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## Illustrious Rabbi from Brazil Apologizes for Stealing Expensive Ties in the US

Contributed by Elma Lia Nascimento  
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Henry Sobel, 63, the renowned rabbi and president of the São Paulo Israelite Congregation, who was arrested, March 23, in Palm Beach, Florida, charged with stealing four big-brand-name ties, left the room in the hospital he has been admitted to in São Paulo to briefly meet reporters and apologize for his act.

Sobel has been hospitalized at the Albert Einstein Israelite hospital, a world-class institution, in the south side of São Paulo, since early Friday, March 30, the day after the Brazilian media reported on his shoplifting activities in the United States.

He was admitted to the hospital, according to the doctors, due to "an episode of mood disorder, represented by a lack of emotional control and altered behavior."

The health facility also informed that the rabbi had been taking large quantities of drugs to treat severe insomnia that "cause potential states of mental confusion and amnesia."

In his statement to the press Sobel said that the person who stole the ties in the United States "is not the Henry Sobel that you know." He also apologized for the distress he caused everyone and said that it was very difficult to explain the inexplicable.

The rabbi, who was born in Portugal, but moved as a kid to New York city, where he became an American citizen, was the head of the Congregação Israelita Paulista for the last 35 years. He temporarily resigned his post last Thursday, a few hours after his shoplifting activities were made public in Brazil.

Despite his enemies and detractors among the conservative Jews, Henry Sobel has become a celebrated character in Brazil for his fight against the military dictatorship's human rights abuses, between 1964 and 1985. He has also helped to establish friendship ties among Jews, Christians and Muslims.

In his brief press encounter at the hospital, the rabbi didn't go into the details of his Florida actions. He arrived at the Albert Einstein's press room a little before 5 pm and seemed very calm while greeting everyone who was waiting for him. It was his first public appearance since the news of his shoplifting was publicized in Brazil.

"I don't know where to start," he began. "I am taking relatively strong medications. Regarding what happened, it is very hard for me to explain the inexplicable. I do not have scientific and psychological knowledge to understand, explain and, much less, justify what occurred, but one thing I know: the Henry Sobel who committed that act is not the Henry Sobel

you know."

"I want to close with an apology, and I also want to make a commitment. I want to apologize for the distress that I caused, especially for having taken medication without a medical prescription. I want to apologize for the distress that I caused everybody, and I want to make a solemn commitment: I intend to keep on defending all the moral and ethical values that I have always stood up for, as a Jew, a man and a rabbi."

He ended the short statement with a "nothing else," refusing to take questions from the reporters and going back to his room in the hospital's 7th floor.

The hospital is not saying when he is leaving the place. A bulletin released after his public appearance states that the religious leader will continue at the Albert Einstein being treated with drugs that should stabilize his psychic condition.

Flávio Huck, the neurologist who is taking care of Sobel, said that the rabbi is suffering from mood disorder. "These are situations," he stated, "in which the individual can have periods of sadness and periods of excitement or both things together."

According to the Palm Beach police, Sobel was arrested after a surveillance camera showed him stealing a tie from a Louis Vuitton store in that city. The police found four ties, all of them luxurious brand name articles in his car.

All of them, it was determined later, had been stolen from three different stores. Besides the Louis Vuitton he also grabbed a Giorgio's, a Gucci and a Giorgio Armani. Each tie costs about US\$ 150.

Sobel spent the night in jail in Palm Beach, and only was free after seeing a judge, paying US\$ 680 for the ties and posting US\$ 3,000 in bail. He is expected back in the Florida court on April 23.

The rabbi receives a monthly salary of 25,000 reais (US\$ 12,200).

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