

Former MK Mordechai Ben-Porat passes away at 98

Former MK Mordechai Ben-Porat was one of the leaders of the aliyah of Iraqi Jews to Israel.

By ARIK BENDER/MAARIV

Published: JANUARY 3, 2022 **Updated:** JANUARY 3, 2022



Former MK Mordechai Ben-Porat
(photo credit: FRITZ COHEN/GPO)

Former MK and minister Mordechai Ben-Porat passed away on Monday morning at the age of 98. Born in Baghdad and immigrating to Israel in 1945, he is considered [one of the leaders of the aliyah of Iraqi Jews to Israel](#).

In 1942, at the age of 19, Ben-Porat joined the underground Hechalutz movement in Iraq.

Described in a *Jerusalem Report* article as an Israeli James Bond, Ben-Porat was the mastermind and undercover on-site facilitator of Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, rescuing 130,000 Jews from Iraq in 1950-1951. During the operation, he was arrested and tortured. In a breathtaking escape, he made his way to an airfield.

In 1948, he completed the first IDF officers' course and participated in the War of Independence as a company commander.

In 1965, Ben-Porat was one of the founders of the Rafi Party, which formed a government together with the National Religious Party. At the same time, Rafi won four out of 11 seats in the Or Yehuda municipality, and he returned to his position as head of the council, a position he had held since 1955.



Former MK Mordechai Ben-Porat (credit: Courtesy of the Ben-Porat family)

In 1968, [Ben-Porat](#) and his party joined the Labor Party, on whose

behalf he served as an MK in the 7th and 8th Knessets, even becoming its deputy speaker. Ahead of the elections to the 9th Knesset, Ben-Porat founded the Movement for the Renewal of Social Zionism, but it did not pass the electoral threshold.

In the run-up to the 10th Knesset elections, his movement joined the Telem Party led by Moshe Dayan. Ben-Porat was placed second on the Knesset party list and was elected to the Knesset. After the death of Moshe Dayan, the faction split and he formed a faction that would represent his party. The faction joined the government of Menachem Begin and Ben-Porat served as a minister without a portfolio. In the government of Yitzhak Shamir, after he replaced Begin, Ben-Porat remained a minister without a portfolio, but resigned from the government toward the end of its term, due to his unsuccessful attempts to form a national unity government.

In 1975 he founded the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries and became its president. In 1979 he went on a mission for the Jewish Agency to assist in the aliyah of Iranian Jews. He had been a co-chair of WOJAC's World Executive Board since 1975.

IN THE 11th Knesset elections, Ben-Porat ran as part of the Movement for the Renewal of Social Zionism, but the list again did not pass the electoral threshold. In 1988, he joined the Likud and was placed 52nd on its list for the 13th Knesset.

In 2001, he was awarded the Israel Prize for "Lifetime Achievement and Special Contribution to Society and the State" and a "Medal of Appreciation" named after Menachem Begin for his work for the State of Israel. Two years later, he was awarded the Ben-Gurion Prize also for "Lifetime Achievement and Special Contribution to Society and the State." In 2005, he was awarded the "Shofar Herut Award" by the Albany community in the United States.

His family stated: "The Ben-Porat family, with all its branches, today mourns the passing of the 'head of the clan,' Mordechai Ben-Porat (David Mordechai), who died tonight in good health at the age of 98. "Mordechai was one of the last of the 'nephilim' [god-like] generation, the favored of David Ben-Gurion, one of the organizers of Operation Ezra and Nehemiah to immigrate the Jews of Iraq, a partner in the

aliyah of the Jews of Iran and a man who has done and acted extensively for the State of Israel in operations and actions some of which we will never know,” they said.

“Mordechai served as head of the Or Yehuda Council, founder of the Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center, served as MK in the sixth, seventh, eighth and tenth Knessets, minister in the Begin-Shamir government and winner of the Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement. “For generations in the family we grew up in his light, path and values; a symbol and role model for Zionism and love of the land. Our descendants will also continue to grow on his legacy. Peace be upon you, David Mordechai, rest in peace on your bed. My condolences to his daughters Edith, Michal and Tami and all the members of his household.”

Ben-Porat’s funeral will take place on Tuesday, January 4, at 1:30 p.m. at the Holon Cemetery.

Jerusalem Post Staff contributed to this report.