News



Ukraine's chief rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman follows the coffin of his adopted son Matityahu (Anton) Samborsky, who was killed in war with Russia, during funeral ceremony in the city central synagogue in Kyiv, Ukraine, Thursday, Sept. 12, 2024. (AP/Efrem Lukatsky)

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Kyiv, Ukraine — September 13, 2024
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Servicemen, veterans and others gathered Thursday in Kyiv to remember the adopted son of Ukraine's chief rabbi, Moshe Azman, who was killed in battle, in a funeral service underlining unity among Ukraine's diverse communities in the fight against Russia's invasion.

Anton Samborskyi, 32, was reported missing in late July, and his death was confirmed after weeks of uncertainty. The service took place at the Central Synagogue of Kyiv, followed by a burial at the city's Jewish cemetery.

Rabbi Azman, who adopted Samborskyi when he was a 10-year-old orphan, shared his grief publicly, referring to his son by his chosen Jewish name, Matityahu or "Moty."

Azman wrote in a post on social media that Samborskyi had a daughter in May, but he was drafted into the army a week after the baby was born. He said the last time he spoke to his son was on July 17.

About 100 mourners, including servicemen and veterans in uniform, many holding flowers and wearing yarmulkes –- some with a camouflage design –- gathered for the service. Mourners filed past the closed casket, which was draped with a tallit, or Jewish prayer shawl, and hugged Azman and his relatives.

"He went to the front voluntarily … as someone who wanted to defend his country. That's why he joined an assault brigade," David Milman, a Jewish army chaplain who attended the service, told The Associated Press.

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Ukraine has a centuries-old Jewish heritage, with Jewish communities playing a significant role in the country's cultural and religious history, despite periods of persecution. Its Jewish population was decimated during the Holocaust in World War

II.

Jews currently make up an estimated 0.2% of the country’s population, including its wartime president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Olena Tolkachova, a member of an assault brigade fighting in eastern and southern Ukraine, said that volunteers from all parts of society had joined the fight against Russia.

“This is very important for Ukraine, because not only Ukrainians from the mainstream are fighting for our country, but different ethnicities and different religious groups — Orthodox and Catholics, Jews, and representatives of the Islamic faith,” she told the AP after the service.

“His position was very simple: he was very pro-Ukraine and wanted to help," she said.

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.