Sheinberg's wife told Eliyahu that she knew her husband had sex with the women, but that the sex was part of their therapy.

I mean. Wow. Wtf.

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She is also one of his victims.

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Vcwa Mcop Jinh

he should be stone to death according to torah law

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