As his name ‘Ben-Zion’ or ‘son of Zion’ states, Rabbi Uziel was born in Jerusalem in 1880, the newest member of a very prestigious Sephardi family. His father, Joseph Raphael, was the Av Beit Din of the Sephardi community in Jerusalem. Following in his father’s footsteps, by the age of 20, Ben-Zion Uziel was teaching at the Tiferet Yerushalayim Yeshiva and helped found the Machzikei Torah Yeshiva for Sephardim.

In 1911, Rabbi Uziel was appointed ‘Chacham Bashi’ of the Sephardi community in Jaffa and immediately attempted to improve the community functions, raising the status of the community in the eyes of the rest of the Yishuv. Here he became friendly with Rav Kook and together they worked for better inter-communal relations between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. He set up yeshivot, improved the Beit Din and helped build various community centers.

During World War I, he worked tirelessly for the protection of the rights of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael. He was exiled to Damascus along with the rest of the community by the Turkish rulers in 1917 but was allowed to return before the coming of the British. In 1920 he joined the Mizrahi Movement and worked on behalf of Mizrahi and the Sephardi communities in Eretz Yisrael and in the Diaspora until his death.

Rabbi Uziel’s travels took him to many countries where he sought to persuade the Jews to come to Israel. However, at the same time, the realities of the moment were his major concern. While serving as the Rabbi of Salonika, Greece for three years (a post he accepted temporarily and with the permission of the Jaffa community), he was able to set up a system of Talmud Torahs and yeshivot. It is said that during his leadership, the community was completely devoted to keeping Shabbat and Koshrut.

Upon returning to Israel, he became the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv and in 1939, Chief Sephardi Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael. In this capacity, he represented his community to the British Mandatory Government.

Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel was responsible for founding the Sha’ar Zion Yeshiva and had a hand in the beginning of the Porat Yosef Yeshivat, which now exist in many cities of Eretz Yisrael. As a member of the Mizrahi Movement, he traveled to Iraq and the United States to generate interest in aliyah and financial support for the Yishuv. He also served as a Mizrahi delegate to the Zionist Congress from 1925-46. He was a prolific writer. Regarding the Redemption of Israel he wrote:

“We all desire that the ingathering of the exiles should take place from all areas where they have been scattered; and that our holy language will be upon our lips and upon the lips of our children, in building the Land and its flowering through the hands and work of Israel; and we will all strive to see the flag of freedom and redemption waving in glory and strength upon the walls of Jerusalem. But we cannot agree with those who view the buying of land as a final objective. Such purchases serve as the first step in the clothing of the soul of life and the Torah of the nation and for this, we must strive...

Those who say that the laws of our Torah have become useless, antiquated relics and its values have outlived their purpose are gravely mistaken. For we know with clear and true knowledge that the laws of G-d are truth and each day they are as new as the day they were given at Mount Sinai, and all human enlightenment until our present day has not succeeded in revealing and reaching the level of moral justice in society as well as in the family, nor the same level of righteousness of the Torah of Israel, whose ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace.”