

# Selim Yehoshua Salti

**Born:** 1935, Istanbul, Turkey

**Resides:** Moshav Rishpon, Israel

**Occupation:** Businessman, Philanthropist

Bar-Ilan University bestows an honorary doctorate on Selim Yehoshua Salti, in recognition of his monumental contribution to preserving Judeo-Spanish heritage and the Ladino language. The University's pioneering Center for Ladino Studies – inspired by his vision – connects past and present, as well as Sephardic culture and Diaspora Jewry with the State of Israel.

Born and raised in Istanbul, **Selim Yehoshua Salti** was inspired by an early memory. "I vividly recall my father's joy in announcing VE Day. He was ecstatic about the future of the 80,000 Turkish Jews, who had survived the Nazis and, at the same time, was devastated by the loss of most of the Balkan's Ladino-speaking Jews in concentration camps. He wondered if the Ladino language would ever be spoken again in the Balkans," recounts Salti. "As I grew older, I took it upon myself to help ensure that Ladino lives on."

With a BA in economics and an MA in journalism, Salti worked as a reporter and was also editor of the country's only Jewish newspaper, *Shalom* (printed in Turkish and Ladino). An officer in the Turkish Army, he served in the armored corps.

After marrying Naime 55 years ago, he became the father of two sons and a partner in the family business. Active in the Jewish community, he was a founder and president of "Yildirim Spor Kulubu," a Jewish youth and sports club. As a member of the Turkish Jewish Waqf, he had "the privilege of maintaining and repairing Jewish institutions and synagogues." In 1975, he emigrated to Switzerland, ending half a millennium of Salti residence under Ottoman and Turkish rule. In Geneva, he served on the Jewish community's executive committee. Salti's diverse business interests and leading industrial companies spanned continents.

Since retiring Salti has devoted his time to philanthropy. The Salti Foundation has supported hundreds of students from Ladino-speaking families. In 2003, he established BIU's world-class Naime & Yehoshua Salti Center for Ladino Studies for the preservation of Ladino and Sephardic culture. Headed by founding director Prof. Shmuel Refael (a former Salti scholar), the Center "fits into Bar-Ilan's long tradition of preserving Jewish culture," says its patron, who sits on the University's Board of Trustees and considers BIU "his second home." With BA, MA and PhD studies, conferences and collaboration with European and American universities, and a modern research library, the Salti Center has put Ladino on the academic map. It has also heightened public awareness of Ladino through courses and activities for the general population.

Now residing in Israel, Selim Salti affirms: "I have come full circle, returning to my ancestors' land to live as a Jew and continue the tradition of *Tikun Olam*."

