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Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, behind acclaimed Hebrew translation of the Talmud, dies

Time magazine lauded Rabbi Steinsaltz's 45-year project to make the ancient Jewish texts accessible to new generations



Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz credit Steinsaltz.org

Rabbi Adin Even Yisrael Steinsaltz – who spent over four decades working on the acclaimed modern Hebrew translation and commentary of the entire Babylonian Talmud and Bible – has died at the age of 83.

Losing his capacity to speak after suffering a stroke in 2018, the Jerusalem born Chasidic rabbi had continued to proof-read and mark-up earlier work up, often with the help of family members, until his death, which was confirmed on Friday.

In 2001, *Time* magazine had lauded Rabbi Steinsaltz's 45 year long project to make the ancient Jewish texts accessible to new generations a “once-in-a-millennium” intellectual undertaking.

His formidable efforts - which involved updating the 2.5 million unpunctuated Hebrew and Aramaic words in the 6,000 pages of the Babylonian Talmud – even earned him comparisons with the 11th-century French sage Rashi, who had embarked on his commentary on the texts.

Upon hearing of Rabbi Steinsaltz's passing, Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis said: “Rabbi Steinsaltz has left a great legacy within the Jewish people, popularising the Talmud for the greater public and illuminating the Torah with a new light.

One of the great intellectual giants of our generation, he embraced Soviet Jewry at the time of the opening of the Iron Curtain by creating a learning centre in Moscow. May his memory be a blessing.”

Beginning his work on the Talmud in 1965, Rabbi Steinsaltz told the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper in 2009: “I didn't take into account the immense effort it requires, which includes not only the work of researching and writing, but also many logistical problems.

“But sometimes, when a person knows too much, it causes him to do nothing ... it seems it's better, sometimes, for man, as for humanity, not to know too much about the difficulties and believe more in the possibilities.”

His *Steinsaltz edition of the Talmud* was originally published in modern Hebrew, with a running commentary to facilitate learning, and has also been translated into English, French, Russian, and Spanish.

The first volume of a new English-Hebrew edition, the *Koren Talmud Bavli*, was released in May 2012.

His earlier classic work of Kabbalah, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*, was first published in 1980, and now appears in eight languages.

A follower of rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Chabad-Lubavitch, he went to help Jews in the former Soviet Union.

Born to secular parents his father Avraham Steinsaltz was a devoted communist and member of Lehi who went to Spain in 1936 to fight with the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War.

Studying mathematics, physics, and chemistry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Rabbi Steinsaltz then attended several yeshivas and in 1965 founded the Israel Institute for Talmudic Publication.

He was later renowned for his cautious approach to interfaith dialogues and once called for “a theological dialogue that asks the tough questions, such as whether Catholicism allows for Jews to enter eternal paradise”.

Rabbi Steinsaltz is survived by his wife, their three children and more than ten grandchildren.

