


Rabbi Isaac (Michel) Guggenheim

Chief Rabbi of Paris & Presiding Rabbi of the
Jewish Court of Law of Paris



Born in Paris, Rabbi Isaac Guggenheim was sent by his father at a young age to absorb Torah in Israel in the Be'er Ya'akov Yeshiva, headed by the great Torah scholar Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Shapira and Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, may his memory be a blessing. Until today the Rabbi remembers those days of uninterrupted learning in the Yeshiva with great fondness and frequently remembers the sayings and lessons of his Rabbis. After he married, he settled in Israel and continued learning Torah. When his father suddenly passed away, the young Rabbi Guggenheim was called to take his place as the Rabbi of the "Mishkenot Yisrael" community in the 19th district of Paris. At the same time the Rabbi began to teach Talmud in the Rabbinical School of France.

From the year 5752 (1992), the Rabbi was the director at the Rabbinical School of France. The Rabbinical School equips young men with the knowledge needed in order to serve as Rabbis in French communities as well as in French-speaking countries. Every day the Rabbi teaches in-depth lessons in the Rabbinical School on the subjects of: laws relating to Kashruth, conducting wedding ceremonies, family purity, circumcision, redemption of the firstborn ceremony, mourning & burial and all other laws that are necessary for a Rabbi. In addition, the Rabbi teaches his students the art of public speaking for all kinds of life-cycle events: the


Sabbath day, festivals, weddings, Bar Mitzvahs and remembrance services. The Rabbi's teachings are clear, concise and ordered. He has a pleasant way of speaking, greets every person with a smile and acts according to all other Jewish laws of courtesy. Most of the Rabbis today in French communities are his students and his influence on them is strongly felt.

The Rabbi has worked as a judge in the Jewish court of Paris since 5738 (1978) and in recent years was appointed to be the Head of the Rabbinical Jewish Court. All of the responsibility regarding issues of Jewish law in the Parisian community rests squarely on his shoulders – Kashruth, ritual baths, marriage and divorce, as well as new, technological questions that arise. Recently, the Rabbi has needed to deal with the issue of opening the electrical locks that are installed in most houses in Paris on Shabbat. According to his instructions, the consistory publicized a list of locks that are permitted for use on Shabbat.

As mentioned above, the Rabbi also serves as the Rabbi of the Mishkenot Yisrael community- a community that is developing in leaps and bounds and is bombarded by requests to join as people wish to draw close to the Rabbi. The community members enjoy receiving guidance and advice from the Rabbi and ask for his advice on all matters, big and small. The Rabbi is considered as a father and spiritual leader.

Most of the Rabbi's knowledge was acquired in his father's house, as the great-grandson and continuation of a long chain of illustrious Rabbis that stretches back three-hundred years in the Alsace region in northern France which borders Germany, on the western bank of the Rhine. This stretch of land is known for being





associated with both Germany and France and as a result of this it was a focal point of territorial struggles between France and Germany for many years. For hundreds of years, Jewish people living in this region strictly kept the traditions and customs of Ashkenazic Jews. With the passage of time, this magnificent Jewish community almost died out. Rabbi Guggenheim grew up in his father's house according to this community's customs and saw it as his obligation and mission to preserve his father's tradition, customs, culture and unique prayer melodies. Until today the community of Mishkenot Yisrael act according to these customs.

Rabbi Guggenheim is deeply Zionist. He sent all of his sons and daughters to Yeshivas and Seminaries in Israel, after which they all settled in Israel. The Rabbi views himself as being on a mission in the diaspora, but his spirit and soul are firmly in the Holy Land.

Rabbi Guggenheim writes many essays in both Jewish and mainstream media in France on the subjects of Judaism, Jewish thought, Hebrew law and ethics and writes entries for encyclopedias that deal with Jewish issues and Jewish philosophy. He is a member of the National Consultative Ethics Committee which provides advice for authoritative bodies regarding ethical subjects relating to the health and life sciences. The Rabbi's book explaining Jewish law in French became a best seller. The book deals with all the foundations of Jewish law and Jewish ethics in modern, accessible language and deals with the relationship between Jewish law, current challenges and modern development.

Despite Rabbi Guggenheim's greatness in Torah, he is extremely modest, creates connections with all those he comes into contact with, is well aware of present-day problems, is involved in modern life and works hard to find solutions for questions bothering the French youth. As a Rabbinic figure who is a source of inspiration, the public find him to be a listening ear for every problem, as well as one who displays openness and patience for every question and request. In his books and writings the Rabbi wishes to connect between modern questions and Jewish law that has been passed down the generations, with his main leading principle being to increase the love for G-d among His creations.

In consideration of the above, the selection committee has decided to bestow upon Rabbi Isaac (Michel) Guggenheim the Katz Award for 5775 (2016).

Rabbi Adin Even
Israel (Steinsaltz)

Professor Menahem
Ben-Sasson

Rabbi Yaakov Ariel

