

JEWISH AFFAIRS

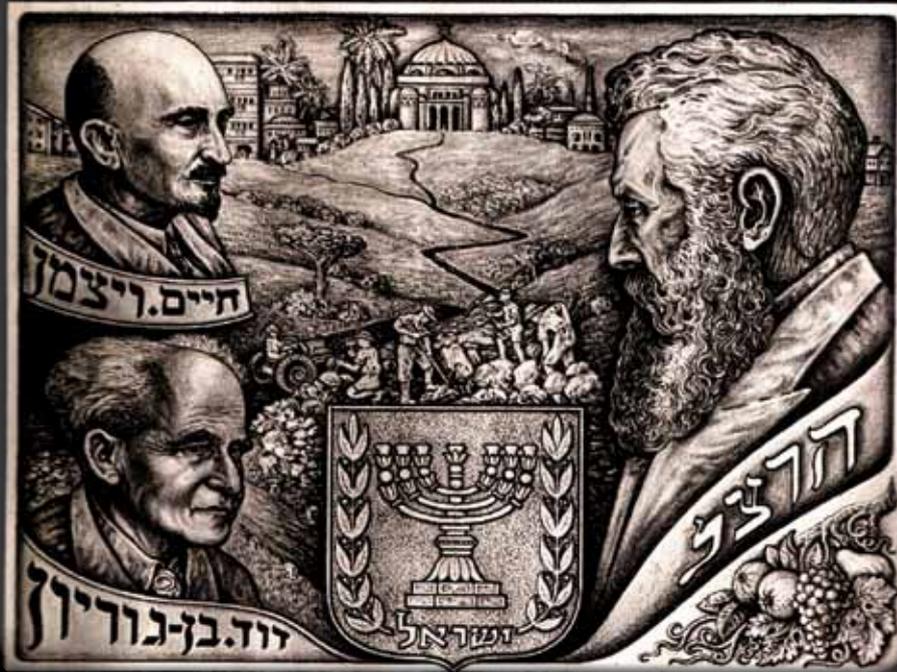
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MISSION

In publishing JEWISH AFFAIRS, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies aims to produce a cultural forum which caters for a wide variety of interests in the community. The journal will be a vehicle for the publication of articles of significant thought and opinion on contemporary Jewish issues, and will aim to encourage constructive debate, in the form of reasoned and researched essays, on all matters of Jewish and general interest.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

JEWISH AFFAIRS will promote Jewish cultural and creative achievement in South Africa, and consider Jewish traditions and heritage within the modern context. It aims to provide future researchers with a window on the community's reaction to societal challenges. In this way the journal hopes critically to explore, and honestly to confront, problems facing the Jewish community both in South Africa and abroad, by examining national and international affairs and their impact on South Africa.

The SA Jewish Board of Deputies is committed to dialogue and free enquiry. It aims to protect human rights and to strive for better relations among peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa.

The columns of JEWISH AFFAIRS will therefore be open to all shades of opinion. The views expressed by the contributors will be their own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor, the Editorial Board or the Publishers.

However, in keeping with the provisions of the National Constitution, the freedom of speech exercised in this journal will exclude the dissemination of hate propaganda, personal attacks or invective, or any material which may be regarded as defamatory or malicious. In all such matters, the Editor's decision is final.

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ADVERTISING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS – Shirley Beagle

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011 645 2583

TYPESETTING/PRINTING – Bookpress, Johannesburg

© South African Jewish Board of Deputies 2017

Permission to reprint material from JEWISH AFFAIRS should be applied for from

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies

JEWISH AFFAIRS is published 3 times annually

Annual subscription R150 including VAT and postage

Overseas Subscriptions R300

Postal Address: PO Box 87557, Houghton 2041

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Original, unpublished essays of between 1 000 and 6 000 words on all subjects are invited, and should be sent to:

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Section of a certificate issued to mark the founding of the state of Israel, 1948.

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JEWISH AFFAIRS

VOL. 72 ♦ NO. 2 ♦ ROSH HASHANAH 2017

Editor: David Saks

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ISRAEL

Our mission is to build strong support and love for the State of Israel.



Promote Aliya and travel to Israel



Communicate Israel related information to the community



Monitor and respond to local media and other attacks on Israel



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South Africa – Why it's crucial to continue to engage and build relationships with Israel.



Ben Swartz, Chairman SAZF, Founder SA friends of Israel

The South African Jewish community has always been a proud Zionist community, standing our ground and defending Israel on a daily basis. The SAZF is directly responsible for the fostering and development of the strongest possible connection with Israel and all South Africa's Jewry.

As a Federation, we work closely to empower our affiliates to build a vibrant and thriving Zionist community. The SAZF which has offices in JHB, CT and KZN is responsible for a wide range of Israel related activities including the promotion of Aliyah, education and training, support and development of pro-Israel organisations and increasing support for Israel through outreach programmes.

Our mandate extends beyond the Jewish community and into the broader South African community via SA Friends of Israel which aims to cultivate relationships and promote a positive image for Israel. We work pro-actively to reduce the amount of anti-Israel bias in the South African political system through various projects and constant monitoring and managing responses to any local media, political, or civil society attacks on Israel. The creativity and innovation that are such defining characteristics of the Israeli landscape are shared through the regular cultural and academic events hosted by SAZF and SAFI (SA Friends of Israel) impacting thousands of South Africans.

As we continue to represent many thousands of Jews and non-Jews in their support of the State of Israel, we would like to ask the community to play an active role in this mission and get more involved in our programmes. We need your help to make an impact. The more partners we have, the stronger we will be! Contact our offices for more details.

ELAINE KATZ

*

Kathy Munroe



Elaine Katz (1935-2017)

Dr Elaine Katz, long serving member of the Editorial Board of *Jewish Affairs*, author, academic, fine researcher, scholar and a close friend and colleague passed away after a short illness on 21 February 2017. Elaine was a South African historian of distinction, possessing a fine mind, sharp sense of humour and dry wit. She had a great capacity for friendship, empathy and caring for her many friends and family.

Elaine was a world authority on the history of the South African mining industry, early trade unionism, medical history and the history of Johannesburg. Her research was deep, acute in its analysis and firmly evidenced-based. She wrote with meticulous precision and her writing style was always readable. She will be remembered for her two masterful works of South African historical scholarship, which were based respectively on her M.A., earned in 1974 at the University of the Witwatersrand and on her Doctoral dissertation for which she was awarded her PhD by Wits in 1990.

Elaine's great strength was as a researcher. Her first impressive study was *A Trade Union Aristocracy: the Transvaal White Working Class and the General Strike of 1913* (1976), published by the African Studies Institute at Wits. In 1994, Wits University Press published her authoritative study, *White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines 1886-1918*. These two works established Elaine's reputation as a leading historian of the South African gold mining industry. She gathered international accolades and her reputation was enhanced by her journal publications and presentations to a range of international conferences on mining history.

In 1995, Elaine achieved the by no means minor distinction in academic circles of publishing a pioneering article in one of the top rated economic history journals of the time, the *Economic History Review* (UK) with a path-breaking critical article on a key debate of the decade, 'Outcrop and deep level mining in South Africa before the Anglo-Boer War: re-examining the Blainey thesis'. This frequently cited article brought her scholarship to the attention of an overseas audience and fostered much interest in the complexities of the South African version of mining capitalism and the links between technology, geology and labour issues.

"As a friend Elaine possessed a number of outstanding qualities", remembers Professor Bruce Murray, "She was genuinely concerned about one's welfare and displayed an amazing empathy in responding to one's trials and tribulations; she was most generous and the most hospitable of hosts, laying on regular luncheons for her friends". For Professor Charles van Onselen, she was "a scholar ahead of her time". He recalls, "If I was ever in doubt about some aspect of the history of the mining industry I would always check first with Elaine and she, in turn, was always extremely helpful and supportive of anything that I was working on. She was a tough critic and could be ruthless in her criticism of sloppy research but, in my case, she was always generous

to a fault and I valued her insight and opinions alike.”

According to Professor Marcia Leveson, “Because Elaine was so self-effacing you would never guess how brilliant she was. She had a mind like a terrier, uniquely researching her chosen hidden areas of South African history, chasing details, unsparing in her academic rigor. Despite many obstacles, her indomitable drive kept her always working with an energy and ability that resulted in so many fine publications and appearances at local and overseas conferences. As a teacher, she was as demanding of her students as she was of herself. I knew her as colleague and had enormous respect for her both as an academic and as a person. I also cherished her as a loving friend - kind to a fault, caring, warm, funny, involved in many fields, and hugely supportive of her family and of her large network of friends who so appreciated her vital conversation and her open house”.

Sean Archer of UCT pays the following tribute: “Elaine was a meticulous historian who never accepted easy-going conjecture, nor did she shy away from correcting the politically correct views of the high and mighty in the South African history profession. I suspect she was a pains-taking teacher too.”

Says Clive Chipkin, “Thinking of Elaine, I recall a generous and caring friend, a brilliant mind, an active sportsperson, an all-rounder. To whatever she was reading, she applied the critical sense of a major historian’s mind that asked basic questions. She perceived life with a sense of fun and a hearty dislike of pomposity. And she was intrigued by the strange variegated geographically widespread family she came out of. She never stopped learning, entering into new fields, discussing architecture critically and passing on articles to me with a flourish of comments and questions”.

Elaine taught at Wits for many years and she was an excellent, demanding yet encouraging lecturer and teacher. She was versatile, serving successively as a lecturer and later senior lecturer in the Departments of History, Economic History and Communications Studies at Wits and, following her formal retirement, she held an honorary research fellowship in the Wits History Department from 1995 until her passing. This 22 year-research specialist association must surely rank among Wits records.

Elaine was a versatile teacher, across history, economic history, speech, drama and communications. She had an advantage possessed by few academics in that she had a Transvaal High School teaching diploma. Flo Bird, doyenne of Johannesburg heritage, recalls with fond affection that Elaine taught her history of Parktown Girls High and how her books have been of considerable assistance in stimulating her own knowledge and enriching the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation tours.

Elaine is additionally remembered for her work, together with Eric Axelson and Edward Tabler, on the publication *Baines on the Zambezi, 1858-1859*, a prestige collector’s limited edition published by the Brenthurst Press in 1982. This book was the eighth book in the first Brenthurst Africana series and remains one of the most sought after.

In 2008, Elaine contributed a major piece on Johannesburg to the *New Encyclopaedia of Africa*, published in the USA and edited by John Middleton. In her final years, her research took her into the subject of the role of American mining engineers and mining technology in the Witwatersrand gold mining industry; a recent talk on this subject at the Rand Club was received with accolades. Elaine also became interested in Jewish genealogy and in her own extensive family history, and applied her skills of careful scholarly research and data gathering to this new area of interest.

Elaine was a critic and referee of academic papers and publications of other scholars, and was generous in giving of her time in this regard. Her praise was hard earned, and her criticisms trenchant and always pointed to positive improvements so that scholarship was advanced.

Elaine left a legacy of a large and important archive of her lifetime of scholarship and research. It is an important source of work for mining, medical and labour history and the history of Johannesburg. We hope this will be received and preserved at Wits, thereby preserving her research sources and becoming open to other young scholars who follow in her footsteps. We would also like to establish a research fellowship in her name at Wits, and hereby invite contributions from her many friends, associates and colleagues who share a desire to commemorate her life and work.

Elaine Katz, nee Kuper, was born in March 1935. She was married to the late Victor Katz for over fifty years and is survived by their four children, Gail, Jeremy, Ruth and Peta Ann and a granddaughter, Abby Sarah.

THE BALFOUR DECLARATION: ITS GENESIS, BIRTH AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

*

Rodney Mazinter

On 2 November 1917, one year before the conclusion of World War I, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour wrote to Britain's most illustrious Jewish citizen, Baron Lionel Walter Rothschild, expressing his government's support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Lord Rothschild, a prominent Zionist and a friend of Chaim Weizmann, had lent his considerable talents to the Zionist cause.

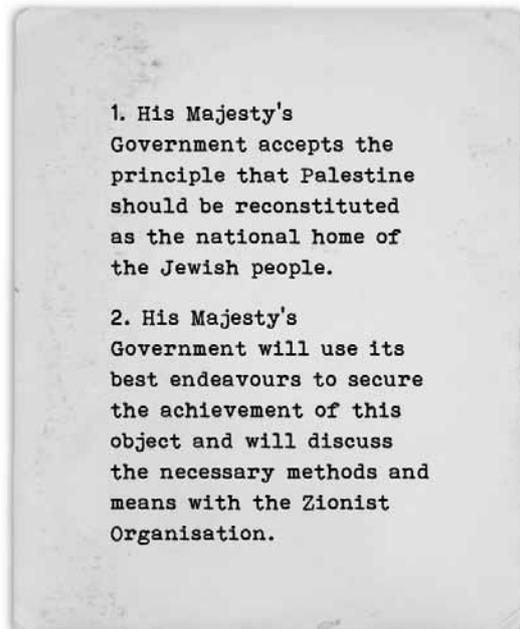
Over the course of that year, a vigorous anti-Zionist movement within the British parliament had held up the progress of the planned declaration. Led by Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India and one of the first Jews to serve in the cabinet, Jewish anti-Zionists feared that British-sponsored Zionism would threaten the status of Jews who had settled in various European and American cities. Especially, they believed that it would encourage antisemitic violence in the countries battling Britain in the war, particularly within Germany and the Ottoman Empire.

This opposition was overruled, however, as Prime Minister David Lloyd George, one of the great reforming British chancellors of the 20th Century and Prime Minister from 1916 to 1922, vigorously promoted the Declaration. After soliciting - with varying degrees of success - the approval of France, the United States and Italy (including the Vatican), Lloyd George's government went ahead with its plan.

Many of history's great documents and speeches were repeatedly modified and refashioned before they were finalised. So it was that on 19 June 1917, British government officials led by Foreign Secretary Balfour asked Zionist leaders Chaim Weizmann and Lord Rothschild to produce a draft formulation that the Cabinet could consider for British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Zionists, along with sympathetic British

officials, had already been working on the outline of such a document incorporating a declaration of British support for a home for the Jews in Palestine. Among those involved were Mark Sykes, Ronald Graham, Nahum Sokolow, Joseph Cowen, Israel Sieff, Simon Marks, Ahad Ha'Am, Leon Simon and Harry Sacher.¹

In his capacity as the titular head of the British Jewish community, Rothschild sent a final revision of this document to Balfour with a covering note mentioning that if acceptable he would "hand it on to the Zionist Federation and also announce it at a meeting called for that purpose". The version seen here, dated 18 July 1917, is known as the Lord Rothschild draft. It was based on a rather long and detailed working draft of 12 July by the Zionists.



Jonathan Schneer, in his book *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*², is struck by the very first sentence - the use of the term 'reconstituted', which "implies an unbroken link between Jews and Palestine despite the nearly two-thousand-year separation". The reference to the Zionist Organisation as the official representative of Jewish interests had several purposes, not

Rodney Mazinter is a Cape Town-based writer, poet and author, who has for many years been involved in media activism on behalf of Israel. He has held numerous leadership positions within a wide range of educational and Jewish communal bodies in Cape Town.



ROSH HASHANA MESSAGE 2017

The IUA-UCF is the "iron dome" under which South African Jewry is able to continue to live a rich and vibrant life, staying true to its Jewish and Zionist values and traditions.

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least of which was to establish a recognised growth node for a future Jewish state.

On 2 November, Balfour sent a letter to Lord Rothschild stating that: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

Much later when, in 1922, Britain was granted the Mandate for Palestine by the League of Nations, Article 5 formalised a role for a "Zionist organization". That Organisation evolved into the quasi-governmental Jewish Agency. In 1917, though, it was meant to indicate the (hugely embroidered) impression of worldwide Jewish influence.

Britain's interest was for Russia to remain in World War I and for the US, which had entered only in April 1917, to assume a major role in the fighting. It was no secret that neither American nor Russian Jews were enthusiastic about the war continuing and that efforts should be pursued to bring about its curtailment. This ran contrary to Britain's desires. London's hope was that giving the Zionists a direct stake in the war's outcome would persuade Jews in Russia and America to urge their governments to support the war.

The idea of a commitment addressed to the Zionist Organisation was also intended to deflate rumours that Germany might yet issue its own statement of support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Balfour himself had used terminology which asked for "any suggestions which the Zionist Organisation may desire to lay before" the Cabinet, according to the Anglo-Jewish historian Leonard Stein.³

This first draft is also modest in its wording. It refrains from using the phrase 'Jewish state', which Sacher had argued for, and instead employed the more restrained "national home of the Jewish people", notes *The Encyclopedia of Zionism*. In modern parlance, this phrase from the Balfour Declaration is paraphrased as "Jewish National Home". Although statehood was not explicitly mentioned in any of the drafts, the expression "a national home for the Jewish people" is consistent in four of the five drafts, including the final Balfour Declaration.

This phrase harked back to the 1897 First Zionist Congress in Basel. Some British Zionists were already vaguely thinking of a self-governing Jewish Commonwealth, presumably under British sovereignty. Balfour himself calculated the matter of statehood -

if it was to happen - would be the outcome of a gradual political development.⁴

Chief Protagonists

Against this backdrop, the newly elected Lloyd George government took a decision to publicly support Zionism, a movement led in Britain by Chaim Weizmann, a Russian Jewish chemist who had settled in Manchester. Weizmann was born in Motol, Russia in 1874, receiving his education in biochemistry in Switzerland and Germany. In Geneva, he became active in the Zionist movement, which benefitted from his clarity of thought and insights. In 1905 he moved to England, and was elected to the General Zionist Council. Weizmann's scientific assistance to the Allied forces in World War I brought him into close contact with British leaders, enabling him to play a key role in the issuing of the Balfour Declaration

Lionel Walter Rothschild, Second Baron Rothschild of Tring, was an eccentric personality, and an outstanding naturalist who contributed significantly to the Darwinian theory of evolution. It is little recognised that the Balfour Declaration promising the Jews a return to their national home in Palestine, described as the "greatest event that has occurred in Jewish history for 2000 years", took the form of a letter addressed to Rothschild beginning "Dear Lord Rothschild".⁵ The central role Rothschild played in the steps leading to Great Britain's support for the return of Jews to Palestine and the formation of the State of Israel resulted from the close relationship and friendship he enjoyed with Arthur Balfour on the one hand and Chaim Weizmann on the other. The key role he assumed has often been downplayed by contemporary writers and commentators. Nevertheless, his letter to Weizmann on 10 April 1917 telling him that he had arranged a meeting with Balfour leaves no doubt about his own sentiments: "I fully realise the great importance of doing everything to further the Zionist cause with the Government in view of the persistent and puerile opposition... Apart from the first and foremost great national aims of our people which are strikingly and consistently being urged now in every country, there is to my mind a very much greater need for establishing the real Jewish nation again in Palestine... ."

In a letter to Balfour dated 18 July 1917, Rothschild wrote: "At last I am able to send you the formula you asked me for. If his Majesty's Government will send me a message on the lines of the formula, if they and you approve of it, I will hand it on to the Zionist Federation and also announce it

at a meeting called for that purpose... ”⁶

Arthur James Balfour was born into wealth and influence. He succeeded his uncle, Lord Salisbury, who had been his political mentor and champion. However, his initial interests were not political. He enjoyed music and poetry, and was first known as a renowned philosopher, publishing *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, *The Foundations of Belief* and *Theism and Humanism*. It was thought that Balfour was merely diverting himself with politics and his colleagues did not take him seriously. Members looked upon him as just a young member of the governing classes who remained in the House because it was the proper thing for a man of high breeding and family to do. In

1874 he was elected the Conservative Member of Parliament for Hertford. Four years later he became private secretary to Lord Salisbury, then Foreign Secretary in Benjamin Disraeli's government. In 1885 Balfour was a member of Randolph Churchill's 'Fourth Party' group (distinct from the Conservatives, Liberals and Irish Nationalists). Later, he joined the Cabinet as Secretary for Scotland and then for Ireland under Lord Salisbury. Despite widespread doubt that he was up to the demanding job of Irish Secretary, Balfour proved to be a tough incumbent, restoring the rule of law. His land development legislation was considered well-judged and has been credited with calming the Irish conflict for a generation.

In 1891, Balfour became First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the Commons. He regained the same positions on the Conservatives' re-election in 1895. When Lord Salisbury retired, Balfour became Prime Minister, but his cabinet split on the free trade issue and his relations with the king were poor. Defeats in the Commons and in by-elections led to his resignation in December 1905. He continued to lead his party until 1911 but, despite stepping down, his career was far from over. He became First Lord of the Admiralty in the wartime coalition and later Foreign Secretary.

Support for a "national home" for the Jews in Palestine from the government of the greatest empire in the world was in part a fulfilment of the efforts of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), a Sephardic Jew who had published *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) in Vienna in 1896. It identified the factors which he believed had created a universal Jewish problem, and offered a programme to regulate it through the exodus of unhappy and unwanted Jews to an autonomous territory of their own.

Herzl offered a focus for a Zionist movement founded in Odessa in 1881, which spread rapidly through the Jewish communities of

Russia, and for small branches which had sprung up in Germany, England and elsewhere. Though 'Zion' referred to a geographical location, it functioned as a lodestone to a people desiring and praying to live in their ancestral land free of subjugation and oppression, architects of their own fate and determinants of their own destiny.

In his diary Herzl describes submitting his draft proposals to the Rothschild Family Council, noting: "I bring to the Rothschilds and the big Jews their historical mission. I shall welcome all men of goodwill - we must be united - and crush all those of bad".⁷

He read his manuscript "Addressed to the Rothschilds" to a friend, Meyer-Cohn, who said, "Up till now I have believed that we are not a nation - but more than a nation. I believed that we have the historic mission of being the exponents of universalism among the nations and therefore were more than a people identified with a specific land."

Herzl replied: "Nothing prevents us from being and remaining the exponents of a united humanity, when we have a country of our own. To fulfil this mission we do not have to remain literally planted among the nations who hate and despise us. If, in our present circumstances, we wanted to bring about the unity of mankind independent of national boundaries, we would have to combat the ideal of patriotism. The latter, however, will prove stronger than we for innumerable years to come...We want to lay the foundation stone of the house which is to shelter the Jewish nation..." and "Zionism seeks to obtain for the Jewish people a publicly recognised, legally secured homeland in Palestine".⁸ That Zionism was "a return to the Jewish fold even before it is a return to the Jewish land" was an expression of his own experience, which was extended into the official platform of Zionism as the aim of "strengthening the Jewish national sentiment and national consciousness".⁸

The motives behind the decision to issue what came to be known as the Balfour Declaration were various: aside from a genuine belief in the righteousness of the Zionist cause, held by Lloyd George among others, Britain's leaders hoped that a formal declaration in favour of Zionism would help gain Jewish support for the Allies in neutral countries, such as the United States and especially in Russia, where the powerfully antisemitic czarist government had just been overthrown with some help from Russia's significant, repressed Jewish population.

Finally, despite Britain's earlier agreement with France dividing influence in the region after the anticipated defeat of the Ottoman Empire, Lloyd George had come to see British dominance in Palestine - a land

bridge between the crucial territories of India and Egypt - as an essential post-war goal. The establishment of a Zionist state there - under British protection - would accomplish this, while seemingly following the stated Allied aim of self-determination for smaller nations.

“It is essential that it [the Jewish community] should know that it is in Palestine as of right and not on sufferance. That is the reason why it is necessary that the existence of a Jewish National Home in Palestine should be internationally guaranteed, and that it should be formally recognised to rest upon ancient historic connection”. In other words, “the Jews are the only existing indigenous people of the land of Israel - which was for a while called Palestine”.

Britain’s public acknowledgement and support of the Zionist movement emerged from its growing concern surrounding the direction of World War 1. By mid-1917, Britain and France were mired in a virtual stalemate with Germany on the Western Front, while efforts to defeat Turkey on the Gallipoli Peninsula had failed spectacularly. On the Eastern Front, the fate of one ally, Russia, was uncertain. Revolution in March had toppled Czar Nicholas II, and the provisional government was struggling against widespread opposition to maintain the country’s disintegrating war effort against Germany and Austria-Hungary. Although the United States had just entered the war on the Allied side, a sizeable infusion of American troops was not scheduled to arrive on the continent until the following year.

Throughout the entire European continent antisemitism was on the rise, although not for another 22 years would it reach a peak in hatred in parity with what was happening to Jews in Eastern Europe and Russia.

Origins of antagonism towards Jews

This anti-Jewish pathology had its origins in the defeat and expulsion from Israel of Jews by the Romans in the 1st Century. Titus, the future Roman Emperor, had starved the city for months. At the end of July, his legions broke through the walls and, according to historian Josephus, killed over a million Jews in their conquest. The Second Temple was burned to the ground on the date in the Jewish calendar called Tisha B’Av (9th of Av). The siege ended with the sacking of the city, and the enslavement of the survivors.

Following the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem on 8 September in the year 70 CE and the dispersal of Jewish survivors from Israel to other lands, Israel was denuded of Jews. The outcome was

the destruction of the national entity of the Jewish people. Over the next twenty centuries, despite efforts to assimilate, Jews were never entirely accepted in their adopted countries. The Siege of Jerusalem was the decisive event marking the beginning of the Diaspora and antisemitism.

Anti-Jewish sentiment has long manifested itself among the Christian and Muslim communities in lands stretching from North Africa and the Mediterranean to the Arctic Circle. There were periods of varying degrees of peace, and political and economic assimilation in some of these countries, but it would be no exaggeration to say that separation, distrust, domination and control by means of brute force was the experience of most Jews. Organised massacres (pogroms) of Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe happened frequently enough to be considered commonplace. Nor would it be an exaggeration to say that Jews led a miserable, second-class existence in these countries.

Consequences

In modern times a number of key events gave impetus to antisemitism and at the same time divided support among Jews and governments for Zionism. One that stands out was the Alfred Dreyfus affair from 1894 until its resolution in 1906 that morphed into a *cause célèbre* in France and split that country down the middle. It involved a case where a Jewish captain in the French army was falsely accused of treason, found guilty by a military tribunal and sentenced to imprisonment on Devil’s Island, a French possession in the Caribbean. This event gave impetus to the Zionist movement that had been chartered at a conference in Berne in 1897 by Theodor Herzl for the purpose of returning the Jewish presence back to the land from which they were expelled, and which at that time had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire for 400 years.

By the time the Balfour Declaration was published in British and international newspapers, one of its major objectives had been rendered obsolete: Vladimir Lenin’s Bolsheviks had gained power in Russia, and one of their first actions was to call for an immediate armistice. Russia was out of the war, and the reality was that no amount of persuasion from Zionist Jews who - despite Britain’s belief to the contrary, had relatively little influence in Russia to begin with - could reverse the outcome.

Nonetheless, the influence of the Declaration on the course of post-war events was immediate: According to the ‘mandate’ system created by the Versailles Treaty of 1919, Britain was entrusted with

the temporary administration of Palestine, with the understanding that it would work on behalf of both its Jewish and Arab inhabitants. Many Arabs, in Palestine and elsewhere, were angered by their failure to receive the nationhood and self-government they had been led to expect in return for their participation in the war against Turkey.

When the Balfour Declaration was issued, it was decided by Lord Allenby that it should not then be published in Palestine, where his forces were still south of the Gaza-Beersheba line. It was in fact not done until after the establishment of the Civil Administration in 1920. The Declaration was confirmed by the victorious allies at the San Remo Conference in 1920, and passed into international law. When the League of Nations was formed it, too, in 1922 confirmed the Declaration, which became a part of International Law giving the Zionists legal title to the land.

Despite Britain being given the green light to implement the Balfour Declaration, it marked time trying to balance its responsibility to the San Remo Conference and the League of Nations with the upsurge of Arab nationalism and Britain's need for oil to keep the wheels of 20th Century mechanisation and technology turning. A policy of procrastination denied access to Palestine for millions of Jews until after World War II and the Holocaust. This low point in human history revealed how mistaken those who fought against the 1917 Declaration by the British government had

been, and later succeeding governments to implement its provisions.

After World War II and the re-evaluation of how the world's countries set about regulating their affairs, this piece of international legislation, which included the Balfour Declaration— unchanged and in its entirety—was taken over by the United Nations, which superseded the League of Nations. It remained the cornerstone of an independent Israel when the United Nations in 1947 voted to incorporate the Balfour Declaration and instructed the mandate power, Britain, to implement it. Thus did Palestine become Israel, thereby bringing to a climax nearly 2000 years of struggle to return Jews to the land from which they had been cruelly ejected and giving impetus to the gathering in of Jews from all over the world.

NOTES

- 1 Lowenthal, M (ed), *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, Gollancz, 1958, p35.
- 2 Random House, New York, 2012.
- 3 Stein, L, *The Balfour Declaration*, Simon and Schuster, 1961
- 4 Rothschild, Miriam, *Dear Lord Rothschild - Birds Butterflies and History*, Balaban: London, 1983. The author was a niece of Lord Rothschild
- 5 Ibid, p266
- 6 Ibid, p235
- 7 Lowenthal, *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, p35
- 8 Ibid, p215



Shanah Tovah Umetukah!

May this New Year be sweet, healthy and happy.
L'shanah Tovah! Happy Rosh Hashanah!

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ON ARTHUR BALFOUR AND HIS ZIONIST SYMPATHIES

*

Cecil Bloom

Foreign Office,

November 2nd 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved, by, the Cabinet:

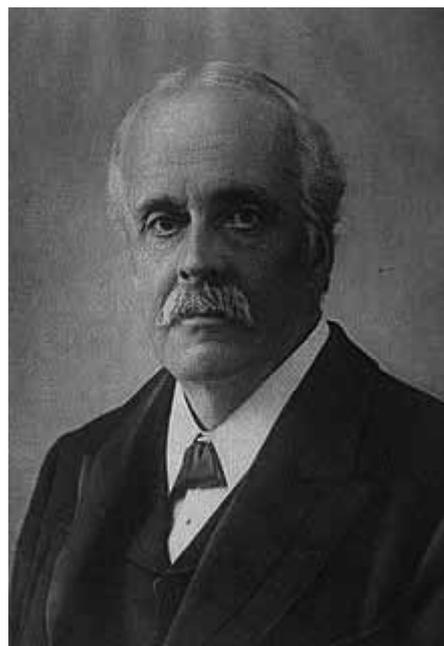
"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country".

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,
Arthur James Balfour

Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930) is forever warmly remembered in the Jewish world for the above proclamation, issued in his name in November 1917. The event that led to the Jewish National Home in Palestine has been described as "the greatest act of diplomatic statesmanship of the First World War" and Balfour has gone down in history as having transformed Zionist politics, a transformation that led eventually to the establishment of the State of Israel. His devoted niece and official biographer Blanche Dugdale, herself one of the most committed non-Jewish Zionists and a close friend of the Weizmanns, nevertheless wrote that the Declaration was decided by the whole of the British Cabinet after very

Cecil Bloom, a veteran contributor to Jewish Affairs, is a former technical director of a multinational pharmaceutical firm in the UK. His essays on Jewish themes relating to music, literature, history and Bible have also appeared in Midstream, Jewish Quarterly and the Jerusalem Post.



Lord A J Balfour

careful consideration. In view of this, she emphasises that it is very important not to overestimate her uncle's influence relating to the document issued in his name.

There has been much ambiguity on how the Declaration came into being. Balfour was certainly involved in the negotiations leading to it and Lloyd George put on record that Balfour himself proposed the wording but others, especially Sir Mark Sykes and Leopold Amery, both members of the War Secretariat, must be given much credit for the historic statement. Balfour in fact once stated that he happened to be the mouthpiece of his colleagues in making the Declaration and Harold Nicolson, diplomat and politician who worked at the Foreign Office during the Great War, recorded that the statement took weeks to draft, with every word being scrutinised with the greatest thought and forethought. Chaim Weizmann once said that some two thousand interviews had gone into the making of the Declaration.

Sykes, said to be the man with most intellectual affinity with Balfour has in fact been called the 'godfather' of the Declaration; there is even a view amongst historians that Balfour's share in the Declaration was rather small and that it could as easily have been called the 'Sykes Declaration'. The British government decided to initiate talks with the Zionist leaders early in 1917 and it was Mark Sykes, who had been responsible on the British side for the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement, the secret British-French plan for the partition of the Ottoman Empire once Turkey had been defeated, who took the initiative. His agreement with Picot allowed France to take control of much of Syria, that included most of the Galilee, with British influence to be mainly in the Acre/Haifa region. This agreement would have prevented the Zionists from making much progress on their objectives regarding the future of Palestine and Sykes, realising that this plan was not in his country's interests, quickly tried to convince his government that Palestine should be within British control.

The former High Commissioner for South Africa Alfred Lord Milner, a member of the five-man War Cabinet, also became convinced that British interests would be best served by an understanding with the Zionists and showed his colleagues how to proceed. However, there is little doubt that there would not have been a Jewish national home in Palestine had Prime Minister Lloyd George not been exceptionally well-versed in the Bible and had Balfour not found a cause that had a very strong emotional appeal to him. Lloyd George himself has said that he was brought up in a school where he was taught far more of the history of the Jews

than about the history of his own land. He was a keen Zionist and when Prime Minister was deeply involved in the decision to support Jewish hopes. The Declaration could thus have well been entitled 'the Lloyd George Declaration' had he himself chosen to sign the letter to Lord Rothschild. Lloyd George's involvement with Zionism went back to 1903 when, as a young lawyer, he had been engaged to draft an agreement that Theodor Herzl arranged to make with the British government following the latter's offer of East Africa for Jewish settlement.

The Declaration was not issued merely for sentimental reasons - there were many wide-ranging political reasons as well. Weizmann's work on acetone production has often been quoted as the prime reason for British action on Zionism but Herbert Samuel scotches this, making it clear that Lloyd George was fully in support of Zionist aspirations without the need to reward Weizmann for his chemical achievements. In 1937 Lloyd George told the Peel Commission that the Zionist cause had been widely supported both in Britain and America before the Declaration was launched and that it was enacted for "propagandist reasons". He added that it had been with his full agreement that Balfour entered into negotiations with Zionist leaders.

Balfour became a keen supporter of a national home for Jews in Palestine, with a real understanding of the Zionist cause; he wanted Jews to have their rightful place in the world. He himself looked upon Zionism as having provided one of the two greatest opportunities in his life - Ireland being the other - although not long before he died he said that nothing he had done or tried to do would prove of more permanent value to the world than his support for the Jewish national cause. Even after his death he was being remembered for his support for Zionism. In 1943, Churchill told a group of people that after Hitler was defeated, Britain would have to ensure that the Jews were established in Palestine because Balfour had left him an inheritance that he had no intention of changing.

Blanche Dugdale remembered in childhood imbibing from her uncle the idea that the Christian religion and civilisation owed Judaism an immeasurable debt. He had been brought up in a genuinely Christian environment thanks to his mother's fervent beliefs, was familiar with Old Testament texts and believed that religious persecution of Jews was "the deepest stain on Christian civilisation". The role of the Jew in modern society intrigued him and he was aware of the Jewish contribution to Western culture. His Conservative Party showed much antisemitism, with many of its members

anxious to limit Jewish entry from Eastern Europe, but Balfour's attitude was much more moderate. In the House of Commons debate on the Aliens Bill, he declared that the treatment of Jews had been a disgrace to Christendom, one "which tarnishes the fair fame of Christianity". He had an uneasy conscience relating to the Aliens Act of 1905 and had sought to atone for this through his support for Zionism. Balfour became enthusiastic about Zionism for the rest of his life following meetings with Weizmann. He had done his best to support Chamberlain's East Africa project and was puzzled by the Zionist rejection of this offer. It was not until he met Weizmann in 1906 that he realised that Palestine was the only possible home for Jews, understanding that Zionism was no mere local adventure but a serious attempt to mitigate Jewish miseries created by Western civilisation. Despite being in the middle of a savage general election campaign (in which he lost his Parliamentary seat), he gave Weizmann an hour of his time (not a quarter hour as had been envisaged). Weizmann was able to convince him that if a home was to be found for the Jewish people, it was vain to seek it anywhere but Palestine. It was thus from this meeting that Balfour saw that the Jewish form of patriotism was unique and Weizmann's absolute refusal even to consider the Uganda scheme impressed him greatly.

Some years later, early in the war in 1914 and on Lloyd George's suggestion, Weizmann again met Balfour, who was affected, to the point of tears, by Weizmann's description of the Jewish problem and especially of the treatment Jews received in Russia. He told Weizmann that he had a great cause that he understood, that Christian civilisation owed the Jews a debt and that Jews should receive British help in order to achieve normal nationhood. The two men formed a genuine friendship and Weizmann was in fact the last non-family friend to visit Balfour just before he died in May 1930. Weizmann broke down in tears when Balfour's death was commemorated at a meeting of the Zionist General Council in London. Blanche Dugdale saw a mystical element in Balfour's Zionism that was encouraged by the messianic faith of Weizmann but it is, however, generally accepted now that Balfour's deep commitment to Zionism came after his Declaration was announced.

Balfour took no special action on the subject of Zionism until he was appointed Foreign Secretary by Lloyd George in December 1916. But earlier in October the government had been presented with a Zionist programme for Palestine for the time when the country would be conquered from the Turks. This

asked for recognition of a separate Jewish nationality in Palestine and for the creation of a Jewish Chartered Company to allow Jewish resettlement there. By March 1917 the war against Turkey had reached the stage where a British military advance into Palestine was imminent. This gave Lloyd George and Balfour the opportunity of raising the Zionism issue in government. By the time Balfour went to Washington in May 1917, where he met Judge Louis Brandeis, one of America's leading Zionists, a decision had been taken for some action to be taken on the subject. Brandeis was impressed with Balfour's understanding of the Jewish problem and by his telling him, "I am a Zionist".

The British government nevertheless was not altogether altruistic in its support for a Jewish national home in Palestine. It knew in September 1917 that Germany was actively trying to court favour with the world Zionist movement, which was especially strong in Russia and America, and it was conjectured that a declaration in support of Zionist aspirations would help the Allied cause and secure the aid of Jewish financial interests. Balfour warned the Cabinet of German intentions and gained its support by telling its members that most Jews in Russia, America and even elsewhere were now fully supporting Zionism, hence a declaration in favour of Zionism would help the British cause. Seven members of the Jewish community were then consulted on a draft pronouncement and while three were hostile, four – Chief Rabbi Hertz, Lord Rothschild, Herbert Samuel's brother, Stuart, then President of the Board of Deputies and Samuel himself were in favour. Balfour then asked Weizmann and Rothschild to submit a statement that he could present to the Cabinet. He told the Cabinet that he saw nothing inconsistent in establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine where Jews could be citizens just as they could be in other countries. He had informed the Americans of German intentions and emphasised that he knew that President Wilson was sympathetic to Zionism. Despite objections from two Cabinet members – Lord Curzon and its only Jewish member, Edwin Montagu - Balfour's efforts to gain his government agreement was achieved. Lloyd George, who was later to reveal that Balfour's negotiations with the Zionists took place "with my zealous assent as Prime Minister" can in fact be credited with the final decision on the Declaration. A Cabinet meeting in September 1917, held in the absence of Lloyd George and Balfour had, thanks to objections from Montagu, put the proposals on one side. It was only after Weizmann managed to see Lloyd George that the issue was put back on the Cabinet's

agenda. But this did not mean that British politicians were simply opportunistic because Lloyd George, Balfour and most (but not all) other leading political figures in government and in Opposition had sympathy with the Zionist ideal. It is clear that most of the Cabinet of the time were committed supporters of Zionism, primarily in the old-fashioned sense influenced by the Bible.

Balfour's original intention had apparently been for Palestine to be some form of protectorate under British, French or American control. He saw Palestine as a place where Jews could build up a real centre of agricultural, industrial and cultural life but he became anxious for another country other than Britain to take over responsibility for it. He did have reservations about Britain being given the Mandate and was at one time anxious to get the Americans to take it over, even suggesting that efforts should be made to bring France into the discussions. He told Weizmann that if France did not wish to take part they should work for an Anglo-American protectorate, something that greatly concerned Weizmann, who was worried that having two countries involved was a dangerous concept. Even as the Declaration was being finally formulated, Balfour was hoping to involve the Americans in helping to establish a Jewish home. He tried on a few occasions to get the United States to take over responsibility for Palestine and in October 1918 attempted to get the League of Nations to award it the Mandate. When, a year later, this became unlikely he still hoped that some other country would accept the Mandate, but by August 1920 he realized that it would almost certainly be given to Britain and came to accept that there was no alternative to Britain as mandatory power, a policy always favoured by Lloyd George. Balfour then was engaged in discussions to obtain League of Nations approval for the terms of the declaration. All this concluded in April 1920 with the San Remo Conference approving the decision to award the Mandate to Britain.

At one point in Cabinet discussions, Balfour emphasised that a national home for Jews did not necessarily involve the early establishment of an independent Jewish state but he soon changed his position on this. There was always concern in Zionist circles on whether the Declaration meant that a Jewish state would eventually be created and Balfour more than once confirmed that this was the intention. Rabbi Stephen Wise, one of America's leading Zionists, saw him in London in December 1918 and asked him to amplify the definition of "a national home for the Jewish people". Balfour replied that it meant that Jews who wanted to go to Palestine

then or in the future would have the right to do so, adding that he looked upon Palestine as a future home for millions of such Jews. In fact, at a key Cabinet meeting he had argued that Palestine could support a very much larger population than existed under Turkish rule. There was a potential problem later in 1921 when Weizmann expressed fears that the Declaration was being eroded and that High Commissioner Herbert Samuel was hesitating over its implementation. However, both Balfour and Lloyd George assured him that the Declaration always meant that eventually there would be a Jewish state. Many years later, in 1937, Lloyd George told Weizmann that Cabinet minutes for 2 November 1917 revealed that Balfour had declared that the natural evolution of the 'National Home' would lead in the course of time to a state.

A measure of Balfour's commitment to Zionism post-1917 was shown in September 1918 when he wrote the introduction to Nahum Sokolow's authoritative work *History of Zionism 1600-1918*. There, he wrote that if Zionism could be developed into a working scheme it would bring great benefit especially to those Jews who "most deserve our pity". Balfour was continuous in writing and speaking in very favourable terms about Jewry. At a demonstration in 1920 aimed at thanking the British government for incorporating the Declaration for a Jewish national home into the Peace Treaty with Turkey, he affirmed that he had long been a committed Zionist and that he hoped the Arabs would remember that while a Jewish national home was being established, all the Great Powers and most especially Great Britain had "freed them from the tyranny of their brutal conqueror who had kept them under his heel for many centuries". He added that he hoped the Arabs would not "grudge that small notch... in what are now Arab territories being given to the people who for all these hundreds of years have been separated from it". Parts of this speech were quoted in the final report of the 1937 Peel Commission that recommended the partition of Palestine. Balfour was anxious for Jews and Arabs to work together because "in the darkest days of the darkest ages, when Western civilisation appeared almost extinct, smothered under barbaric influences, it was the Jews and Arabs in combination working together who greatly aided the first sparks which illuminated that gloomy period". He recognised the problems that would arise between Arab and Jew. Building a Jewish homeland in the Holy Land would not be easy, he said. It would "require tact, require judgement, it will require above all sympathetic goodwill on the part of Jews and

Arabs". But he saw the needs of the Jews to be more important than those of the Arabs saying in 1926 that right or wrong, Zionism was rooted in age-long traditions and the needs of Jewry were far more important than "the desires and prejudices" of the 700 000 Arabs living in Palestine; he viewed Arab claims to be infinitely weaker than those of Jews. In his maiden speech in the House of Lords, Balfour spoke emphatically in favour of Jewish immigration. He repeated his view that Palestine could maintain a population far greater than it had under Turkish rule and denied that Arabs would suffer from Jewish immigration. It was, he said, "surely in order that we send a message to every land where the Jewish race has been scattered ...that will tell them that Christendom is not oblivious of their fall... and that we [should] give them that opportunity of developing in peace and quietude under British rule". At this stage he did not declare his support for an eventual Jewish state. He told their Lordships that of all the charges made against Britain "the charge that we have been unjust to the Arab race seems to me to be the strangest". On the tenth anniversary of his historic Declaration, he said that Zionism was one of the greatest experiments ever conceived and that he was convinced that it would succeed.

Balfour was especially enthusiastic about the establishment of the Hebrew University at Mount Scopus. He had sent a cordial message when the foundation stone was laid in 1918 and, although aged seventy-seven and not in robust health, was at the university's opening in April 1925. Appearing in the scarlet robes of Chancellor of Cambridge University, he formally inaugurated the new university building, proclaiming that a "new era had opened in the history of the scattered people". In a moving address, he emphasised that this "new great seat of learning" should be a Hebrew one with Hebrew as its language. "A great cultural effort within Palestine which came to an end many hundreds of years ago is going to be resumed in the ancient home of the people". Weizmann then took him around the country, where he was enthusiastically received. He told Weizmann that he was impressed with the flourishing settlements that were testifying to the soundness and strength of the growing national home. However, when he passed through Damascus after leaving Jerusalem, there were Arab disturbances with several dead and wounded. Ronald Storrs, then Governor of Jerusalem, later wrote that Balfour would have been "torn to pieces" by the Damascus crowd had he not been guarded on a liner in Beirut harbour by a French torpedo-destroyer. But

when Weizmann apologised for the incidents, he replied that this was nothing to what he had experienced in Ireland.

One of Balfour's last political interventions was in 1928, when Weizmann wanted a British guarantee towards a loan for economic development in Palestine. Balfour, a member of Stanley Baldwin's Cabinet, arranged for Weizmann to discuss the matter with himself and with Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill but although both Ministers agreed to support the loan, the Cabinet rejected it. The 1929 riots in Palestine concerned him greatly and although bedridden he was said to be waiting for a signal where he could be of some use. To his end, he was certain that he had taken the right action on Zionism. Nothing had occurred to suggest the least doubt of what he had done, he wrote.

Balfour's contribution to Zionism has, apart from his being the signatory of the famous Declaration, not been fully recognised. Right up to the end of his life he continued his belief in a Jewish national home, and a measure of his stature within the *Yishuv* was shown by the many tributes and memorial services that followed his death. A small *moshav* (agrarian settlement) in the Jezreel Valley was given the name "Balfouria" in his honour.

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29 NOVEMBER 1947 - HOW SA JEWRY RECEIVED THE NEWS

Editor's Note: Seventy years ago, on 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted by a requisite two-thirds majority to adopt, as Resolution 181(II), the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine. The resolution, which recommended the division of the Palestine Mandate territory into independent Arab and Jewish States with a 'Special International Regime' for the city of Jerusalem, provided the legal basis for the formal establishment of the State of Israel just under six months later. The article republished below, which recounts how South African Jewry responded to the news of the UN's decision, first appeared in a special edition of the *Zionist Record* on 2 December 1947. The author is identified simply by the initials 'A R'.

At about 1.30 a.m. (South African time) people sitting around their radios, tuned in to Lake Success, heard Dr Aranha, the President of the United Nations' General Assembly, make the historic announcement that the two-thirds majority had been obtained for the Ad Hoc Committee's resolution to partition Palestine.

Many people, in different parts of the country, were listening in and numerous stories are circulating of spontaneous rejoicing at that early hour of the morning. A listening post was organised by a number of well-known Zionists. Here is the story of this group sitting eagerly and grimly around the radio.

The session of the General Assembly, which usually commenced at 10.15 p.m. (South African time) had been postponed for an hour, and when the President called the delegates to order the group sat gravely, ears strained to catch every word. Reception was good and the speeches came through clearly. The phone rang frequently and eager enquirers, unable to tune in to Lake Success themselves, asked for latest developments.

The President of the Assembly called on the delegate for the Lebanon!

What Surprise?

What surprise would he spring? What last-minute attempt would he make to throw a spanner in the wheel? His suggestion of a Federal State as a means of conciliation seemed like crude irony. But any form of attempted sabotage could be expected. ...

The delegate for the United States of America was called to the rostrum. He demanded an immediate vote on the Ad Hoc Committee's resolution. His tone was firm. He told the delegate for the Lebanon that what he was in fact suggesting now was the Federal scheme which the Ad Hoc Committee had rejected.

The delegate for the U.S.S.R. was called

upon. His speech was translated as he spoke. He, too, was firm, and asked for an immediate vote.

The announcer stated that the atmosphere in the Assembly Hall, as well as in the packed public and press galleries, was tense; and the group around the radio listened solemnly as the president stated:

"We shall now proceed to vote on the Ad Hoc Committee resolution."

Any Developments?

And then one of the Arab delegates rose on a point of order, which was rejected. While he was speaking on the point of order, the phone rang.

"Any developments?" asked a prominent Zionist.

"You phoned at a critical stage," came the reply. "A vote may be taken soon. I'll phone you back."

The President announced that the names of the countries would be called alphabetically, and that "those in favour will say YES, those against will say NO, and those who abstain . . . they will know what to do."

Faint smiles at the President's little joke crossed the grim faces of those around the radio. Everyone was conscious of the great significance of the "scene" they were listening to.

*"Afghanistan" . . . "No!" "Argentina!" . . . There was no reply.
"Argentina!" . . . Again there was no reply.
"Abstention," said the announcer.*

Recording the Votes

Several of the listeners were recording the votes.

"France" . . . "Yes!"

There was a cheer in the Assembly and the President called for order, admonishing the gallery; but the group around the radio loudly applauded France's affirmative vote until they were called to order with several "sh's" as the next country was called upon to vote.

Telephone Rang

The telephone rang . . . nobody was going to answer it at this stage . . . the receiver was simply lifted off and put down on the table.

- "The Phillipines" . . . "Yes!"
Exclamation of surprised approval.
- "Pakistan" . . . "No!"
- "Poland" . . . "Yes!"
Warm smiles.
- "Persia" . . . determined "No"
- "Union of South Africa" . . . "Yes!"
- "United States of America" . . . "Yes!"
- "U.S.S.A" . . . "Yes!"
- "Yugoslavia" . . . Abstention

Voting Is Over

The voting was over! Lightening calculations were made. A two-thirds majority had been obtained. But everyone around the radio remained quiet.

"The votes are now being counted," said the announcer. Soon afterwards the president announced:

"The Ad Hoc Committee's resolution has been adopted with the necessary two-thirds majority."

Mazel Tov!

A spontaneous burst of applause came from the group. "Mazeltov," 'Mazeltov," and hands were warmly shaken. Numbers were immediately dialled. One prominent Zionist, who had been waiting at his telephone for the news, listened quietly while the bare details were given and then shouted jubilantly, "Yipee!" and then announced the news to a group of people who were with him. This group, as well as several other individuals who had been phoned, joined the first group and there was much celebrating, hearty expressions of "mazeltov," and the dancing of the hora.

The Editor of the *Zionist Record* was awakened to hear a voice over the telephone saying: "I make no apologies for pulling you out of bed at this late hour. The UNO Assembly . . ." he was kept awake all night answering calls from people who were seeking confirmation of the news. Enquiries came from as far afield as Rhodesia and the Cape.

A prominent member of the S.A. Zionist Federation was phoned.

"I want to speak to Mr. X."

"Mr. X is asleep," said a tired voice.

"What do you mean he is asleep? How dare he sleep at a time like this? Wake him immediately!"

It was interesting to note the reactions of people dragged out of bed in the early hours. Many remained speechless for a short while. Others without apology rushed from the telephone to awaken members of the family.



Children of the South African Jewish Orphanage (Arcadia, Johannesburg) singing *Hatikvah* in celebration of the adoption of the Partition Plan.

At Synagogues

The usually well-attended Sunday morning services in the synagogues were pervaded with the news of the day. Worshippers prayed with added fervour. At the Sunday sessions of the Talmud Torahs the teachers gave the children a holiday after announcing the significance of the day.

At the S.A. Jewish Orphanage the children lit a bonfire and sang the Hatikvah.

The first representative gathering to take place at which reference could be made was the monthly Sunday meeting of the Board of Deputies (reported elsewhere in these columns). Neither the chairman, executive nor the Deputies were in mood for any other business but the topic of the day. The usual rules of procedure were dropped and deputies from the floor, as well as members of the executive made brief speeches after Mr. Kuper and Mr. Gering addressed the gathering.

At other functions in town, at weddings, engagement parties and barmitzvahs the news from Lake Success was the main topic of conversation.

Federation Meets

The Executive of the S.A. Zionist Federation met at a brief meeting on Sunday afternoon. A number of urgent matters arising out of the latest news were dealt with and arrangements were made for public demonstrations.

At a Barmitzvah

By coincidence the barmitzvah of the second son of Mr. Bernard Gering was celebrated during the week-end. On Sunday night when friends of the parents came to their home to wish them mazeltov, the celebration became a double simcha. Most of the leading Zionists of Johannesburg were present and they all joined in singing and dancing the hora. The gathering was delighted to see Mr. Kirschner joining the singing by the youthful members.

Mr. Kirschner toasted the barmitzvah and referred to the great occasion with which it coincided. All were in a happy mood and for a moment all the worries and hard tasks which necessarily face the leading workers of the Zionist movement were forgotten in joyous abandon.



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THE JERUSALEM GREAT SYNAGOGUE

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David A. Sher

One of the most inspiring structures lining Jerusalem's undulating King George V Avenue (Street)¹ is the stately Jerusalem Great Synagogue, situated at number 56. The road was opened on 9 December 1924 by the British High Commissioner to the Holy Land, Sir Herbert Samuel, a Jew and member of London's New West End Synagogue, in the presence of Sir Ronald Storrs, the allegedly antisemitic Governor of the Jerusalem-Jaffa district.² By contrast, the synagogue structure is relatively new, having been opened in 1982. Naturally the congregational history of the structure is far older than the edifice itself.

In 1923 the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook (1865-1935) and his Sephardic counterpart Rabbi Jacob Meir (1856-1939) proposed strategies for a great central synagogue to be constructed in Jerusalem. In 1946 Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac HaLevi Herzog (1888-1959) bought land in Jerusalem with the object of eventually building the Seat of the Chief Rabbinate. It was only in 1958, however, that a medium-sized synagogue was established within the building of *Hechal Shlomo*, seat of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. This was a forerunner of the present Jerusalem Great Synagogue (hereafter JGS).

The opening of *Hechal Shlomo* itself saw 275 Rabbis, including scholars of international repute, twelve Chief Rabbis, representatives of Christianity and other faiths and over a dozen foreign consular officials in attendance. Some invitees did not attend due to theological concerns on the part of Rabbi Isaac Zev Soloveitchik (the 'Brisker Rav', 1886-1959) over a desire by some to open a modern *Sanhedrin* within the building.³ The chief financier of both *Hechal Shlomo* and the JGS constructed next door almost 25 years later was the famed British philanthropist **Sir Isaac Wolfson** (1897-1991). At the *Hechal Shlomo* inauguration ceremony, he was presented with a golden key to the building by Chief Rabbi Herzog.

Hechal Shlomo was one of Sir Isaac's most imposing projects. It contains a large inscription recording that it was "Erected to the Glory of G-d and His Holy Torah" and

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Sir Isaac Wolfson speaking at the opening of Hechal Shlomo, 1958

dedicated to his parents, the late Shlomo and Necha Sarah Wolfson. The building is named after Shlomo Wolfson.⁴

Hechal Shlomo features a large dome and a menorah upon its façade. The architect was Dr Alexander Friedman, who also designed the offshoot of *Hechal Shlomo*, the JGS, the nearby Yeshurun Central Synagogue and the Museum for Islamic Art in Jerusalem. The contractor was Matityahu Lifschitz.

The highly intricate *Bimah*, Holy Ark and other fittings of the Renanim Synagogue situated within *Hechal Shlomo* were transported from the magnificent 300 year-old Padua Synagogue of Italy. Plaques recall how the saintly Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzatto (the *Ramchal*) composed special hymns of thanksgiving for the inauguration of this Ark in 1728. Detailed stained glass windows were donated by Lady Wolfson and other key philanthropists; these are startlingly similar in style to the windows at the St. John's Wood United Synagogue in London, which were designed by the same artist, David Hillman, a son of Dayan Hillman of the London Beth Din.⁵ Initially, there was a five-man choir accompanied by ten children. It was conducted for many years by Cantor Zvi Talmon, a composer of note who published *Lamnazeach Mizmor* and *Mizmorei Shem VeYefet*, and arranged the music for the *Yad VaShem Yom HaShoah* memorial services.

As time passed, the need for a more

spacious sanctuary became apparent, and services were accordingly held in the capacious atrium of *Hechal Shlomo*. When these premises could no longer contain the number of worshippers, it was decided that a new, much larger synagogue should be constructed. At the present time, the original *Hechal Shlomo* complex continues to hold services at the Renanim Synagogue. It also houses an auditorium with 500 seats and the Wolfson Museum of Jewish Art, with an exclusive collection of Jewish ceremonial artwork.



The Italian Aron HaKodesh in the Renanim Synagogue in Hechal Shlomo, the forerunner of the Great Synagogue

A large plot of land next to *Hechal Shlomo* was purchased, primarily due to the tenacious efforts of **Dr Maurice A Jaffe**, chairman of *Hechal Shlomo*'s Board of Management. Jaffe's inspiration had its roots in the moment he was shown a letter from Chief Rabbi Kook, who protested that when he stood on hills overlooking Jerusalem all he saw were mosques and churches and that Jerusalem needed a Great Synagogue. Reading these words, Jaffe declared, "If that is what he wanted then that is what he will get."⁶

Jaffe was born in Manchester, Great Britain and was a Major in the British Armed Forces and also served with the Jewish Brigade of the British Army. Indeed, he accompanied Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac HaLevy Herzog on a mission throughout liberated Europe to recover Jewish children who had been placed in monasteries before or during the war and whose parents had been murdered by the Germans. Despite the monasteries' intransigence, many children were identified when they reacted to Rabbi Herzog reciting in a loud, tremulous voice the '*Shema Israel*'. Jaffe was also responsible for the establishment of 50 different synagogues and Jewish organisations across Israel including in some staunchly secularist *yishuvim*.

Funding and Sponsorships

It is clear that the main sponsor for construction of the new synagogue was Sir Isaac Wolfson, who pledged a fantastic sum in British Pounds Sterling and then urged other philanthropists to match him, including some of his colleagues in business.⁷ Donations came from the crème de la crème of Jewry's gentry, alongside donations from Jews in the most far-flung Diasporic locations. Naturally, the British leanings of the synagogue meant that donations were received from many towns in England, including book cases from Stanley and Dian Faull from Hove, stained glass windows from Sebag Cohen of Jersey in the Channel Islands, one from Bart and Betty Wijsmuller, also from Jersey and one from Jack and Bebe Steinberg of London. Lady Wolfson donated the five stained glass windows over the Holy Ark and together with her husband donated the Holy Ark itself and the *Bimah*. Numerous Holocaust survivors made donations, including the Grossmans of Toronto, the Knellers of Antwerp and the Levensteins, Merkins, Pantirers and Zuckermans of New Jersey. Donations were received from residents of Beverly Hills, Geneva and Montreux, Switzerland, Mexico City, Milan, Chicago, Miami Beach, New York, and Grand Rapids, USA. The Holocaust Memorial Wall was donated by the Feurstains of Buenos Aires whilst the *Chupah* was donated by the Wiesels of Vienna. A stained glass window was sponsored by the Bains of Sao Paulo, Brazil, and another was donated by families in Brussels. The Greek Jewish community in Athens paid for the bridal room and donations were received from several families in Kinshasa, Zaire, for stained glass windows. Truly this was a synagogue for the Jews of the world.

Jews in the Holy Land also made substantial contributions. Esther and Jules Elefant of Jerusalem donated the *Amud* and Matityahu Lifshitz, also of the Holy City, sponsored the creation of two stained glass windows. The High Holy Day Ark Curtain was donated by Hermann Ellern of Jerusalem; its design is the same as the regular curtain excepting that its colouring is primarily white. Sam Sebba of Tel Mond was a Master Builder while Max Grunt of Tiberias donated his Judaica collection.

The inauguration of the Great Synagogue took place on *Tu B'Av* (15 Av) 1982. At the opening a representative sent by US President Ronald Reagan was present as were the Israeli Prime Minister and President, the Chief Rabbis and many dignitaries and Members of the Knesset. Israel's Philharmonic Orchestra provided musical accompaniment at the service.

Façade

The style of the JGS was modelled upon Solomon's Temple. Its summit features two cubist *Luchot* or Tablets of the Ten Commandments. The aforementioned Alexander Friedman subpoenaed that the façade of the synagogue should be of Jerusalem-stone and ensured this would be a most iconic Jerusalemite building. The total cost of the project was \$18 million.⁸

The synagogue was opened by Sir Isaac and Lady Edith Wolfson and this fact was recorded on two large plaques, one English the other Hebrew, flanking either side of the entrance. The plaques read; "*This House of Prayer For the Jews of the World is Dedicated by Sir Isaac and Lady Wolfson to the Memory of All Those Who Died so That we the Jewish People May Live To The Six Million Jewish Victims of the Nazi Holocaust and All Those Jewish Men And Women Who Sacrificed Their Lives For and in Defence Of The State of Israel*". The actual doors were modelled on the High Priest's breastplate with its precious stones. Before the synagogue lies the large Maurice A. Jaffe Plaza. In the low wall surrounding the plaza is a stone with Hebrew symbols on it taken from the now destroyed Jewish community of Southern Germany. Such stones were upon which bridegrooms would smash the glass goblet, in grief at the destruction of Jerusalem. It serves as a guardian to this unique German tradition and as a silent reminder to the murderous actions of the Nazi regime, which savagely decimated the once flourishing community from where this custom originated.

At the entrance to the synagogue is the Wohl Entrance Hall, named for the donors and founding members of the JGS, Maurice and Vivienne Wohl of London. Of this couple and their philanthropy, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chief Rabbi Emeritus of Israel and presently Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, later declared, "Maurice and Vivienne Wohl left us a powerful legacy of caring for every Jew in need, with compassion, respect and to devotion". Both were founding members of the JGS, as a plaque in the Wohl Entrance Hall attests,⁹ and Maurice served as its President from 1987 until 2007. The Wohl Entrance Hall consists of a marble cladded space with the *Mezuzah* collection upon the two walls leading to the staircases; five chandeliers light the space. On the left of the Hall is the Wohl Legacy Room, containing computer screens and artefacts displaying the Wohls' philanthropy. Many medals from the cities of Jerusalem, London and Tel Aviv line the walls. These include Maurice's Commander of the British Empire Medal, together with

its citation signed by Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh. It is displayed alongside a large photograph of Maurice and Vivienne holding the medal outside Buckingham Palace in 1992.

Adjacent to the Wohl Entrance Hall is the Friedler Banquet Hall, a tasteful venue for hosting religious celebrations. At the far end of the Wohl Entrance Hall, sweeping staircases lit with chandeliers afford access to the tiered ladies gallery.

Other JGS founding members include the well-known Beni and Nina Kaplan, and Selwyn Struck and family both of South Africa. Their names appear on a large marble wall of Founding Members in the vestibule, which lists many of Jewry's greatest philanthropists.

The JGS is perhaps the only synagogue in the world to have a *Shabbath* escalator, situated close to the *mezuzah* collection.



Jerusalem Great Synagogue: Façade

The Jacob and Dr Belle Rosenbaum *Mezuzah* Collection

One of the most unmistakably Jewish symbols is the *mezuzah* which graces the doorpost of every true Jewish home. It is an emblem of devotion to the Omnipresent and reflects the concept expounded by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch that each Jewish homestead is a Temple of the L-rd.¹⁰ It reminds the faithful Jew that he is merely the lodger in his home since, after all, the A-lmighty is the owner of all. Jews are accustomed to placing their fingers upon the *mezuzah* and then kiss their fingers to make themselves mindful that they are entering hallowed territory.

Moved by her early childhood experiences of her father lifting her up to 'kiss the *mezuzah*' in their home, in 1940 Dr Belle Rosenbaum decided to collect 19th and 20th Century *mezuzoth* and their cases from across the world. She found the *mitzvah* of the *mezuzah* especially significant because it was one of the commandments linked to all Jews: men, women and children. The results of her efforts were breath-taking, a collection

that is one of the hidden gems of Jerusalem. The Jacob and Dr Belle Rosenbaum *Mezuzah* Collection, containing thousands of *mezuzoth*, was eventually donated by the couple to the JGS and is housed at Wohl Entrance Hall. It includes some exceptionally unique items. For example, in 1808, the internationally renowned Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (Breslov) was presented with a magnificent throne chair by a follower. It featured ornately carved images of creatures, birds and flora from the Bible intertwined in the Tree of Life from Proverbs. Following the Rabbi's passing, his disciples hid the chair, which only reappeared in 1936 when it was smuggled in stages out of the USSR and wisely sent to the Holy Land. There, it was received by the local Breslov community. Over years parts of the chair became corroded and so in 1985 Breslov leaders approached the acclaimed artist Catriel Sugarman to attempt to reconstruct and restore it to its former glory. Whilst much of the chair was irrevocably lost to putrefaction, Catriel managed with great expertise to incorporate substantial fragments of the old chair into a splendid new throne. Belle, ever on the lookout for fascinating additions to her collection, asked Catriel to create a *mezuzah* for her compendium from the excess remains of the wood. The Breslovers, vehemently protective over every chip, at first categorically refused her request but eventually acquiesced. Catriel duly designed the *mezuzah* case, which (with worm tracks visible on its exterior) is on display in the JGS vestibule.

In 1965, on one of her missions to obtain new *mezuzoth*, Belle met an elderly gentleman known as Shalom displaying *mezuzoth* from a makeshift counter in Israel's Ain Hod artist's colony. He related the following story. Before World War II, he had lived in a small Polish town, where he gained a livelihood as a scribe writing *mezuzoth* and other sacred scrolls. When the Germans invaded and rounded up the town's Jews, Shalom hid some scrolls and a quill upon his person before being sent with his brethren to a concentration camp. Upon arrival in the camp he resolved to write as many *mezuzoth* as possible and to disburse them to each prisoner's barrack. The prisoners took these scrolls and placed them in hidden splits behind the entrances. In order to ensure that the parchments were somewhat protected he encased them in brown paper torn into squares from paper bags and twisted them on both sides to hold them. All of Shalom's family were murdered in the Holocaust and in 1950 he immigrated alone to Israel. There, in a move redolent of Jewish tenacity and continuity he continued his former sacrosanct occupation. He designed one *mezuzah* case out of black iron to recall

the smoking chimneys of the death camps' crematoria. The size and shape of the *mezuzah* case is crafted as an emblematic reference to the small twisted brown paper utilised to cover the parchments which provided solace to the inmates of the German death camps.

The collection contains some fascinating shapes, including one in the form of a map of Israel, with the writing from the *mezuzah* scrolls "that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the land" (Deut. 11:21) written on it and another featuring Noah's Ark from which miniature giraffes and lions are emerging. These appear alongside modern *mezuzoth* consisting of guitar shapes and modern arts compositions.

Hechal Jacob and Beth HaMidrash Be'er Miriam

When walking through the capacious vestibule of the Great Synagogue, congregants will likely hear sweet Sephardic melodies emanating from a side room. This room houses the *Chazon Ovadiah* Sephardic Synagogue, also titled the *Hechal Jacob* Synagogue, which is dedicated to the memory of Jacob Safra by his sons Eliyahu, Edmond, Moshe and Yoseph Safra of Safra banking fame. In 2001 *Beth HaMidrash Be'er Miriam*, located on the basement floor of the JGS, was consecrated in memory of the late Miriam Landau. Under the guidance of the *Rosh Beit HaMidrash* Rabbi Zalman Druck, the *Beth HaMidrash* blossomed to hold daily weekday morning and afternoon/evening prayers. The JGS often also holds its Sabbath afternoon services there, followed by *Se'udah Shlishith* and *Ma'ariv*. This area is an understated yet pleasing sanctum with light cream coloured furniture and a fully-stocked library housing many tomes of the Bible, Mishna, Talmud and many commentaries on all these transcendental volumes.

Rabbi Druck delivered the *Daf Yomi* lecture [entailing the daily study of a page of Talmud in tandem with thousands across the globe] each morning (Monday-Friday) ever since the opening of *Beit Midrash Be'er Miriam*. He had commenced the second round of Talmud lectures (the full cycle often takes seven years to complete) at the time of his passing in December 2009.

Main Sanctuary

The main sanctuary of the JGS seats 850 men and 550 women. The pews are made of a richly coloured wood and their tip-up seats consist of a plush maroon felt. Upon entering the sanctuary, visitors will be struck by the vibrant stained glass windows lining its walls.

At the forefront of the synagogue the white marble Holy Ark (*Aron HaKodesh*) is flanked by two convex marble walls which soar to the high ceiling. To maximise this ethereal and angelic effect, at either side of the Holy Ark appears the form of a marble angel wing. The centre of the Holy Ark features the *Luchoth* (Tablets), with the Decalogue inscribed in gold lettering upon them. Behind the *Luchoth* are two plinth-like marble slabs and beneath them can be seen the affirmation “I have set the L-RD always before me” (Psalm 16:8), commonly known as the *Shivithi* sign. Access to the *duchaning* area before the Holy Ark for where the Priestly Benediction is declaimed is gained from either side via a long marble staircase. The mahogany wooden *Amud* and pulpit standing in the Holy Ark area are reached by an entirely different marble staircase. There are two white marble pillars dividing the *Parocheth* (Holy Ark curtain). In 2017 the Prayer for the Welfare of The State of Israel was inscribed on one column flanking the Ark by Ronald and Jo Carol Lauder and on the other flanking column the Prayer for the IDF and security personnel was inscribed in honour of Malcolm and Frieda Hoenlein.

An observant worshipper will note how the shape of the central *almemar* and the area leading to the Holy Ark form the shape of a great *Menorah* (candelabra) when looked upon panoramically. The marble *almemar* is reached from two sides and features tall lamps, moulded with large silver ‘flags’ at their summit. Illuminating this commodious sanctum is a shimmering chandelier. Weighing around 3½ tons, it hangs from an enormous circular plate covering much of the ceiling. It is only turned on for Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur and other important services, namely *Shabbath Hannukah* and on *Shabbath Shalom Yerushalayim*, the Sabbath preceding *Yom Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem Day) which marks the day on which Jewish sovereignty was restored to East Jerusalem in 1967.¹¹ On this Shabbat enormous flags of both Israel and Jerusalem (consisting of a lion against a Western Wall backdrop) flank the Holy Ark and Cantor and Choir sing an additional ‘Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem’ composed by the late Chief Rabbi She’ar Yashuv HaKohen of Haifa. Typically, the Chief Rabbi and Mayor of Jerusalem will speak.

When the building was first constructed, Maurice Jaffe was desirous of having a wardens’ box constructed before the *almemar* as per the custom of the United Synagogue in Britain. He also wanted the wardens to be clad in top-hats, as was the English custom. However his views were not supported by a majority on the synagogue council.¹²

The most striking elements of the synagogue

are undoubtedly the titanic stained glass windows above the Holy Ark. Arresting and vividly coloured, these are the work of the late Régine Heim of Zurich. They contain evocative Judaic symbolism and as they are positioned over the Holy Ark housing the five Books of Moses, there are five windows. These feature elements of the metaphysical and the material worlds created by the L-RD, with the two worlds divided by a striking rainbow centrally positioned between them. Fittingly, at the summit of the windows appears the verse “Thine, O L-RD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine” (I Chron. 29:11). The central depiction of the window is of the Burning Bush of Moses. The tree has Torah connotations and the verse “She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that holdest her fast” (Proverbs 3:18) appears in the window. The synagogue’s official description of the window makes the pertinent observation that the strength of sunlight during daylight hours makes it difficult to gaze at the peak of the centre window, just as Moses had to shade his eyes at the Burning Bush.¹³ The higher windows are dominated by the colour blue, in reference to the ‘*techeleth*’ turquoise thread that Jews are adjured to attach to their garments (Numbers 15:35). Flanking the upper windows are three wings, signifying the L-RD’s throne as portrayed by Isaiah (6:3). To indicate the triumvirate reference from Isaiah, in the central wing on each margin is the word “*Kadosh*” (Holy) and the middle window contains the conclusion of the verse in Isaiah. There is also a Kabbalistic reference in the 10 *sefirot* found in this section.



The Aron HaKodesh beneath stained glass windows, Jerusalem Great Synagogue.

Below the rainbow, Régine Heim introduces

the viewer to the earthly material world and symbolises it by fire. Heim wished to illustrate how fire can be used for both constructive and pernicious purposes. The noble, beneficial use of fire is indicated by the Burning Bush Moses encountered which, being a manifestation of the L-RD's presence, radiates goodness and giving (Exodus 3:1-6). It is also emblematic of the Jewish nation, which, despite the sedulous barbarousness of other nations in their efforts to 'consume' Judaism, always blossoms forth to further, verdant existence. The Bible describes how when the L-RD came from the holy myriads (Deuteronomy 33:2) "at His right hand was a fiery Law [Torah] unto them" thus the connection between the Torah and the fire is clear and it appears Heim wished to reinforce the image of the positive 'Torah' fire of law and morality by numbering the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-14) from 'Aleph' to 'Yud' around the fiery bush. The injurious use of fire to decimate appears at the nethermost point of the window: this is the attempt to extirpate the Jews and the moral lessons that Jews must exemplify. Nonetheless amidst that satanic contrivance we see the vigorous roots of the tree emerging triumphantly. The Divine reassurance informs the worshippers "Fear not, O Jacob My servant", (Isaiah 44:2) as does the consolatory promise; "For out of Zion shall go forth the Law [Torah], and the word of the L-RD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

The ten stained glass windows in the men's section of the synagogue and the ten windows in the women's section were crafted by Dr. Alexander Friedman, the building's architect. Each window has a verse from Scripture at the bottom. The design above is the artist's interpretation of that verse. They depict themes of the Jewish Sabbath, festivals and Biblical events. The gallery fronts at the Great Synagogue also depict a wide range of Jewish sacramental items including the *Shofar*, *Lulav* and *Ethrog* and Stars of David.

The *Ner Tamid*, or the Eternal Lamp, is a fascinating piece consisting of silver walls of Jerusalem arranged in a Star of David shape suspended pendulously before the Holy Ark, with the flame beneath. This masterpiece was donated by Imri and Edith Rosenberg of Vienna, Austria. The voluminous velvet ermine *Parokheth* [Holy Ark curtain] features the apposite verse, speaking of Jerusalem "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces" from Psalm 122:7. It was donated by Michael and Edith Lishka, also of Vienna.

Nowadays the synagogue bestows gold embossed cards summoning respective people

for the 'honours' related to the Service of Reading from the Scroll of Law (Torah). On many *Yizkor* days, the Chief Cantor recites special memorial prayers for all past Israeli Prime Ministers and Presidents, as well as for Sir Isaac and Lady Wolfson. A special *E-l Male Rachamim* is recited for the soul of Eliyahu Ben-Shaul Cohen, commonly known as Eli Cohen, the heroic Israeli spy murdered by the Syrian regime in Damascus' Marjeh Square. In his final letter to his family he asked "Don't forget to pray for the soul of my late Father and of mine" and the Jerusalem Great Synagogue resolved to honour his request.

Many people of diverse backgrounds flock to the Great Synagogue every Sabbath. Thousands attend for Festival services. Young children in primary schools across Israel come to the Great Synagogue for their first *Siddur* presentation. More mature students often attend synagogue for the *Rosh Chodesh* [New Month] Services and the penitential *Selichoth* services. Many groups of soldiers from the Israel Defense Forces tour the site regularly. To encourage religion amongst the sadly predominantly religiously unobservant wider Israeli society, special services are held to create a stronger religious identity. Annual collective *Bar* and *Bath Mitzvah* celebrations for the offspring of Israeli police staff are held. Similar services for the children of Russian and Ethiopian immigrants, are hosted by the Great Synagogue. The Jerusalem Great Synagogue has an annual operating budget of an astounding \$1,000,000.

Rabbinate

Rabbi Dr Zalman Druck was the spiritual leader from the synagogue's establishment until his death, aged 75, on 11 December 2009. He also served as Rabbi of the Rechavia neighbourhood. Several months prior to his death his name became even more well-known when, after *Shabbath* prayers, a Torah scroll fell to the floor and he ruled then that due to the *halakhic* doubt anyone who attended prayers should repent and fast one day. "If the person finds fasting difficult he should give money to charity," he added.¹⁴

On Rabbi Druk's passing Zalli Jaffe, son of Maurice, commented on Israel's Channel 7, "Judaism lost today one of its leaders. There aren't many like him. We have lost an enormous pillar of knowledge that will not be replaced. We are in total shock". Rabbi Druk's son Rabbi Yisrael Chaim Druk has since assumed some of his father's duties. The Great Synagogue also benefits from a steady stream of great rabbinic personalities, including *Roshei Yeshiva*, *Avoth Batei Din* and Chief Rabbis who address the congregants

on many Sabbaths.

Cantorate

The JGS, with both a world renowned cantor and internationally-acclaimed choir, is one of the world's chief repositories for Jewish Ashkenazic liturgical music. With a mandate to preserve the vast repertoire of the cantorial and choral chants of pre-war Europe whilst injecting the music of modern Israel, the synagogue's cantor and choir officiate regularly on the Sabbath, Festivals and Israel Independence Day.

Cantor Naftali Herstik was the first Chief Cantor, a position he held until 31 December 2008, when he was succeeded by Cantor Chaim Adler. Herstik, born in Salgótarján, Hungary, was three years old when his family immigrated to Israel. Descended from a long rabbinic and cantorial line, he was considered a cantorial prodigy and as a teenager sang alongside Cantor Moshe Koussevitzky. His first cantorial mentor was his father, Moshe Menachem Herstik. He also studied under Cantors Leib Glantz and Shlomo Ravitz. Whilst attending the prestigious London Royal College of Music, from which he graduated, he served as cantor of London's Finchley United Synagogue. In 1981, he became Chief Cantor of the JGS. He has sung with the London Mozart Players, the London Festival Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra.

Cantor Herstik's style is more intensely formal than his successor and his music bears a marked Western European influence. His repertoire includes the work of the Berlin choirmaster Louis Lewandowski, Josseleh Rosenblatt and Moshe Kraus, the stately work of Salomon Sulzer and Samuel Alman, choirmaster at the Dalston Synagogue, at the London Great Synagogue, in Duke's Place and at Hampstead.

In 1984 Herstik was approached, alongside the world-famous Cantor Moshe Stern (who commenced his career at *Hechal Shlomo*),¹⁵ Dr Tzvi Talmon and choirmaster Elli Jaffe to start a school dedicated to preserving and coaching people in the cantorial arts. The school was based in *Hechal Shlomo* for three years before moving to Tel Aviv in 1987. The municipality of Tel Aviv assumed responsibility for what is today the Tel Aviv Cantorial Institute in 1991 and Cantor Herstik in due course became general director. Herstik's son Cantor Netanel Herstik of the Hampton Synagogue graduated from the TACI, as did a number of the stars of today's cantorial world. The latter include Cantors Yitzhak Meir Helfgot of New York's historic Park East Synagogue, Azi Schwartz, Gideon

Zelermeyer, who serves Montreal's highly anglicised Shaar Shamayim Synagogue,¹⁶ and Moshe Haschel of the United Synagogue's flagship synagogue at St. John's Wood.

Herstik composed a special *En Kelokenu* melody now in use all over the world, in which the cantor alternates with a young boy soprano in singing the stanzas. This he did with his musically gifted grandson, to the enthralment of congregants. Herstik's discography includes songs celebrating Jerusalem's and European Jewry's musical tradition. Records include his album, *The Danzig Tradition* and *The Koenigsberg Tradition* alongside *Shirè Yosef* devoted to Cantor Joselleh Rosenblatt.

Unquestionably, JGS strengthened *Chazanuth* in Israel. It must be noted, though, that the Yeshurun Central Synagogue was the first in Jerusalem to employ a professional full-time Cantor. Today Cantor Asher Hainowitz, resplendent in cantorial gown and cap, officiates every week in the Yeshurun Synagogue's sanctuary, also situated on King George V Street.

Naftali Herstik being such a magnificent cantor meant that finding a suitable successor was no easy matter. Interestingly, the JGS chose a Hasidic Cantor, the very talented **Chaim Adler**. Adler also broke with tradition by not wearing canonicals on all occasions, although he still wears the cantorial cap. His pronunciation during prayers follows the modern Israeli *Sephardit* pronunciation which prevails at the Great Synagogue. Adler's piety means he spends an equal amount of time studying the meaning of the prayers as he does preparing for the cantorial renditions. He has been said to synthesise "heartfelt prayer and soulful singing in which every word comes alive with meaning." Adler is widely recognised as a composer. Not content to merely parrot compositions of earlier masters, he sets the prayers to new tunes. It comes as a shock for visitors to the JGS to learn that Cantor Adler is in fact in his late 70s. His scintillating cadenzas seem to indicate otherwise. Felicitously, he was informed by leading voice specialists and professors that he will retain his vocal capacities to his final day.

Adler's father Rabbi Zvi Adler, an author of five volumes on the *Yoreh Deah* section of the *Shulchan Arukh* (Jewish Code of Law), used to lead the services on the High Holy Days and would encourage his four year old son to lend him vocal support for certain parts of the prayers. Chaim enjoyed visiting local synagogues to hear the cantors and his father often took him to listen to them; indeed, he "always dreamed of being a *Chazan*."

His first 'appointment' was at the age of

11 to be class *chazan* every *Rosh Chodesh*. From such humble beginnings, his fame spread and so it was that he sang in the choir performing before the court of the Grand Hasidic Rabbi of Gur, Rabbi Israel Alter. He was then sent to a Yeshiva in Jerusalem, where on one occasion he joined three other students to visit Shlomo Zalman Rivlin, mentor of Jerusalemite cantors. Rivlin had sung with such noted cantors as Joselle Rosenblatt and Zanvil Kwartin and also conducted a choir at the famous Sabbath service in Jerusalem's Hurva Synagogue, where Cantor Rosenblatt sang and Chief Rabbi A I Kook spoke. Each of the four boys wished to hear his expert opinion regarding their cantorial potential. After hearing each of them Rivlin, turning to Adler, announced; "This one will grow up to be something special." Upon his return home from Yeshiva, Adler was informed by his father that the renowned Cantor Leib Glantz had honoured him with leading *Selichoth*.

After his marriage Chaim Adler studied in a *kollel* in Tel Aviv and joined the Academy of Jewish Religious Music, under the tutelage of Glantz who directed the academy. Adler considers himself a student of Glantz, a mentor who would often resort to dissecting every note in a piece and draw the musical notes on a blackboard, in order to clarify areas needing improvement. Before being appointed to the Great Synagogue, Adler served as Cantor to the Ichud Shivath Zion Synagogue in Tel Aviv and Young Israel of Jamaica Estates in Queens, New York. Since then he has sung before Rabbi Y.S. Elyashiv and Rabbi S. Wosner at a mass completion of *Daf Yomi* study of the Talmud in 5750. He has also appeared at tribute concerts to Leib Glantz and at a concert celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the city of Tel Aviv. He has sung *E-l Male Rachamim* ('G-d Full of Compassion') at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in memory of the Six Million Jews savagely murdered by the Germans and their collaborators. On one such visit to Poland he sang Psalm 23; "The L-rd is my Shepherd: I shalt not fear." Adler mentioned that he stressed the words "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." Later, among the large crowd present, one man stepped forward and told Adler "You sang so beautifully that you touched my heart." The man then introduced himself as "Pope Bendedict the 16th." Adler, an observant Jew was evidently unimpressed when he responded "And I'm Cantor Adler the 1st!"

Adler's wife, an artist, related how once she sat as usual in the JGS's women's gallery while her husband led the service

below. During the prayers a girl who was obviously very moved by the experience came up to her and said, "Did you ever hear such a *chazzan* in your life? I haven't!" The girl, not knowing that she was speaking to the cantor's wife, continued to relate how she came from a religious background but had turned to a secular lifestyle. She had however once experienced a prayer service led by Cantor Adler and was so moved that she decided to return to Torah observance.

Cantor Adler also maintains a pastoral role. On being asked to sing for a man who had both his legs amputated, he used the hospital chapel on the eighth floor and sang several pieces for him. Obviously his voice carried through the floor and many enthralled patients, religious and non-observant alike, came to listen. Seeing the electrifying effect on the sickly and melancholy patients he decided to make his visit to the hospital a weekly occurrence. In 2013 he was awarded the Jerusalem Prize and recently received the Official of Tel Aviv Award.

Adler makes a point of not slurring two words into one when singing and emphasises the grammatical integrity of the words. According to the Code of Jewish Law (OC 53) a cantor must not only have a pleasant voice but must also be "worthy, accepted, humble, of good repute and accustomed to studying the Bible." Certainly, Chaim Adler fulfils these requirements. For over fifty years, he has led the services on Rosh Hashana and has never missed leading *Kol Nidre*, *Mussaf* and *Ne'ilah*. It is astounding to see a 75 year-old man exerting himself in the recitation of the High Holy Day prayers as he stands with his back straight for the three and a half hour recitation of the Day of Atonement *Mussaf* followed by a one and a half hour *Neilah* in the midst of the fast.

Another aspect which greatly enhances the quality of music at the JGS is the participation of the choir's Musical Arranger Raymond Goldstein, who studied music for decades in his native South Africa. An expert pianist, Raymond also studied organ music for many years and regularly appears on concert platforms, included well-attended events at London's Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue and at Boca Raton, Florida.¹⁷ The South African connection to the JGS is further strengthened by the South African members of the choir.

Choir and Choirmaster

Undoubtedly one of the greatest assets the congregation possesses is Elli Jaffe, the synagogue choirmaster and brother of Acting Synagogue President Zalli Jaffe. Both are sons of the congregation's founder and originator

Maurice A. Jaffe, who came from a family which for years has been either heading or guiding Lubavitch UK. Elli leads the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra and has decades of musical study to his credit. Often appearing in tail-coats at concerts across the world as he directs an orchestra, he has developed the Great Synagogue choir to arguably be the best Jewish synagogal choir in the world. Jaffe has released several CD albums focused upon prayer melodies and the manner in which intricate pieces must be rendered. During the *Kedushah* service, when the congregation must be upstanding and face the Holy Ark, he directs the choir masterfully although by religious requirement he is compelled to do so by gesturing behind his back to the choir facing the same direction! On several occasions he has taken over as Cantor extemporaneously when the Chief Cantor and Deputy Cantor Avraham Kirshenbaum were, for whatever reason, unable to lead the service. On the Sabbath preceding the new Jewish month Jaffe joins Cantor Adler in a duet during the special New Month Prayers. Jaffe resonates from his conducting location before the Holy Ark and Adler intones from the *almemar*; the result is a very moving piece beseeching for a new month “free of iniquity and filled with fear of Heaven.”

Elli Jaffe was born in Jerusalem and as a child studied some recorder and piano and sang in a choir. At the age of 19 he decided to become a professional musician and enrolled at the Jerusalem Academy of Music. He completed his Artist’s Diploma with distinction in conducting and music theory, and then spent a year studying at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Upon return to Israel, he took master classes with Leonard Bernstein and Igor Markevich and began conducting in countries all over the world. He was offered the position of conductor of the Mexico Philharmonic Orchestra, but turned this prestigious position down due to reasons of Sabbath observance. Jaffe conducted all the major Israeli orchestras and encourages furthering the careers of youthful performing artists, by inviting them to play with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, The Israel Chamber Orchestra and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. He has conducted many other orchestras including Great Britain’s Royal Philharmonic, the Liège Philharmonic, the Baltimore Symphony, and the Prague Symphony Orchestra, of which he holds the title honorary guest conductor. He is artistic director of the music department of Dvir Yeshiva High School for Art and of the Jerusalem School for Cantorial Art.

Jaffe has said he conducts the JGS choir in memory of his late father, Maurice, a driving force behind the establishment of the

synagogue. He has stated his aims are to create a standard of excellence in performance but also to promote a deep understanding of the piece and the composer’s ideas. There are rehearsals at least once a week. Choir members come from many walks of life: many are professional people – businessman, lawyers and doctors – as well as music-lovers and some professional musicians.

The choir has performed in such venues as the Mozarteum Hall in Salzburg, the Sydney Opera House and with orchestras such as the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, the Prague Symphony and the Manchester Camerata in the new hall of the Halle Orchestra. Jaffe established a school of cantorial music, now in Petach Tikvah, in order to produce a new generation of cantors and some of his own students are teachers there. He was also a driving force behind the establishment of the Tel Aviv Cantorial Institute.

Elli composes and arranges Jewish music, including orchestral and cantorial arrangements of Israeli and oriental songs. His ‘*Kaddish*’ symphony has been performed by the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and a quintet of his has been played by the Israeli Philharmonic Quintet. He has also written “Ode to Ida”, a violin concerto, dedicated to Ida Haendel. Elli has written a book about modes of the prayer of *Ashkenaz* [*nusach*] used throughout the year. A 15 disc recording has been issued to accompany the book. He has also composed a work commemorating 400 years since the death of the seminal sage Rabbi Judah Loew, the *Maharal* of Prague (1525-1609). The work is scored for large orchestra, choir and soloists. Jaffe was invited to conduct at the Mahler Festival in Prague in 2010. He is musical director of the Europe-Israel Foundation for the Advancement of Jewish Liturgical Music and his liturgical settings, arrangements, and orchestrations are widely used by cantors.

Unusually for an artist of such high repute Elli is deeply religious. In his own words: “For me, music is the greatest gift after Torah. It helps me raise my level in Torah and I conduct my Torah way of life through music. It promotes communication between human beings: people play and sing different voices but they do hear each other. Music can create bridges between nations and between Jews and it does it better than politicians can. I believe music is a gift of G-d. When conducting Richard Strauss’ Alpine Symphony, I claimed it was a gesture of gratitude to the Almighty for creating those monumental mountains.”¹⁸

The stately compositions of the 19th Century Berlin choirmaster Louis Lewandowski are

famous all over the world. Naturally his beloved melody for the Sabbath Psalm 92 'Tzadik KaTamar', his well-known 'Uvnucho Yomar' and his rendition of Psalm 29, both sung when returning the Torah to the Holy Ark, are staples at the Great Synagogue. Rosenblatt's compositions for 'Berich Shmeh' and his other famous pieces are regularly used as are Nadel's 'Sim Shalom' of the *Amida* and the 'En Aroch Lecha' by Benny Hershkowitz.

The synagogue is uniquely designed to maximise acoustical capabilities and this proves itself when Cantor and Choir are heard perfectly throughout the cavernous space. Like Cantor Haimowitz in the Yeshurun Central Synagogue a few doors down, Cantor Adler is a Kohen and he too must deliver the Priestly Benediction (Numbers 6:24) to the congregation; hence a designated member of the congregations calls out the responsive blessing on his behalf.

The Chief Rabbi of Emeritus of South Africa, Bernard Moses Casper attended a number of JGS services upon making Aliya; as has the Chairman of the United Hebrew Congregations of Johannesburg, Mr Samuel M Sher and his wife Rose and the Emeritus Av Beth Din Dayan Kurstag. More recently, Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein delivered a sermon on *Parshath Vaethchanan* 5775 before *Mussaf* at a special service led by Chief Cantor Chaim Adler accompanied by the *Kolot Israel* Choir.

The synagogue serves as an unofficial ambassador for synagogal practice in general as tour operators make sure to include it as a primary stop on their daytrips, preferably on a Saturday when Cantor and choir are often present. It is not a strange phenomenon at all at the Great Synagogue to see hundreds of tourists streaming across the expansive plaza before the synagogue, the men fastening *yarmulkas* to their heads as they walk and then enter the sanctuary where they are awed at the gargantuan proportions of the Great Synagogue and beauty of the service.

The Great Synagogue's management views the dissemination of spirituality to the wider Israeli society as an important mission and they are actively involved with the effort to provide one *Sefer Torah* to each Israel Defence Forces base. Moreover they are extremely supportive of *Chayalim Bodedim*, lone soldiers who travel from the Diaspora to serve Israel through the IDF despite not having any family in the country. The JGS regularly arranges Friday night meals for them in an environment where the soldiers are made to feel a sense of belonging.

Congregants reflect a wide cross-section of Israeli society. Professors with English backgrounds sit alongside Israeli Religious

Zionists and Yeshiva students in black fedoras sit next to Hasidic men in black coats and Jerusalemite men in their trademark golden smocks. The JGS possesses around twenty *Sifrei Torah* and the Emeritus Reader of the Law or *Baal Koreh* is Rabbi Nahum Agassi who has been part of the ministry of the Great Synagogue and its earlier incarnation at *Hechal Shlomo* for over 50 years.

Through the majestic beauty of the synagogue, captivating prayer services, inspiring Torah study, lectures and other meaningful activities which take place in the Synagogue each week, the memories of the Six Million Jews murdered by the Germans and their collaborators and those who died in Israel's wars are honoured and their legacy is preserved and strengthened.

Due to its vast interior with ample seating, its close propinquity to Jerusalem's largest hotels and it following a largely *Minhag Anglia* rite the synagogue remains very popular amongst Jewish visitors to the Holy City. Other than the *Kotel Ma'aravi*, the Western Wall, and perhaps the Hurva Synagogue, one would be hard-pressed to find another sanctuary which is viewed as a 'home away from home' in the way the Jerusalem Great Synagogue is viewed for countless visitors to the capital city of Israel.

The building is open daily during the morning hours and welcomes visitors to this special location. Guided tours are available gratis upon request and by prior arrangement.

NOTES

- 1 Although the street is colloquially known as King George V Street, its opening plaque attests to its being named King George V Avenue.
- 2 Storrs did make some antisemitic comments and was seen by the *Yishuv* as firmly antisemitic, although he assisted Jews in some areas. The law that Jerusalem stone on the facades of all buildings in the city is mandatory originated with him. See M. Gilbert, *Jerusalem in the Twentieth Century*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1996, pp58, 71.
- 3 It has been claimed that Rabbi Soloveitchik did not mean this to apply to the saintly Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, who convened in *Hechal Shlomo* with other leaders of strict Orthodoxy including Jerusalem Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Zolty and Chief Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef when the Great Rabbinical Beth Din (*Beth Din HaGadol HaRabani*) was situated there. Rabbi Eliyashiv apparently said in later years regarding the prohibition "The *Brisker Rav* did not mean me." For a full discussion of Rabbi Eliyashiv's involvement with *Hechal Shlomo* see Y. and M. Heimowitz, *Rav Elyashiv- A Life of Diligence and Halachic Leadership*, New York, Artscroll-Mesorah Publications, 2013, pp.186-193.
- 4 Other prominent religious buildings donated in honour of Shlomo and Necha Sarah Wolfson include a wing of the Gateshead *Yeshivah Gedolah* in England.
- 5 Dayan Hillman was the son in law of Chief Rabbi Yitzhak

- Isaac HaKohen Herzog.
- 6 Zalman Jaffe, son of Maurice Jaffe, interviewed by David Sher, 28 July 2016, Rechavia, Jerusalem.
 - 7 As heard from Samuel Sher, who regularly attended the Great Synagogue and whose family following services there were invited to the Wolfson's residence and briefed on synagogal concerns by Lady Wolfson.
 - 8 A. I. Gellis, *Majesty and Glory: Synagogues in the Land of Israel*, Jerusalem, Carta: The Israel Map and Publishing Company, 2011, pp.160-163.
 - 9 A photograph belonging to the Wohl Foundation shows them standing outside the building site alongside Maurice Jaffe.
 - 10 To cite just one instance of his development of this theme, see his comment on Genesis 28:22 in S. R. Hirsch, *The Pentateuch- Genesis*, Gateshead, Judaica Press, 1989, pp.465-466.
 - 11 Gellis, pp.160-3.
 - 12 Z. Jaffe interview.
 - 13 Stained Glass Windows, (website), http://www.jerusalemgreatsynagogue.com/EN_StainedGlassWindows.aspx, (Accessed 19 Oct. 2016).
 - 14 U. Baruch, 'Rabbi Zalman Druck, Rabbi of the Great Synagogue Passes On', *INN* [website], 11 Dec. 2016, <http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/197709> (Accessed 16 October 2016).
 - 15 Z. Jaffe interview.
 - 16 Shaar Shamayim insists on morning dress and tailcoats for wardens and canonicals for clergy; it is an important cantorial center which has recently become the focus of controversy at its appointment of a female clergywoman associated with the *Hovevei Torah* institution
 - 17 As related by R. Goldstein to the author, London, February 2015.
 - 18 P. Hickman, 'Interview with conductor Elli Jaffe', *Ynet News* [website], 6 May, 2009, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/1,7340,L-3711599,00.html>, (Accessed 16 Oct. 2016).





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CHILD OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMP (Part 1)

*

Don Krausz

My name is Donald Krausz and I was born in Schiedam, Holland, on 17 July 1930. My father was a Persian carpet merchant of Hungarian nationality while my mother was English. I have a sister, Irene, who is five years younger than I. We are Jews. For the first six years of my life we lived in Schiedam. I went to school there, while my father commuted daily to nearby Rotterdam, where he had his business.

We were very friendly with our neighbours, a Christian family by the name of van Hulsten. Their younger son, Jan, was my closest friend. Mr van Hulsten, who was headmaster of a primary school, spoke fluent English and was thus able to help my mother adjust to a foreign country where she did not understand the language. During the war the van Hultens took risks on our behalf that could have caused them a great deal of trouble had they been found out.

Ours was a happy family without being exuberant or demonstrative. I hardly ever saw my parents quarrel and they were loving and supportive towards each other. My father had nine brothers and sisters, of whom seven lived in Holland. His mother and two younger brothers had remained in Hungary. There were also numerous cousins living in Holland. The patriarch of the family was Marton Kulszar, called Baczi, who was married to my father's half-sister, Lenke. The family kept in close touch with one another and most of them were involved in the Persian carpet trade. I even remember receiving a Persian cushion as a birthday present when I was about seven years old, a rather odd gift for a child of that age. My father had many friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who had regular bridge games in our home.

In 1937 we moved to Rotterdam, where my father had rented an old five-story house on the North Blaak, a street on the side of

a tree-lined canal. It was a business street, with large shops, a departmental store and the stock exchange, a massive building known as the Bourse. The other side of the canal was called the South Blaak. Like many of the old Dutch houses, ours stood between two streets, so that the front entrance (the shop) was in the North Blaak while the rear (living quarters) entrance was in a street called the Vissers Dijk. Our shop was at street level, the office and warehouse on the first floor, while the remaining three stories and the attic were used as living quarters. Like most old Dutch houses, this was a high, narrow house, with only two or three rooms per storey.

The Vissers Dijk consisted of some of the oldest houses in Rotterdam, many going back to the first few years of the 17th Century. It was a lower class district with many prostitutes. I don't think my father anticipated that when he moved into this rather well-to-do North Blaak, that his son would be associating with the children of the Vissers Dijk.

I went to a government primary school and had quite a few friends, both Jewish and Christian. After the war had started I even had a gang of my own. At no stage did I ever experience antisemitism from neighbours, teachers, classmates or associates. Although both my parents came from strictly orthodox homes, we were not as observant as their parents had been. We belonged to the Orthodox Synagogue, lit candles on the Sabbath, but did not observe its rules and celebrated the religious holidays. We went to shul on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur only, that is three days every year. From the age of seven I went to *Cheder*. The first year I won a prize and the second I was expelled for missing too many classes. I don't remember my parents being particularly upset about this.

Don Krausz has served as the chairman of the Association of Holocaust Survivors in Johannesburg (She'erith Hapleitah) since 1985. Over the past three decades, he has spoken to thousands of South Africans, Jewish and non-Jewish, including addressing many school groups, on his experiences during the Holocaust.

War comes to Rotterdam

On 10 May 1940, I was awakened by the noise of many aircraft. My parents told me that we were at war and that the Germans had landed troops in Rotterdam. Before long the streets emptied and I saw Dutch marines

in their black uniforms take up positions in the North and South Blaak. They stood in doorways or lay prone behind trees, all facing to the left of our street. Dutch infantry with fixed bayonets were meanwhile occupying the Vissers Dijk. We were told that the Bourse to the left corner of our block had been occupied by German troops.

Although it was obvious that we were in the front line, I did not feel a sense of danger. Our phone was working, we had running water and electricity, and I do not remember much shooting. The radio was still in Dutch hands and broadcast regular news bulletins. We were informed that Dutch Nazis had taken up arms against the government forces and that we should try and remember the voice of our familiar announcer, in case the Germans or their collaborators took over the radio station or set up their own.

The Dutch military in the Blaak now began to warn people not to appear at the windows. They were probably afraid that they might be shot at. One would hear a command: "*Van de ramen weg!*" (Get away from the windows!) This would be repeated in a more strident tone, followed by a shot and the sound of breaking glass.

Some hours later a terrible noise was heard. The Dutch had lifted the paving stones in front of our house, dug a trench and mounted a machine gun, which commenced firing on the Germans in the Bourse. Meanwhile, behind us in the Vissers Dijk, the soldiers stood guard, tense and alert. I noticed a window opening behind one of them; a soldier jumped and swung around, his gun at the ready. Then an arm clad in a lady's nightgown appeared holding a tray with sandwiches and a glass of milk. Rotterdam's prostitutes were doing their patriotic duty.

My father now gathered us all on the first floor, which was used as the warehouse. Many of the carpets were rolled and tied, and he stood these up against the windows to prevent bullets, shrapnel or glass fragments from entering the room. We spent our first night of the war sleeping there on the floor. The following day a house in our block was bombed and stood burning. Apart from the walls, those old houses were largely constructed of wood and because of the fighting the fire brigade was unable to get near. I do not know whose decision it was to leave, or whether we were ordered to do so, but we packed as much clothes and personal possessions as we could carry and evacuated our home using the rear door in the Vissers Dijk. We went on foot, although my father did own a car. In our area we saw few civilians, except for the women of the Vissers Dijk mingling with the soldiers and

watching the fire. On several occasions we were stopped by Dutch soldiers and searched.

My parents had decided to go to friends of ours, the Feketes, an old Hungarian couple who lived in another suburb. We walked several kilometers to that address and I will never forget the contrast that we found there. It was as though the war did not exist; children were playing in the streets, shops were open and people seemed to be going about their normal affairs. I had the impression that our friends did not believe us when we told them of the situation that we had just left behind. This experience made a lasting impression on me. In later years, when we would hear of trouble spots around the world close to where friends and relatives lived, I never panicked, because I remembered that one could have a war in one suburb and not even know about it in the next.

During the following days, other refugees came to stay at the Feketes. We slept on couches, in armchairs and on the floor. Apparently there was no problem in obtaining food. On 14 May, the fifth day of the war and our third day at the Feketes, I was in the basement chopping firewood. Suddenly I became aware of whistling sounds and distant explosions. They did not perturb me and I carried on with my work, but after a while my father called me to join the others who were standing in the passage for safety. In a bombardment, the smaller the room, the stronger the structure. Later, I would see many houses that had been destroyed, with only the toilet remaining intact, sometimes stuck several floors up and projecting from a remaining wall.

Only the elderly Feketes and my family remained. After the bombing we went out into the street and noticed that a large part of the town was in flames, with the wind blowing the fire steadily towards us. The block of houses where we stayed had an overhead railway line between us and the fire and a stream on the other side. A fire engine was positioned there and pumping water from the stream for the fire hoses. The fire on a broad front was now approaching us rapidly. There were German soldiers on the railway line, the first that I had seen. I assumed that they were there to extinguish any fire that might threaten the railway.

We now began to evacuate our possessions, piling them in a heap on the island in front of the house. Irene, who was only four years old, was left sitting on top of those belongings. Eventually a Dutch couple approached, giving my father their address and telling him that their house, which was on the other side of the stream, would be available to us should we need it. I walked

in the street and watched the fire approach. House after house would burst into flame. A chemist shop caught fire and in a fierce blaze it burnt to the ground in about fifteen minutes.

It was already dark when my parents decided to avail themselves of the kind invitation. There was no point in spending the night on the street, and to stay in the house was too dangerous. The Feketes elected to remain. So once again we picked up our belongings and began walking. Upon arrival at our benefactors' house we were taken up to the attic, where there were several bedrooms. On our way up we noticed a large picture of Hitler on the wall. These people were Nazis. My father immediately told the proprietor that we were Jews. He said that he had realized this by now, although Irene's and my father's Aryan looks had deceived him. He told my father that we were welcome to stay. He had once been in a similar predicament to ours, he said, and this had made him resolve to repay the debt should the opportunity arise. Before going to sleep I happened to glance out of the attic window and saw a sight I shall never forget. The whole city from horizon to horizon was in flame.

The following morning we awoke to find that there was no running water. Our hostess brought my mother Eau de Cologne to wash with. My father and I then left to see what had become of the Feketes. Luckily the block in which they lived had been spared, as the fire had not been able to cross the railway line, or if it had, the firemen had been able to control it. My father and I then began a nightmare journey through the smouldering streets. I don't remember him saying much, but his agitation showed in the way that he would sometimes roughly lift me up by my arm to carry me bodily over heaps of broken glass. We could not have gone very far from the Fekete's house when a van drew up alongside us. It was the delivery van belonging to my father's Uncle Baczi which, with my cousin Theo and a driver, had been sent from The Hague to try and find us. They had first tried, unsuccessfully, to reach our house on the North Blaak and been told that nothing remained of that suburb. They then tried the Feketes and eventually, after driving to and fro, found us. To me it seemed like a miracle, a chariot sent from heaven. And so the end of that day saw us all safely with my aunt Lenke in The Hague, all unharmed albeit shocked, ruined and dispossessed.

Life in a country at war

We lived with my aunt Lenke for about three

months, while my father tried to re-establish himself. Everything had to be replaced: the home, furniture, and the business. During this period I went to school in The Hague. Eventually we returned to Rotterdam and to our new home in the Claes de Vrieselaan. It was a small three-roomed house, one bedroom, dining room and a lounge that my father turned into his shop. The shop had large display windows and served as my bedroom at night. My father had two shop assistants. One was Jan Speelman, who had been caught in the streets during the bombardment, and although he suffered no visible injury, his legs remained partially paralyzed. In any case the shop was now so small that my father could manage it by himself.

I returned to my old primary school. Situated in the centre of the town, it had been bombed and the top stories burnt out. It was the only usable building for kilometers around, other than the Townhall and the hospital. Every other building was a shell, burnt out and blasted.



Rotterdam city centre after the bombardment.

If you should think that this was a most depressing place to re-establish a school, you would be mistaken. We children had a glorious time. The ruins became our castles, and the enemy, children from other schools. Our weapons were the stones that were lying in heaps everywhere. We could not wait for school to end so that, with our leather satchels over our arms as shields, we could do battle with other children. We would confront each other on any cleared plot and throw stones. Alternatively, we would occupy one ruin and beat back any boys that tried to dislodge us by throwing stones and dropping the occasional boulder on them. The following day the roles would be reversed. We would go looking for an occupied 'castle', bombard it with stones and then storm it.

Obviously children were hurt. My friend Loekie van Veen was hit by a stone just

below one eye. We took him to the nearby hospital where he was duly admitted and for some unknown reason his shoes were given to us by a nurse. As his best friend, I volunteered to take them to his mother. The houses in Loekie's part of the world were also long and narrow, with one endless staircase connecting all the different floors. I rang the bell and Loekie's mother, who lived on the top floor, pulled the string that was connected to the lock thus opening the door. I stood in the doorway and she stood five floors above me looking down the uninterrupted staircase. With the wisdom of my nine years I shouted: "Loekie is in hospital and I have brought his shoes back", and then I saw this woman start swaying at the top of that staircase.

In due course Loekie returned to school with a magnificent red scar below his eye. He was promptly paraded in all the schools in the neighbourhood to demonstrate the evils of throwing stones at people. A week later, Loekie happily rejoined our stone-throwing expeditions.

One day I left school a bit later than usual, only to come across a pitiful sight. A boy wearing spectacles, of small stature and my age, was cowering against a wall while my classmates threw stones at him. I asked for the reason and was told that he was Italian and that his father was one of the foremost Nazis in Rotterdam. I knew that when I was with this boy the others would leave him alone, so from that day he would wait for me and I would walk him home. I was not the biggest boy in the class, but I had many friends and the boys respected me. This boy, Pietro, was intelligent, loyal to his parents and yet apologetic for their beliefs. We would sit on the doorstep of his home and converse. He would tell me that he regretted not being able to invite me in, as his parents did not approve of Jews. I never heard an antisemitic remark from Pietro. Years later I would meet him again under very different circumstances.

Rotterdam at that time was the biggest port in the world, and air raids were the main events in our lives. The RAF bombed the harbour facilities with its docks and oil tank farms almost nightly. At the end of the Claes de Vrieselaan stood a skyscraper which housed the electricity and, I think, the telephone communications network for the whole city. Our house was about three blocks away from this complex, which put us in the target area. The trouble was that despite weekly and sometimes nightly air raids the complex was never hit, but everything around it was.

How can I describe the terror of the air raids? One would look at the full moon or

its combination with fresh snow, lighting up the night until you could read by it. Then people would whisper, "Tonight they will come". First, one would see the searchlights stabbing the night sky with their ghostly beams. Then the wailing sound of the air raid sirens would be heard, followed by the roaring of the giant 88mm anti-aircraft guns. Soon the distant throbbing hum of the bombers would sound, coming closer and closer, accompanied by the shrill whistling and explosions of bombs. The house would shake and creak and I would join the silent figures of my parents in the bedroom. There was no panic, no hugs or words of comfort - what was there to say? We would just sit and await our fate.

I remember one night when the bombers sounded as though they were right overhead. The bombs were falling so close that we would not even hear their whistle, just the devastating explosions. My four-year old sister lay asleep in her bed and there was talk of waking her in case we had to leave the house. We could hear the crash of collapsing buildings, the display windows in the shop blew out, cutting my bed into shreds. The leaded glass in an interleading door buckled, the grate fell out of the fireplace and the pictures dropped from the walls. And all this time my sister slept.

Daylight would bring relief, that is, until the American Superfortresses took over in 1942. I would rush outside to survey the damage, check to see if my friends were all right, and then start searching for the shrapnel from the anti-aircraft shells. Collecting shrapnel was on a par with postage stamps. To us they were things of beauty; they were rare, could be exchanged and had a value, especially if the serial numbers and the screw threads were still intact.

In front of our house was an air raid shelter, which we never used unless caught out in the open. I awoke one morning to find a huge gaping hole in the street on the far side of the shelter, obviously a bomb crater. I happily jumped into it, hoping to find bomb splinters and when this proved in vain, I resumed my usual rounds of checking up on my friends and neighbours. Returning about an hour later, I found the whole area cordoned off. I asked for the reason and was told: "You see that hole in the street over there? There are unexploded chain bombs lying in it" (chain bombs were several bombs chained together to create a greater impact.) So the Krausz's packed up once more and went to Auntie Lenke in The Hague for three weeks until those bombs were finally defused.

It was now 1941. We had been under German occupation for a year and the Jews

had not been touched. In Eastern Europe the story had been very different: in Poland the persecution commenced with the entry of German troops. In other parts of Eastern Europe the population did not even wait for the Germans to encourage them - the murders, rape and plunder began immediately. Latvia, Estonia and Russia were not too different: the German Einsatzgruppen moved in right behind the advancing Wehrmacht to massacre the one and a half million Jews now under the control of the Third Reich. But that was in Eastern Europe, with its age-old history of antisemitism, actively encouraged by government and church. Holland had no official policy of discrimination against Jews. Once a year the Royal Family would attend a synagogue service, so I had been told, and Jews occupied high positions in the army and the government service. Besides, from the German point of view, the Dutch were of Germanic stock and should therefore be encouraged slowly to accept the Nazi ideology rather than be alienated with brutal measures.

So, for about a year and a half we were left in peace. Meanwhile, the German propaganda machine was hard at work. In the newspapers, on the radio, in all the cinemas, through the placards on the walls, the Dutch population was being re-educated, especially as far as Jews were concerned. When the Nuremberg Laws were promulgated in Holland, the Dutch population did not read of it in their newspapers; every Jewish family received its own paper with the latest prohibitions. The Dutch population did not have to know everything that was happening to us.

This propaganda was horribly effective. My father, who looked Aryan and did not have to wear the Yellow Star because of his Hungarian nationality, used to go to see the German antisemitic films. He would tell us that if he had not been Jewish himself, he would have become an antisemite. The placards on the walls showed in lurid detail repulsive Jewish caricatures engaged in acts of murder and robbery against innocent and pure-looking Aryan men, women and children. The arrest of Jewish criminals was trumpeted through the press and exaggerated out of all proportion.

And so the Jews were forced to wear the yellow star whenever they appeared in public. Parents and children were prohibited from entering any public place of entertainment. Jewish children could no longer go to playgrounds, parks, sports meetings, swimming pools, cinemas or theatres or use public transport and we children were taken out of our schools and made to attend special schools for Jews only. We were not even allowed to walk on the beach. Not only were we stigmatized through our

yellow stars, but we ourselves began to feel different and abhorrent. Our introduction to the new German '*Kultur*' was through the persecution of children.

Friends of my parents came to our house telling how they had been kicked out of their businesses and jobs. People began to disappear. Lists were published in the Jewish press of age categories of young men and women who had to report for forced labour. My cousin Theo, son of Lenke and Baczi, who like his parents had given up his Hungarian nationality, was sent to one of these labour camps. From there he was eventually sent to Auschwitz and we never saw him again. After the war we heard that his hand had become infected, so that he was unable to hold a spade. A course of sulfa drugs or in today's age, antibiotics, would have cured him; instead he was gassed.

We Hungarians were exempt from these regulations. Hungary was an ally of Germany and insisted at that time that her Jewish nationals be treated accordingly. (Most of my father's family had taken out Dutch citizenship, and this seemingly harmless act would eventually cost them their lives.)

Despite our exemption, the prevailing atmosphere was one of fear and despair. Life became violent. The Dutch Nazis in their black uniforms would march in the streets armed with truncheons. The locals would taunt and insult them and fights used to break out. This happened several times right in front of our house. For a child unused to physical violence, seeing adults being beaten bloody right on one's own doorstep was a fearsome sight. The prevailing mood is best described by the fact that we had rucksacks made for each of us and kept them, plus several suitcases, packed just in case. And that was while being exempt Hungarians; how the Dutch Jews felt can only be imagined.

There was resistance of sorts. My father would go out at night with friends and sabotage German army directional signs. Many of his clients were German army personnel and my father spoke fluent German. He did not look Jewish and I must assume that we did not have a '*Mezuzah*' on our front doorpost. One day, the Gestapo arrived and asked to see his ledger. They did not know that he was Jewish. When he asked them for an explanation they told him that all Jews had to declare their income. If a Jew bought Persian carpets which were luxury items and yet declared a low income then he was obviously lying. My father asked how one could tell whether a person's name was Jewish, as many Dutch Jews had Dutch names. "We'll know!" was the answer, and to my father's surprise the agents were

able to identify the majority of the Jewish customers. My father spent the rest of the day phoning and warning them.

I, of course, also joined in the fight against Hitler. During the winter we would throw snowballs at German soldiers. I remember one chasing me until I managed to duck into a department store and get lost in the crowd. I would also try and tear or damage the horrible antisemitic posters on the walls. Once I was so occupied when I felt that something was wrong. I turned around to see a fat individual with a Hitler moustache, a cigar and a swastika lapel button advancing on me. I managed to escape. About six months later we all went on holiday to a place near the German border. Who should share our compartment but this same man with his swastika badge? Luckily he did not recognize me, but my journey was far from pleasant. His face I remember to this day. Thereafter I developed a technique of standing with my back to a poster and scraping away at it behind me with a knife. Thus I could watch out for anybody hostile.

By now I had also been removed to a Jewish school, despite my Hungarian nationality. This was a blow, for I had attended my previous school for about five years and most of my friends were there. I spent about a year at that Jewish school, but do not think that I learned much. The poor Jewish teachers were continually being changed as one or the other would disappear. They taught under terrible tension, and I have seen a teacher so enraged that he grabbed a pupil and proceeded to bang his head against a wall.

One Jewish holiday the school was closed and I took my bicycle and paid a visit to my old school. My erstwhile classmates were pleased to see me and asked where I had been. I explained the circumstances, which my old friends refused to accept. They then took me to the headmaster in order to find out whether I spoke the truth. The headmaster confirmed what I had said, but assured me and those Christian boys that as soon as the war was over he would be only too glad to welcome me back. So much for antisemitism in Rotterdam.

Westerbork

On 16 September 1942 we were all having dinner when suddenly a window was smashed at the back of the house. A Dutch policeman put his hand through the broken window, opened the backdoor and marched in. He curtly ordered my father to open the front door to his German compatriot and a soldier entered. They gave us fifteen minutes to pack and accompany them. Despite our shock and consternation this was not difficult as our

rucksacks and suitcases were packed already. We were marched across the river to the other side of Rotterdam, where we joined a large group of people in a warehouse and spent the night sleeping on the floor. The following morning we were packed into a passenger train and taken to the Westerbork transit camp in the north of Holland on the heath near the German border.

Westerbork was not a concentration camp, if compared to the ones we were to experience later. There were no executions, or uniformed thugs lumbering around beating people, cursing and kicking them. There was hunger, but no one died of it. We were housed in barracks with three-tier beds spaced in twos with a table and two benches in between. The barracks did not leak and were heated with stoves. Men slept in one half of the barrack, women and children in the other, so that families could see one another every day. There was a wire fence around the camp, but it was not electrified and there were no watchtowers. The camp had an excellent hospital, an orchestra, a theatre - all of top quality as they were staffed by the foremost Jewish doctors, musicians and actors in Holland and from Germany. The camp commander and some of his staff were SS, otherwise it was guarded by Dutch Military police, who at a later stage were replaced by Dutch Waffen SS. We were allowed to wear our own clothes. One could even get a milk ration for babies.



Prisoners' barracks, Westerbork transit camp.

The whole camp was administered by German Jewish refugees, who had very little sympathy for us. We were to find out that the camp predated the war, having been established by the Dutch government to house these refugees who, I assume, had left Germany without any means of support, passports or visas and had no contacts in Holland. These refugees regarded their having been housed in such a camp as a disgrace, both on the part of the Dutch government and the Jews of Holland who had not seen to it that the Jewish communities in the cities of Holland absorbed them.

The inhabitants were employed in and around the camp. Although food was minimal

and there was hunger, these were not the starvation rations of a concentration camp, nor was the work such that, when combined with totally inadequate rations, it could amount to a death sentence. We children went to school, and only occasionally were sent out to help with the harvest on the surrounding farms or cleaning barracks. My mother worked at her profession of English teacher while my father was a hospital orderly as far as I remember.

So with the exception of some SS officers and the guards that camp was run by Jews, mainly German refugees. The camp commander was a German Jew and only responsible to the SS. The administration was Jewish and drew up the lists of the Jews that had to be sent to the death camps, even though I believe that they were unaware of the ultimate fate of those unfortunates. The camp police that took the people from the barracks and put them into the cattle trucks were Jews. The hospital was staffed by Jews, some including famous German specialists.

Many of the German refugees were religious and they had a well-organized Zionist youth movement in the camp. It was there that I first participated in an Oneg Shabbath, the ceremonial celebration of the Sabbath with song, dance and cultural activities. The language was German; we went to German classes at school, all of which was to stand me in good stead later.

Nine months after arriving in Westerbork I 'celebrated' my barmitzvah. In preparation thereof my parents arranged for a Hebrew teacher, Mr Finkel, to teach me my Torah portion. Normally, the preparation for a barmitzvah ceremony would involve a certain amount of study of our religion, customs and scripture, but because of the circumstances pertaining to inmates of the camp it was decided to prepare me in as short a time as possible. The aforementioned circumstances I will come to later.

Mr Finkel was a good teacher and a fine, impressive man. I came strongly under his religious influence and became friendly with his son and his circle of very religious boys. It was through them that I first experienced the wonder and beauty of the Sabbath when properly kept, as well as the fervour and devotion that can be put into prayer. In due course my barmitzvah was held in a tent and my father managed to obtain a *tallis*, *tefillin* and even a silver watch for me. I am afraid that there could not be a reception.

By that time my friends and cousins had all gone, and so I joined Yitzchak Finkel and his ultra-religious group of boys. One Sabbath I was walking between the barracks together with young Finkel and his group. There would be a stove outside each barrack

and I saw a woman come and placed a pot of milk thereon. In Westerbork milk was only obtainable for babies, and once that daily ration had been drawn it could not be replaced. Having put that milk on the stove, the woman went back into the barrack. I noticed that the milk was going to boil over and so removed the pot from the fire. *Chillul Shabbat!!* One may not cook, touch or light a fire on the Sabbath! The outcry from my new friends was harsh; they called their fathers, tall men all dressed in black with black hats and long beards, and their condemnation was even stronger. They brought me the Bible and showed me where it was written that desecration of the Sabbath was punishable by death! That sounded daft to me and I tried to explain that we were no longer in Amsterdam, but to no avail. Although a child, I insisted that they accompany me to my teacher, Mr. Finkel. I could see that he was not too happy to be involved in this matter, but could not dispute the fact that in a certain chapter of the Chumash, on such a page and such a line, I was duly condemned. I pointed out that the milk was irreplaceable, only to be told that that was not my responsibility, but that of the mother. I had virtually signed my own death warrant.

The sad and ironic side to this story is that with the exception of the Finkel family, I am probably the only one left alive of all those people.

I must mention the superb entertainment in Westerbork. Some of the finest actors, musicians and cabaret artists of both Holland and Germany were Jews, and sooner or later the Dutch ones, and those of Germany who had sought refuge in Holland, were arrested and sent to the camp. I think that my first introduction to classical music stems from that time, while the cabaret and both opera and Yiddish vocalists were unforgettable.

We were allowed to receive parcels. My father had left money with friends and relations to provide for this contingency, and as the food was insufficient, the arrival of a parcel was most welcome. But there were those who did not receive anything and were as hungry as we were. Consequently most of the parcels were plundered, but at least the thieves often had a sense of humour. I remember our receiving an apple crate with one apple inside. Another time the box was empty except for what looked like a very moldy loaf of bread. My mother sadly gave me the task of throwing this loaf out, but on the way to the dustbins it struck me that this loaf felt rather heavy. So back I went for a knife, only to discover that I held a complete round cheese in my hands. I also remember our receiving a few wooden boxes

of sardines from Portugal sent by my mother's English family through the Red Cross. For normal, well-fed people this won't sound like a big deal, but believe me, if it had not been, I would not have remembered it after all these years.

So what kind of a camp was this? We were told that our destination were labour camps in Poland where families would be together, the work hard, but the rations adequate to perform that work. In retrospect we now know that these benevolent conditions were part of a diabolical plan. Westerbork existed to send the Jews of Holland to the gas chambers. Provided that it served its primary function of railing 1000 Jews every week to places such as Auschwitz or Sobibor, the SS in charge of the camp could allow the inmates to do what they wished. The more successful they were in dispelling any misgivings of the inmates as to their fate the easier it would be for all concerned.



Westerbork prisoners boarding deportation train

But were we completely stupid? Surely the fact that babies and aged people were being sent to these so-called "Labour Camps" must

have set the alarm bells ringing? I believe that there were several factors at work in dispelling our doubts.

a) The Jews were a sane people and would not have readily accepted information that did not make sense. Had some one informed us of the real purpose of Auschwitz, we would not have believed it. Why should we have believed something that even today with the wisdom of hindsight appears utterly insane? Germany had mobilized millions of men for its war effort. These had been taken from the farms, factories and commercial sector. They had been employed, and others would be needed to replace them. We saw ourselves selected for that role, the Geneva Convention governing the treatment of civilians and prisoners-of-war notwithstanding.

b) Even if we became aware that we were being duped, there was not much that we could do about it. Breaking out of the camp would have been easy, but then what? There were thousands of men, women and children there. To get back to their places of origin they would have needed travel documents and money; to obtain food they would need ration cards. A break-out would have caused a mass mobilization of the German forces, which had been known to react with the utmost savagery. Westerbork was situated on a heath. Escaping was not a matter of quickly popping next door to the neighbours. The casualty rate might well have been horrendous and for what? A highly unlikely rumour?

In view of the above, those who had knowledge denied to others may have felt that it was better not to cause alarm among thousands of defenseless men, women and children and give the highly cultured, civilized Germans the benefit of the doubt...



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THE ATTITUDE OF SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY TO GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEES SEEKING ASYLUM IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Ralph Zulman

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis' poignant remarks about 'we' and 'they', made in his key-note address at the SA Jewish Board of Deputies Gauteng conference in 2016, brought to mind an unfortunate blemish on part of our history. This was the attitude of South African Jews to German Jewish refugees seeking asylum in South Africa.¹

The late Justice Cecil Margo, in an address at the opening of the 1985 SAJBD conference, commented as follows on the Holocaust and of some of the victims of Nazi persecution:

...from 1934 there came to our shores but a handful of German Jews, in many cases without money, without knowledge of the languages of South Africa, without relatives and without friends, but determined to make the best of things and how they succeeded. These were fine people, law-abiding, hard-working, capable and people of character. We could have done with thousands more. Look at their achievements – in the universities, the professions, the arts and sciences and in the fantastic military achievements in Israel. And look what they have done here and what they have contributed financially to South African charities and Jewish causes. Their attainments in the West demonstrate the magnitude of the loss in the Holocaust...

Four principal pieces of legislation affected Jewish immigrants to South Africa, namely the Immigration Registration Act of the Cape of 1902, the Immigration Regulation Act of 1913, the Immigration Quota Act of 1930 and the Aliens Act of 1937. It is only the latter two Acts, and particularly the second, that have direct relevance to the topic under consideration. The Nazi accession to power in 1933 was followed almost immediately by repressive measures against German Jewish citizens. An exodus from the Reich followed.

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In the beginning the exodus was to neighboring countries and then further afield. As time progressed, the number of Europeans who no-one wanted rose steadily. By the end of 1936 some 100 000 of Germany's half-million Jews had emigrated, about one-third going to South America, another third to what was then Palestine and the remainder to diverse countries, including South Africa.²

The *Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden*, founded in 1901 by German Jews to help East European refugees, turned its energies in 1933 to helping the German community's own young people to emigrate. After 1936, it was assisted by the German Council for German Jewry. Immigration to the Union of South Africa from Germany was free from the Quota Act restraints, since Germany was not one of the quota countries. From accounts of former refugees it is evident that German Jews knew little about South Africa.³ An editorial in the *Cape Times* in 1930 stated "that South Africa will always welcome settlers from the British Empire, from Holland, from Germany and from Northern France. They are ethnically our own kith and kin".

General Jan Smuts was on board ship returning from an overseas trip when he learned to his consternation that the government had during his absence introduced a Quota Bill to restrict Jewish immigration to South Africa. Even worse, his entire South Africa Party (SAP) caucus, with the exception of five Jewish members and two others had supported the Second Reading of the Bill. Arriving at Parliament during the Third reading, an infuriated Smuts took his party to task so effectively that during the final division on the Bill every SAP MP voted against it. Government members taunted him for being the 'King of the Jews'.⁴ It is noteworthy that the Quota Act did not mention Jews as such, but its effect was to restrict Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe, so much so that after 1930, as Edna Bradlow remarks, a camel could have gone through the eye of a needle more easily than a poor Lithuanian immigrant could have entered South Africa for the first time.

Initially, a limited number of German Jews came to South Africa.⁵ The increase in their numbers in 1935 was not extraordinary when compared with those from other non-restricted countries, hence the government up until then did not contemplate taking steps to deal specifically with Germany and the victims of Nazi persecution. This notwithstanding, there were some vague expressions of disquiet as early as 1934, from sources as divergent as Sir Abe Bailey and the parliamentary caucus of the National Party. Even Morris Alexander, a Jewish parliamentarian and then leader of the SAJBD, 'viewed with concern the large number of German Jewish immigrants who are looking for jobs'.⁶

Early in 1936, a deterioration of the Jewish position in Germany in conjunction with Arab opposition in Palestine which forced the British to tighten up entry into the mandate, led to an upsurge in German Jewish immigration into Southern Africa. That year, the SAJBD leadership wrote to Norman Bentwitch, a prominent figure in Anglo-Jewish refugee work and Chairman of the Council of German Jewry in London; to Otto Schiff, Chairman of the Jewish Refugees Committee in London and Max Warburg President of the *Hilfsverein* in Berlin, asking the overseas organizations to reduce the volume of immigrants to South Africa. The most serious debate arose in September, when Jewish organizations wanted to charter the *SS Stuttgart* to transport over 500 refugees to the country.⁷

German newcomers were not at first welcomed by the local Jewish community, whose roots lay predominantly in Eastern Europe, and who traditionally felt an antagonism towards German Jews (pejoratively referred to as '*Yekkes*'). The *Yekkes* for their part tended to look down on Jews of Lithuanian extraction ('*Litvaks*'). Joe Joffe, a '*Litvak*', said that he 'always tried to keep away from German Jews because they always tried to prove their superiority and I didn't like it'.⁸ This antagonism was not always the case. Indeed many Litvak Jews associated with, and indeed married Jews of German origin.

Late in 1935 and early 1936 the fate of German Jews in Germany worsened with the promulgation of the infamous Nuremberg Race Laws. Between 1933 and 1936, a total of 6132 German immigrants entered the Union of South Africa; 3615 of these were Jews, 2549 in 1936 alone. The Greyshirts, a virulent antisemitic organization, vociferously protested about the influx. Antisemitic elements within the opposition *Gesuiwerde Nationaliste Party* ('Purified National Party') were quick to jump onto the bandwagon of galloping agitation. On 16 June 1936

they raised an angry cry in Parliament against continuing Jewish immigration and demanded that the loophole in the Quota Act permitting Jews, particularly from Germany, to immigrate be blocked. Rebuffed by a government majority in Parliament, the hue and cry against German immigration was continued at public meetings throughout the country. In Stellenbosch Dr D F Malan, later to become Prime Minister and at the time National Party MP for Calvinia, contended that Jewish immigration was being fostered by organized Jewish '*geldmag*' (money power) and that the Government had purposely done nothing to remedy the position. He is alleged to have said that the Jews were the salt of the earth and that one needed salt to make a good meal but that too much salt spoiled the meal.

These remarks were followed by a spate of antisemitic letters in the press. The government found it increasingly difficult to withstand the pressure of public protest. In 1936, as a first step, the existing immigration regulations were tightened. Whereas until that time all that was needed by prospective German Jewish immigrants was a valid passport and a guarantee signed by a South African citizen, now a cash deposit of £100 sterling was required. The writer's friend Henry Fabian, later to become chairman of the Transvaal Council of the SAJBD, relates how as a young boy he was instructed by his father, a businessman in Cape Town, to go to the docks and exhibit the requisite £100 to an appropriate immigration official. This was then exhibited as a deposit for use by people coming to South Africa. Henry, in his short pants, would then scramble up the gangplank of the ship carrying German Jewish immigrants and hand the £100 to a would-be immigrant, who would then exhibit the notes to the official. Henry would be standing nearby. As soon as the formalities were complied with, the £100 would be handed back to Henry, who would unobtrusively make his way back onto the ship and hand the same £100 over to another would-be immigrant. The process went on very successfully. Henry says that the attitude of the officials was probably to turn a blind eye to what was happening.

Jewish communal leaders at the time attempted to get government to make it illegal to provoke racial hatred between Europeans, much along the lines of the many years later Riotous Assemblies Act. The government, regrettably supported by its own Jewish MPs, was loath to introduce such legislation (1934). It viewed with some apprehension an open discussion in the House of Assembly of the Jewish question. The reason for this was obvious. The Greyshirts activities

were exposing and further inflaming what Smuts called a wide current of antisemitism, particularly in the *platteland* and smaller towns. Malan's National Party was forced, as it were, to adopt antisemites as an effective means for making a counterbid. Bradlow comments that: 'From about April 1936, after a two-year flirtation with the idea, a campaign was launched against Jewish immigration, during which the semantic subterfuge of 1930 was abandoned. They were replaced – even in parliament – by language both reflecting the beliefs of the simplest white voter – as the provincial councils, particularly in the Cape were to show, later in the year. At Lichtenberg, Malan stated that that he was not a Greyshirt but that he went along with them as far as German-Jewish immigration was concerned.'⁹

Pressure from the opposition to restrict German-Jewish immigration was compounded by that from the government's own officials abroad. During February and March 1936, the Union's representatives in Washington, The Hague, Rome, London and Berlin, which included the well-known antisemite Eric Louw, and Charles te Water, sent the Prime Minister a memorandum, subsequently called the 'Te Water Memorandum'. This stated that 'at this critical juncture and in view of the exceptional circumstances attending it, there should be restrictions on the movement of Jews into South Africa'. The memorandum further pointed out that between April 1936 and the end of that year, over 2000 Jews had applied for information concerning South Africa and that the country was regarded as a 'Jewish country'. The signatories posed the question as to whether without detriment and even danger to the national interests, South Africa could 'continue to allow its commercial interests and related vocations to be fed by recruits of the type from overseas.'

In Parliament, the Nationalists demanded that people whose travel did not allow them to return to their home country should not be allowed to enter South Africa. This patently referred to German Jews since under the Reich's Citizen Act of September 15 1935 (a section of the Nuremberg Race Laws), all non-Aryans had been deprived of their German nationality, which inter alia meant the cancellation of their German passports and the issue of new passports indicating that had no status in Germany or right of return. The SAJBD immediately expressed its fears that the effect of the proposed amendment would be to exclude people on the very racial and religious grounds that had occasioned their disabilities in their homeland. J H Hofmeyr, then the Minister of Interior, was asked to consider what the effect of the amendment would have on

the local antisemitic movement. Distressed by the situation yet unable to act without jeopardizing his position in the Cabinet, Hofmeyr confessed: "My blood boils ...when I read of the new antisemitic excesses in Germany and Austria. Sometimes I wonder whether I should not be gloriously indiscreet and say exactly what I think about Hitler's policy in this respect. Then no doubt the PM would send an apology to Germany and I would have to resign"¹⁰

Various amendments were proposed to the 1930 Quota Act. Although an Immigration Bill was prepared, it was dropped by the government. The latter was prepared to introduce certain restrictions on immigration but these were quickly attacked by Malan as being inadequate. The German Jews, unlike the earlier Lithuanians, were a sophisticated secularly educated group, who could not be excluded by stiffer education tests. New regulations were introduced, stiffening the financial requirements and any attempts made to use influence to secure admission of a particular person were to be regarded as enough to cause the person's exclusion. The opposition described the new regulations as particularly weak and of a patchwork nature. The immediate effect of the regulations was to cause immigration figures to rise dramatically, especially in October 1936, when the peak figure of 948 Jewish immigrants came in. This peak was reached in order to beat the 1 November deadline. That month, the figures dropped to 113.

It was at this time that the Council for German Jewry in London made hasty efforts to charter the *Stuttgart*, to enable as many immigrants as possible to arrive ahead of the deadline. Shimoni writes:

Drawn between the desire to save as many German Jews as possible and trepidation lest public reaction could lead to new legislation slamming the doors on all immigration, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies had been warning the London Council from time to time that the climate in South Africa was dangerously hostile to Jewish arrivals. After consultation with one of the organisers, Dr. Mark Wischnitzer, who was present in South Africa during September 1936, the SAJBD cabled London to strongly disapprove of the venture since it would 'seriously endanger the future position'. It favoured, instead, representations to the Government to ease the effect of the regulations in the long term. But, confronted with the fait accompli of the *Stuttgart's* departure braced itself to receive the immigrants and face the inevitable reaction from hostile gentile opinion.¹¹

As the date for the arrival of the *Stuttgart* drew near, the atmosphere was electric. Telegrams reached the Prime Minister from various parts of the country demanding that he prevent the ship's landing. At a meeting at Stellenbosch University it was decided to conduct a protest march against the arrival of the immigrants. On the evening of 26 October the Greyshirts held a large protest meeting in Cape Town. Owing to a rumor that the *Stuttgart* had arrived seven hours earlier than scheduled, about a thousand people rushed from the meeting to the docks. The ship in fact only arrived the following morning as planned, and by that time the demonstration that was to have occurred had fizzled out. The *Jewish Times* of 6 November 1936 estimated that there were only a handful of demonstrators - not more than 30 or so. Anti-immigration agitation did not let up, however. The *Stuttgart* had been barely 12 hours in Cape Town docks when another protest meeting of some 1500 persons met at Stellenbosch University and passed an angry resolution against the 'unrestricted and undesired Jewish mass immigration to South Africa' and appealed to the Government "to put a stop to this organized mass immigration by means of legislation and other measures".

Whilst the ship was on the high seas, the local Jewish community was making arrangements to disperse the immigrants to various centres as soon as they arrived. The main contingent of the passengers were young people between 19 and 30 years of whom the majority were artisans, locksmiths, electricians and bakers, a number of them having retrained only recently to some of these 'practical occupations'. The reason for this was that the immigration regulations required such qualifications. A special train to Johannesburg was chartered by the South African Fund for German Jewry, a Jewish self-help organisation of German Jewish immigrant volunteers, started in Johannesburg in 1936. The fund sent a representative to Cape Town to meet those coming to Johannesburg to learn into which categories of employment they fell. During the train journey, reception committees to meet the refugees were organized. One *Stuttgarter* later described her reaction to the landing scene:

As we docked our high hopes of beginning life anew in South Africa were mingled with fear the first news which greeted us was that there had been a demonstration here in Cape Town our landing because a section of the population did not want us ... because we were Jews. It was an indescribable blow. Some women were

in tears and begged to be allowed to go back. Nobody knew what to do. Then we were told by the Jewish reception committee consisting of Mr Raphaely and Miss Kuperholz, who were allowed on board, not to worry, that we would land under any circumstances and soon calm was restored. We disembarked and in spite of the ugly news we had just heard, found friendliness beyond description showered on us.

Frieda Sichel describes in heart rendering terms the feelings of some of those who arrived on the *Stuttgart*.¹²

Early in 1937, unable to resist the pressure further, the Hertzog/Smuts Fusion Government introduced a new immigration law, namely the Aliens Act of 1937. This represented a complete departure from the Quota Act, which it replaced. It was more palatable from the point of view of Jewish dignity because it reverted to a universal principle for applicants irrespective of origin of the ethnic group. The Bill provided for the establishment of a small Immigrants' Selection Board appointed by the Governor General for the purpose of deciding on the desirability of each individual alien applicant for permanent residence in the country.

The main criteria for the Board's decisions regarding the applicant were the following:

- a) *He is of good character;*
- b) *He is likely to become readily assimilated with the European inhabitants of the Union and to become a desirable inhabitant of the Union within a reasonable period after his entry into the Union;*
- c) *He is not likely to be harmful to the welfare of the Union;*
- d) *He does not and is not likely to pursue an occupation which in the opinion of the Board, a sufficient number of persons is already engaged in the Union*

In October 1936 the *Hilfsverein* communicated with the SAJBD, seeking its assistance in helping German Jews considering immigration to South Africa. The reply by the secretary of SAJBD to the request was astounding. One of the three Jewish MPs, Morris Alexander (the other two were M Kentridge and C P Robinson) read out the reply during the debate on the Aliens Act, which read as follows:

I wish to invite your most serious attention to the facts of this letter and your energetic co-operation in regard thereto. You are undoubtedly aware of

the general reaction in this country to the immigration of Jews from Germany. Some four months back, we indicated the growing agitation against the increased immigration of Jews to this country. We draw your attention to the agitation which was then conducted against this immigration. We accordingly call upon you to use every means at your disposal to bring about a dramatic diminution in the immigration. The present tide must be reduced to a trickle, and best of all, be dried up completely for many months ahead.¹³

Alexander no doubt read the letter to show that the local Jewish community was discouraging the immigration of German Jews.

Given the universal and non-prejudiced basis of the Bill, even the Jewish members of Parliament felt constrained to support it as the lesser evil. Hofmeyr himself was spared the invidious duty of having to introduce the legislation since Prime Minister Hertzog had relieved him of the Ministry of Interior about a month earlier and replaced him with Richard Stuttaford. In a private letter dated 17 November 1936 to Mrs J.M. Raphaely of Claremont, Hofmeyr stated, *inter alia*, 'I do not think that it is fair for you to expect us to open our doors to an unlimited number of foreigners, whether Jews or of other races, although I fully appreciate the enormous difficulties that that the Jews who at present are in Germany are facing. Even England does not give unlimited asylum to the Jewish race...'

Australia adopted a similar attitude. In July, Thomas W White represented Australia at an inter-governmental conference on Jewish refugees held at Evian, France, to discuss the growing numbers of Jewish immigrants seeking to leave Germany and occupied territories. He expressed his distress after listening to stories from refugees during the conference, but ultimately hedged his offer of support saying, "As we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large-scale foreign migration". Australia would not liberalize its alien immigration policy from an annual quota of 5000, or 15000 over three years. It nevertheless absorbed between 7 and 8000 Jewish refugees from Nazism, many from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Over 5000 arrived in 1939.¹⁴

Smuts felt it necessary to deny emphatically that the Bill was especially directed against Jews. He said: '...Whether the man is a Jew or a gentile; whatever his race may be, or whatever his religion may be, or whatever his outlook may be, if he can comply with the conditions laid down, he will be welcome'.

Hertzog placed a rather different interpretation on the Bill's purpose. He stated categorically that the 'influx of Jews is ... one of the two immediate causes for the introduction of this Bill.' Smuts' assurance notwithstanding there can be no doubt that the main effect of the Aliens Act was the stemming of German Jewish immigration. Between 1 February 1937 and 31 March 1940, 2918 Jews entered the Union for permanent residence, of whom some 300 were other than wives, minor children or aged persons or persons already resident in the country. Moreover government policy even under the premiership of Smuts continued after 1939.¹⁵

The Board's discretionary powers were very wide. This discretion was final and not subject to appeal. No reasons were required to be given for the refusal of an application. The restrictions were a bitter disappointment to those who looked forward to settling in this country. How many who wished to come here and despaired of getting the necessary permission and went elsewhere or were left to their fate and murdered by the Nazis we will never know.

As a result of representations by the SAJBD to the Minister of Interior, the position was alleviated to a slight degree for those who had been caught unawares by the hurried passage of the Aliens Act and for refugees who were in South Africa on temporary permits and were awaiting permission to take up permanent residence when the Act was introduced. Making due allowance for the exigencies of the moment and bearing in mind that the matter is now being viewed with the benefit and comfort of hindsight, one of the most disturbing features of the Aliens Act was the attitude taken by the SAJBD led by Alexander and the other Jewish Members of Parliament. They were no doubt driven by political expediency, fears of rising antisemitism and the possible job losses by local Jews if German Jews were given free access to the country. Furthermore they no doubt believed that their prime task was to look after the interests of local Jews. Nevertheless their capitulation in supporting the Act showed a heartless lack of humanity, Jewish conscience and a basic failure to heed the plight of its German brethren trapped in the Nazi Reich. Professor Colin Tatz describes the attitude as 'moral abdication'.

The SAJBD's then President Morris Franks admitted to the Deputies that the MPs had acted fully in concert the SAJBD's own executive, explaining, "When we read the Bill through, we come to the conclusion that the measure as it stood, having regard to the terms incorporated in it, was not one which we could oppose".¹⁶

When one reads the Hansard debates

at the time one cannot help noticing the preoccupation of those in Parliament and particularly the Jewish members, not with the fate of their brethren in other countries, but rather with the consequences which a wave of Jewish immigration could have on local Jewry.

The local Jewish press was highly critical of both the SAJBD and the Jewish MPs. The following hard-hitting editorial, entitled 'To Run with Hare and Hound with the Hounds', appeared in the *SA Jewish Times*:

Even the Jewish members have thrown themselves with enthusiasm into this game and have in 'twenty different sharps and flats' praised the Bill, which differs little from Dr Malan's proposed measure. Mr Morris Kentridge strained at the leash in his evident desire to prove his 101% loyalty to his party. He could not even wait for the Bill to be tabled before assuring the Government of Jewish support and their approval of the Bill. If this were not enough the member for Troyville thought it was incumbent on himself to assure the country of Jewish satisfaction on this point.... What remarkable dexterity in the art of throwing dust in the public eye is here shown our coreligionist... On another page, our readers will find an article by Dr. Bernard Friedman in which our contributor, a distinguished member of the Jewish community, expresses his apprehension at the wording of the Bill. In this article ...our contributor realizes the gravity of the situation and the need for serious speaking. Dr. Friedman puts the sincerity of our Jewish parliamentarians to an acid test suggesting to them to move an amendment in which the word 'assimilability' would be deleted and substituted by the word 'loyalty'... Unfortunately for the Jewish Members the country is blessed with a Prime Minister who abhors dishonest thinking. ... Messrs. Kentridge, Robinson and Alexander must have felt very uncomfortable when the Prime Minister declared that the Bill was not aimed at the Jews but was framed to keep the Jews out. Would Mr Kentridge care to explain to fair minded people of this country why, in a democratic country where the Swastika is not yet its national emblem, the social origin of the merchant, or the purveyor of goods must be known to his customer...Hitler and Goering ... demand that the Jews should clearly indicate on their windows the social origin of the proprietor. But then Hitler and Goering do not have to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. A Mr Wolpe, in a letter to the *SA Jewish*

Times (5 March 1937) sought to defend Kentridge, stating inter alia that to vote against the Bill 'would have been childish as it could not have prevented its passage ... We are practical people. We know that it is useless to knock one's head against a brick wall'.

In the same issue of the paper, the editorial called for a statement from the SAJBD. It drew attention to the fact that the SAJBD went out of its way to eulogise the Jewish MPs for their submissive attitude towards the government during the passage of the Aliens Act through Parliament, referring to a remark made by the then chairman of the SAJBD to the effect that 'had I been in their position I should have acted in the same way'.

In a letter of 12 March 1937 a Mr Greenstein wrote inter alia, "The Board of Deputies has been a useful body in the early days ... But as time went on and more important and delicate questions arose, the leaders of the Board proved themselves utterly inadequate... The Aliens Bill which was later passed in Parliament was truly the acid test of the Board. They failed most hopelessly... very little was heard from the Board with regard to that Bill... The Board is treating Jewry with contempt... the masses of Jewry are entirely in disagreement with the sentiments expressed by these members, leadership and personnel of the Board'.

Shimoni sums up the attitude of the SAJBD in these succinct terms:

Despite the crying moral need to assist its destitute refugee brethren, the Board's executive in fact capitulated to the public clamor against German Jewish immigration which the antisemites had fanned into a hysteria; it appealed to the organizers of the immigration 'to bring about a drastic diminution in immigration'. The Board was thus telling the bitter truth when it repeatedly issued public statements during 1936 denying the charge that it was organizing and sponsoring German Jewish immigration in brazen defiance of gentile public opinion.¹⁷

It is of course true that very few people, if any, could have anticipated that the mass murder of Jews on an organized scale would take place. From February 1937 to 31 March 1940, 2918 Jews entered the Union for permanent residence, of which only some 500 were other than wives, minor children and aged parents of persons already resident in the country. During the war years, Jewish immigration was negligible, only 220 being admitted for permanent residence from the beginning of 1940 to the end of 1944.

When a Jewish deputation came to see Smuts in September 1943, he frankly admitted 'you know, there is antisemitism in South Africa and it is very difficult. Antisemitism is getting worse and while it would certainly be a generous to bring more Jews here it would be a very unwise thing. Unwise for the Jews' sake and for all our sakes'.

On the positive side, it should be noted that in May 1933, the 14th Zionist Congress in Johannesburg decided to create a fund for the relief of German immigrants and their settlement in Palestine and steps were taken to implement that decision. Something like £80 000 was initially raised for the Fund. Of this amount 75% was devoted to the settlement of Jews in Palestine. The Fund provided substantial loans to refugees and as these were repaid used those funds to assist other refugees. Thousands of pounds were provided for passages, luggage deposit guarantees and the like to enable relatives, especially parents of immigrants, to enter South Africa, and later the Protectorates, Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa. Branch offices of the Fund were closed in 1937 when the main flow of refugees ceased, while in Johannesburg it continued to function until 1948. In 1939 an aged home was established. It was members of the immigrants Help Organisation who had the foresight to start negotiations in 1940 for the acquisition of premises in Saratoga Avenue, Doornfontein, which was the foundation of Our Parents Home.

In religious observance as in other matters the refugees differed greatly. On many of the boats that brought them to South Africa daily services were organized. The Jewish community in Germany was renowned for the quality of its communal services, and many of the refugees sought to establish the same fundamental institutions in their new homeland. One small group was distinguished for their strict adherence to Jewish orthodoxy. In 1936, they founded the Adath Jeshurun congregation, based on the spirit and principles they had been used to in pre-Hitler Germany, but having due regard to the peculiar circumstances of their new environment. The Etz Chayim congregation was also established by German Jews. On the initiative of Etz Chayim the SA Committee of Refugees from Central Europe was founded in 1938.

Even after the war, one of the greatest frustrations of the Jewish community was its failure to bring more than a very modest number of Jewish refugees and concentration camp survivors to South Africa. In October 1945, a delegation asked Smuts to admit 400 Jewish war orphans entirely at the community's expense and under its care.

Although he gave the delegation a sympathetic hearing, it was indicative of his constant need to look over his shoulder at what the Nationalist opposition would say, not to speak of those with similar sentiments in his own party, that he found it necessary to consent to this only on condition that it be done as part of a general non-sectional plan. Accordingly, he ordered the relevant government department to devise a scheme whereby orphans from various Allied European countries were to be brought to South Africa. Deciding on the reception of up to 5000 orphans, the department stipulated that the number of Jewish children included in this framework 'should conform to the proportion which the Jewish community now stands to the population of the Union'. As it happened, apart from Greece, none of the countries approached, including Great Britain, France and Holland, were interested in the scheme. This demonstrated the artificiality of the idea that it had to be made a general project. In the end, the Jewish organizations responsible for the children in Europe preferred to send them to what was then Palestine.

The publication of the plight of Eastern and Central European Jewry after the war and at a time that Smuts was setting in motion his arrangements for attracting a considerable number of European immigrants to South Africa revived the issue of large scale Jewish immigration for the last time.

In July 1946 the UK government, following discussions with the United States, approached the Dominions with an urgent request to absorb as soon as possible a specified number of displaced persons of all classes, including Jews. The request was linked to a British move to counter Arab opposition towards the immigration of European Jews into Palestine. The Dominions' response was lukewarm. Smuts equivocated over the British proposals. Initially he foresaw legal obstacles to the acceptance of Eastern European Jews on the grounds of the Quota Act, which in terms of the Aliens Act was no longer operative. He publically capitulated to the Nationalist stance that he intended creating an 'alternative Jewish home here' by telling Parliament that he would not provide the solution to the Jewish problem, which believed lay in the founding of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. If this country 'were overloaded' with Jews, he added, an antisemitic movement would result.

Immigration figures for the period 1947-1952 show that in 1947 there were 698 Jews out of a total of 28 841 immigrants, 65% out of 35 631 in 1948, 233 out of 14 780 in 1949, 176 out of 12 803 in 1950, 22 out of 15 243 in 1951 and 201 out of 18 473 in 1952.

In considering the reaction of South African Jewry to the victims of Nazi persecution, mention should be made of a spontaneous boycott movement organized by some Jews to stop buying German goods. This campaign was led, amongst others, by Max Sonnenberg, a leading South African Jew and one of the founders of the Woolworths chain of stores. In his biography *The way I saw it*, he describes the movement in these powerful terms:¹⁸

Refugees started to arrive in South Africa, men and women, and often children, all belonging to the best families, whose only offence was that they did not happen to be qualified Nordics as defined by Adolph Hitler and Company. As the stories of concentration camps, Gestapo tortures and the rest reached us, a spontaneous movement began to stop buying German goods. With that particular naivety that has always astonished me in the Nazis, they immediately began to squeal and make allegations about dark conspiracies by the leaders of Jewry. To see the success of the boycott gave us all satisfaction and even *more* the complaints by the Nazis headed by the German Minister in Pretoria, where sales of German products were dropping.

In seeking to defend South African Jewry, Sonnenberg states: ‘...I must say something in justice to South African Jewry... Nothing that has been given by the South African public can compare with what South African Jews contributed to help their brethren and other victims in Europe. The sums involved ran literally into millions ... The old expression of ‘giving till it hurts’ has general validity here. At a very modest guess, South African Jewry has given since 1933 the better part of ten million pounds’.¹⁹

There is a lesson to be learned in recounting the attitude of SA Jewry to the victims of Nazi persecution. It is necessary to recount this sad history, notwithstanding the establishment of the State of Israel. We would do well to have regard to the following moving words which appear in a dedication prepared by the sculptor, Ernest Ullman:

We ask for forgiveness for the dead for having failed and abandoned them. We want to remember their suffering because it could perhaps have been our fate as well. To be spared implies an obligation. It is the duty of the son to honour his parents and their memory - love will dictate this reverence but more than that, is it not also the sacred obligation of the living to keep the flame alight, to carry the torch,

to hand on the spirit of hope to others, so that it may not be extinguished, so that the last sighs of those that have perished be heard and preserved and not be lost forever in nothingness.

NOTES

- 1 See generally: Stone, Lotta M., “Seeking Asylum: German Refugees in South Africa, 1933-1948”, Phd. Clark University, 2019; the *Doctoral Thesis* of Lotta M. Steyn (May 21001); Shain, Milton, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa, 1930-1948*, Jonathan Ball, 2015; Edna Bradlow, ‘Immigration into the Union 1910-1948 : Policies and Attitudes’ unpublished PhD dissertation University of Cape Town 1978; Jocelyn Hellig, Myra Osrin, Millie Pimstone, *Seeking Refuge: German Jewish Immigration to Johannesburg in the 1930s*. Johannesburg: SA Jewish Board of Deputies, 2005, Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience (1910-1967)* pp149-150, Hellig, Jocelyn, ‘German Jewish Immigration to South Africa during the 1930’s: Revisiting the Charter of the SS Stuttgart’.
- 2 Bradlow (supra), p250.
- 3 Stone (supra) p44 refers to a certain Claire Lampel who sought assistance from the *Hilfsverein* in Berlin to immigrate to the United States. She was advised that this was not possible due to the American Quota system, but South Africa was a viable option. Her response was ‘What must I do in South Africa? Must I feed the monkeys with bananas or what?’
- 4 Steyn, R., *Jan Smuts - Unafraid of Greatness* (2016), pp119-120 and Crafford, F S, *Jan Smuts – A Biography* (1943), p259.
- 5 In 1933 the official total of Jewish immigrants was 745; in 1934 it rose to 1123 and in 1935 it was 1059. Of these, German Jews respectively comprised 204, 452 and about 388.
- 6 Alexander *Papers, Letterbook* 1932-1934, Alexander to Hertz, 23.1.1934.
- 7 This matter will be considered presently and see Stone (supra) p5.
- 8 Stone (supra) p38.
- 9 Bradlow (supra) and *Die Burger*, 21.8.1936.
- 10 S G Millin Papers. Letters dated 22.11.1936; 19.6.1936.
- 11 Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, p117.
- 12 Sichel, F, *From Refugee to Citizen: A Sociological Study of the Immigrants from Hitler-Europe who Settled in Southern Africa*, Balkema, 1966, p251.
- 13 Hansard 12 January 1937 pp92-3.
- 14 Suzanne Rutland, ‘Jewish Immigration after the Second World War - Transformation of a community’, in *Teaching History - the Journal of the History Teachers’ Association*, New South Wales. 2006.
- 15 Shimoni, pp142, 144.
- 16 BD Minutes of Monthly Deputies Meeting, Johannesburg, 31.1.1937
- 17 Shimoni (supra) page 149.
- 18 *At page 141*
- 19 *At pages 143/14*

“ONE WORLD AND ONE HUMAN RACE” – A MESSAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY, 2017

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Marlene Bethlehem

It is an honour and a privilege to have been asked to address you today on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. We gather here in Germany, to witness, to remember, to ask what we can do to honour the memories of so many.

I address you in the City of Hanover, where the deportation Jews began on 15 December 1941. It was not the only deportation.

I address you in the presence of survivors of the Shoah who have joined us here today. To the survivors I say, we can never understand the extent of your suffering or your resilience, but we honour you from the depth of our souls.

On this solemn day I will talk of both the past and of the present.

Let me begin with reference to another visitor to Germany, US President John F. Kennedy, who when visiting West Berlin in June 1963, famously declared, “*Ich bin ein Berliner*”.

Kennedy was speaking at a time when things were very different from what they are now. The Iron Curtain was firmly in place. A wall divided the city of Berlin. Apartheid was at its height in South Africa.

Kennedy made his famous declaration in defence of democracy. He made his declaration to express solidarity with the German people in the face of Soviet backed dictatorship. He was expressing his support for freedom of movement, freedom of opinion and freedom of religion. He went on to say: “Freedom is indivisible, and when one person is enslaved, all are not free. When all are free, then we

can look forward to that day when the city of Berlin will be joined as one and this country and this great continent of Europe in a peaceful and hopeful globe.”

But of course, at that time, most of Europe was only beginning to rise from the ashes of World War II. Kennedy was speaking only eighteen years after the defeat of the Nazi regime. Less than twenty years after the shadow of death finally began to lift from this great continent.

Many of Kennedy’s hopes were fulfilled. Berlin was reunited. And then all of Germany. And then the whole of Europe took the bold step of establishing the European Union. What a great achievement this was.

And so, things are very different from the day that Kennedy spoke. But some things are the same. The shadow of the World War II, and of the Holocaust in particular, has not lifted entirely. Indeed, there are ominous signs that the spectre of racism may again be raising its ugly head in Europe and other parts of the world - signs that fascist ideas may again be taking hold, that ordinary people will again be misled into hatred.

Today, I will try to conjure up the past. I will remind us of its consequences. I will reflect on what it means for the present.

Today I will stand in Hanover, and say, “*Ich bin Deutsche*”.

Like Kennedy, I say this to identify myself with the principles of freedom and inclusivity.

I say this to remind us of the consequences of racism, of name calling, of forgetting for even a moment that all human beings are equal, and all equally deserving of a decent life. I say this in solidarity with the people of Aleppo, and many other cities whose citizens have been forced to flee. In particular, I say this to honour and commend the people of Germany for accepting so many refugees into their midst. To commend you for the way in which you have taken on this global responsibility.

I say this also to remember those murdered at the Christmas market in Berlin last month. No one deserves such terror, much less a community that has done so much for those fleeing war and persecution.

But I also I make this declaration for

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other, more personal reasons. I say, "*Ich bin Deutsche*".

I also say, "*Ich bin Jüdin*" - I am a Jew. I also say, I am a South African. I have inherited the legacy of Nelson Mandela. How can all of this be true?

The Holocaust, the events we remember today, can only be understood one person at a time. Six million were killed, and let us never forget each of these victims was a person and not a number. Each one was an entire world.

Allow me tell you a story. The story of one person, one family. One mother, her husband and child. Let us hear what became of them.

I will tell you the story of a woman named Judit Gerson. Born in Tilzit, near Königsberg, in what was then Prussia, Judit was one of eight siblings. Her name Judith - or Yehudit in Hebrew - means Jew. She was a Jew. She lived as such. She died as such. She has a name. She does not have a grave.

Judit's family were Jews and they were German. For them, for a time, there was no contradiction between the two. Her father Eugene served in the Prussian army. The names of some of her siblings - Helmut, Arno, Siegfried, Lotta and Leo - reflect a deep connection to German culture. The names of other siblings - Yaakov and Nathan - reflect a deep connection to Jewish life.

Judit grew up, attended school and synagogue, and married another German Jew, Reinhold Gutfeld. In 1934, they had a little boy and called him Josse after the great Jewish *chazzan* Yoselin Rosenblatt. Like Moses in Egypt, Josse was born under a cloud. Like Pharaoh in Egypt, the murderers of Jewish children were beginning to stir. Like Moses, Josse was destined to be saved.

As Josse began to take his first steps, the world began to darken. Here in Germany, Hitler's influence began to grow. Judith's family, wary of the threats to Jews, looked for ways to escape. Judit's parents and some of her siblings made their way to Israel, which was then Palestine and some of her siblings went to South Africa. They found ways to leave Germany even though they had to give up so much. About half of all German Jews left the country at this stage.

In 1938, Reinhold wrote to his family in Palestine trying to arrange for papers to join them. But it was too late. Papers did not come through in time.

Just before the outbreak of the war, Reinhold, Judit and Josse managed to reach Belgium. Bewildered, terrified but alive, they settled there and Josse even went to school for a short time. But soon the Nazis began their march across Europe. In Brussels, the family was tipped off about the imminent

round up of Jews. Living by their wits, they crossed the border into France. But fate caught up with them again. The family were arrested by the Nazis and detained in Gurs internment camp in southern France. From here it was still possible to emigrate and some inmates were able to organise papers. Reinhold was now desperate to find a way out and tried making contact with people who could help him. In 1941, he wrote a heart-breaking letter to a contact in Turkey, asking for help in getting papers. It was probably his last attempt and it did not yield any results.

In March 1941, the family were transferred to transit camps. Reinhold was detained at Camp des Milles near Marseilles, while Judit and Josse were detained in the Centre Bompard in the same area. Camp des Milles and Bompard were transit camps and Jews were detained there. While at the Centre Bompard, Judit managed to make contact with the French resistance. Despairing of her fate, and that of her family, she tried to make plans for escape.

In 1942, the German army invaded southern France and the situation worsened. The Jews in the transit camps were now in mortal danger. Judit knew that the end was near and was desperate to get her child to safety.

After the occupation of southern France and beginning of the deportations via Drancy, desperate efforts were made to save children. With the help of the Jewish organisation Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants, Judit was able to arrange for her son to be taken in by a rural Catholic family.

In August 1942, Judit and Josse were placed on a train from Camp des Milles to Drancy near Paris. As the death train passed through the small farming village of Le Haut-Biol overlooking the road to Lyon, Josse was secretly taken off the train, together with another boy called Simon Haas.

Josse told me personally of his mother's last words to him. Words etched in his memory forever: "Be brave. Be good. Don't cry. Play with the other boy." He was seven years old.

Judit arrived at Drancy, where she was reunited briefly with Reinhold. On 14 August 1942, both were sent from Drancy on the nineteenth transport to Auschwitz and were murdered immediately on arrival.

I return to Josse. The name of the family who had agreed to take the boys was Argoud. They lived on farm outside a small village. The parents, Joseph and Emilliene had three children of their own, two boys and a girl. Josse and Simon became the two additional brothers. They lived with the Argoud family for two years. During that time the entire village knew that they were there. Nazi

soldiers made searches, and warnings were posted throughout French villages stating the harbouring Jews was punishable by death.

Yet the code of silence was never broken.

Certain shacks in the pastures were their place of hiding. At a moment's notice from the Argouds, whenever a German patrol passed by, Josse and Simon would be ready to hide themselves.

When the village was liberated by the Allies, Josse was sent to an orphanage in central France. One of the social workers, Rachel Altman, took him to her family in Strasbourg, where he stayed until 1946.

Josse's name was included in a list of children waiting to be reunited with their families. The list was seen by Judith's parents, Eugene and Faiga Gerson in Tel Aviv, and arrangements were made for him to move to Israel.

Josse grew up in Tel Aviv with his mother's family. He became an electrician and married Ruth Minikes, also of German-Jewish descent. They had four children. As the children grew up Josse would relate his story to them. He never forgot the simple farming family to whom he had owed his life. As time went by he decided to try to find them and to show them his gratitude.

In 1981 Josse and Ruth, accompanied by their youngest son Oren, travelled to France. They made their way overland to Le Haut-Biol. They arrived at the farm stopping at the white picket fence twenty meters from the house. Josse slowly stepped from the car, grasping Oren's hand tightly. Joseph Argoud, now an elderly man, leaned forward from his porch bench to see who it was. Josse called to him in French: "Do you remember a boy?" A moment of silent recognition passed. The tears and excitement came to the old man's eyes. "*Josse C'est Tu?*"- "*Oui, c'est Moi PAPA*".

The adopted Jewish child was reunited with his Catholic family, as an ecstatic Joseph called his wife. She, too, was overcome with emotion.

Josse's youngest son Oren remained silent and pensive while his eyes wandered about his father's pastoral refuge. His response to the family was, "I owe my life to you. Had you not sheltered my father he would not be here and of course I would not be here."

Chocolates were served as there was much catching up since so much time had passed. On his return to Israel, Josse was determined that the family should be formally recognised. A lengthy process began as he applied to Yad Vashem to accord the family recognition for what they had done.

Josse tried to expedite the process in view of the Argouds' advancing age. Finally, the research complete, the family – and the

entire village of Le Haut-Biol - were formally included on the list of Righteous among the Nations – Gentile people who saved Jews during the Holocaust. By then, the Argoud family were too old to travel to Israel for the ceremony and so it was agreed that the event would be held in the village.

The Israeli Ambassador to France accompanied Josse and his family and agreed to host an event to honour the Argoud family and the village as a whole. When Josse and his family arrived, flanked by the consular entourage and a host of journalists, the villagers expressed their surprise. "We don't know what all the fuss is about." They said, "Two children's lives were at stake. Of course we had to protect them".

I quote from Proverbs 24. 11:

Rescue those who are being taken away to death;

Hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.

If you say, "Behold, we did not know this"

Will not the One who weighs your heart perceive it?

And so my friends, I will say it again: "*Ich bin Deutsche*". I am the daughter of Judit's brother Leonard.

My aunt Judit and her husband Reinhold were murdered in Auschwitz. My cousin Josse survived. My father managed to reach the southern shore of Africa. Had he hesitated to leave his homeland, Germany, my brother Errol and I would never have been born.

I was born in 1940, when Judit and her family were already trapped in Europe. I was named Marlene Gerson. Marlene, a name with German roots. Gerson, the name of a Jewish family from Gumbinnen.

All my life my father spoke with a German accent. He never spoke much about Germany. He never taught us a word of his language. But he yearned for the life he had lost. After he and my mother were divorced, he married a German woman in South Africa. In some ways, he never stopped feeling like a refugee.

So where does Judit's story leave us on this International Holocaust Remembrance Day?

In the years following her death, Hitler and his allies were defeated. Later, the Soviet regimes fell. The Berlin Wall fell, apartheid was defeated in South Africa.

The world made real progress.

But recently, the world has begun to change again. Once more we feel the cold, ominous wind of racism and ultra-nationalism. Once again we hear talk of walls being built between countries. Once again it is fashionable to believe that some human beings are superior to others. To believe that it is acceptable to humiliate, insult and isolate people on their basis of the religion,

or their origins.

This is what makes International Holocaust Remembrance Day so important. On this day we remember the slaughter of the Jews of Europe and those associated with them. As we remember them, we try to draw lessons for our world today.

It is a difficult day for us all. It demands deep reserves of emotional energy and integrity.

It is a day for intense reflection. It is a day that asks us to commune with the dead - to imagine for a moment their suffering, their desperation, their misery, their terror. To put ourselves in the shoes of people who committed no crime, but who were in the grip of a monster, unable to protect themselves, unable to defend their children.

It is a day to remember the survivors. I especially recognise the survivors present with us today. I offer deep respect for their resilience, their strength - to honour their capacity for healing in the face of immense trauma. In the face of a world that was often indifferent to their inordinate suffering.

It is a day to remember those who resisted, those who opposed, and those who stood up against evil, to listen to the voice of their own conscience, even in the face of death. It is also a day to talk about the perpetrators and those who supported them. To remember that Hitler was voted into power. To remember that so many ordinary Europeans gave their active or tacit support to the politics of hatred, the politics of cruelty, and the politics of fear. It is a day to pause. To ask ourselves as individuals what each of us can do to help someone who is vulnerable. To ask ourselves as citizens, what kind of world we are trying to build.

What stories will be told of us by our children?

Will they tell the story of people like the Argoud family and so many others? Ordinary people committed to their values, knowing that they lived under the gaze of the Almighty?

It is, without doubt, a day to honour those who risked their lives to save others. As of January 2016, a total of 25 271 people have been recognised by Yad Vashem as "Righteous among the Nations." Each one receives a medal inscribed with the words of the Talmud: Sanhedrin 4.5: *"Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world; and*

whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world".

Just as we cannot and will not forget the Holocaust, we must never forget those courageous individuals whose humanity transcended it. By trying to understand some of the attributes that distinguished rescuers

from the onlookers and perpetrators, perhaps we can deliberately cultivate those attributes for the world of the future.

Let me speak for a moment to the refugees and their families, as the daughter of a refugee. When my father and some of his sisters arrived in South Africa they were not universally welcomed. Those who were intent on oppressing black people in South Africa also hated Jews. They were indeed Nazi sympathisers.

All Jewish South Africans descend from refugees. They mostly arrived penniless and scared, with little knowledge of local culture or language. They were generally not well educated but they knew that their future depended on hard work and creativity. In the end the Jewish community in South Africa made a massive contribution to our country, in the professions, in the economy and also in the anti-apartheid struggle. And Jewish life in South Africa has thrived, with many synagogues, institutions and places of study.

Given the right environment and the right approach, refugee communities can thrive. Refugees who do best are those who hold on to their roots but integrate into their new environment ... encourage their children to honour the traditions of their community as much as the traditions of their new country.

Let me end with a word to all the German people who are accepting refugees into their midst. This a difficult process, challenging, and not without risk. But we have learnt from the Holocaust that there is only one world and only one human race. When you look to the refugees arriving in Germany now, think about their children. And think about the Argoud family and the boy they saved. In saving one life, they saved an entire world. Josse never ever recovered from the deep trauma of the Shoah. One indication of this is the speech impediment he developed on the farm, which lasted most of his life. Judit and Reinhold, who both perished in Auschwitz, have three grandchildren (sadly one passed recently), 11 great grandchildren and three of the next generation, alive and well thanks to the Argoud family.

I am privileged and delighted that Josse's son, Dr Oren Gutfeld, and daughter Tamar Gutfeld are present here today, along with my daughters Professor Louise Bethlehem and Lael Bethlehem.

La'dor va'dor

That Oren is present is an astonishing testament to hope and recovery and that the light of a people can never be blown out. Dimmed perhaps but never extinguished.

I conclude by dedicating this story of courage and hope to my dear Aunt Judit Gutfeld, saying *"Nie wieder"* - never again.



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THE YIDDISHE FOLKSHUL UN KINDERGARTEN: MEMORIES OF A PAST ERA

*

Shirley Zar

In 2013 the Yiddish Folkschool nursery school in Sydenham, Johannesburg, hosted a Yom Ha'atzmaut ceremony to which former pupils were invited. Andy Haefner, the headmistress, wrote: "I have begun to feel very strongly about our link with the past and with this in mind I set about searching for our heritage the search was on to find the Yiddish folk alumni. I wanted our kids to connect to the past in a real tangible way".

A handful of people attended, some reconnecting after sixty years of not having seen each other. It was an overwhelmingly emotional experience for guests, who were enchanted as the children entertained them with their dancing and singing of Yiddish and Hebrew songs.

A special guest was Rosa Woolf, a member of the first committee of the original *Yiddishe Folkshul* founded in 1937. She was one of the protégées of Mendel Tabatznik, the acclaimed Yiddishist. Together with her mother, Eva Green, and her brother, she lived with the Tabatznik family in their home at 15 Upper Ross Street, Doornfontein. There Mendel, with the assistance of Eva, had started the Yiddish kindergarten. It was extremely popular with the immigrants as Yiddish, the *mameloshen*, was the language of everyday instruction. Rosa taught there, as did Mendel's daughter Mirele (Mary) Tabatznik. She went on to become principal of the kindergarten. Later, in the late 1950s, she started her own successful school, Riviera Nursery School.

By 2013 Rosa, once so dynamic, was wheelchair-bound, suffering from Alzheimer's and unable to communicate. However, the joyous singing in Yiddish of the kindergarten children triggered an amazing reaction from her. Some spark awoke in her ailing body and mind a desire to participate and reconnect with her past. Getting up, she clapped and sang and joined in the celebration. A truly miraculous awakening!

Shirley Zar studied Architecture and Town Planning at Wits University, going on to work with some of Johannesburg's most eminent architects. She later lectured in architecture at the University of Johannesburg and founded its Town Planning Department.

On visiting this nursery school, I too wanted to pay homage to the memory of what the once vibrant Yiddish community had achieved in setting up an institution dedicated to the survival of Yiddish and to its rich culture. But I couldn't help asking: "does this school's continuity as the Yiddish Folkschool kindergarten have any significant meaning? Or will it be just a short time before even the name falls into disuse?" To answer this, one has to look at the history of the school and its ethos, as well as to ask if the founding fathers expectations were realistic. Perhaps, I mused, this little school was an anachronism hanging on by a thread of sentiment to its past.

In November 2016, the school finally closed. Although it had represented only a vestige of the original school, there was a feeling of profound loss – a loss of Yiddish, of Yiddish culture and of our historical roots. It signified the end of an era.

Context of the *Yiddishe Folkshul* – Doornfontein

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Yiddish Folkschool in Doornfontein the Yiddishist and author Leibl Feldman (1896-1975), who was closely connected with the school and whose family were major patrons, wrote an article for *Jewish Affairs* outlining the background to the school and its distinctive contribution.¹ In it, he explained how the modern 19th Century enlightenment movement (*Haskalah*) brought about a renaissance in Yiddish culture, one giving rise to the emergence of scores of new and important writers, poets, philosophers and artists. Classic authors such as Mendele, Peretz and Shalom Aleichem gave voice to the changing world, catering for the more than eight million Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the Diaspora. Important national, workers and socialist organizations were formed. 'The cry for justice and a striving for a better life for all resounded amongst the Jewish masses, and life vibrated with new interest and hope' Feldman wrote.

In the context of this renaissance, the modernization of Jewish education became important. The traditional education of

the shtetl - the *Cheder*, *Talmud Torah* and *Yeshiva* - was regarded by the modernists as stultifying. Yiddish folkschools – secular schools with Yiddish as the language of instruction emerged in spite of opposition from Orthodox and pro-Hebrew factions. In Poland, in addition to elementary schools, high schools and seminaries were opened under a central educational body – the Yiddish cultural and educational organisation YIVO (*Yidishe Visenshaftlekhe Institut*). Educators from this organisation were to become the leading luminaries directing the Doornfontein Yiddish Folkschool, which promoted Yiddish culture, history and literature. Naturally, at both the kindergarten and the afternoon classes Yiddish was the medium of instruction. Music and acting played seminal roles in teaching.

Among the immigrants who came to South Africa and who were imbued with the ideals of the Yiddish renaissance was Mendel Tabatznik (1894-1975), a leading light in the establishment of Yiddish cultural life in Johannesburg. Besides teaching, lecturing, organising a Yiddish choir and acting and producing Yiddish theatre, he wrote prolifically, producing poetry, stories and novels. Tabatznik was born in Kletsk in the province of Minsk, White Russia, in 1894. In 1913, the family moved to Mir. After seeing a performance of Goldfaden's *Shulamis*, he developed a passion for theatre and as a young man became director of the local amateur group. After studying to become a teacher he was appointed principal of the Mir *Yiddishe Folkshul*. His love of Yiddish culture, its theatre and literature, as well as education were driving forces of his life. In 1927 he became mayor of Mir but shortly afterwards, immigrated to South Africa. Driven by a fervent socialist ideology, his first option for immigration was Palestine, but he was unable to secure the necessary immigration certificates required from the local Zionist organisation. It took several years before, in 1932, he managed to bring out his wife Feigele and children Dovid, Berele and Mirele to join him. By that time the Quota Act (1930) had been passed. This stipulated that not more than fifty immigrants per year would be admitted to South Africa from Quota (mainly East European) countries. Had Tabatznik not had the necessary papers completed early on, in readiness for the family's immigration, they would probably have been denied entry.

On arrival in South Africa, Tabatznik began working as a teacher, setting up the kindergarten and forming a Yiddish theatre group. Two members of his Yiddish theatre group in Mir, David Dancig and Chaim Portnoy, who also immigrated to South Africa, made successful theatre careers here. They

were joined by Feigele Kopelowitz, a leading lady in Yiddish theatre and a former pupil of Tabatznik in Mir. Dancig ran a small boarding house in Benoni, where Rabbi Irma Aloy stayed when he arrived in 1937.

The Tabatznik home in Doornfontein became a community centre of Yiddish activities. Surrounded by a veranda and set on a double stand, it was large in comparison with the small houses and semi-detached dwellings in the area. In the yard in a cluster of buildings, a variety of Yiddish-oriented activities took place. There were theatre groups, choirs rehearsing and music ensembles practising, such as the 'Russian Balalaika Musicians' who dressed in traditional Russian tunics for their performances. The local barber, Zelik Alter, was the conductor. So popular was the group that it even travelled to Muizenberg to perform in the Pavilion in the summer season, as did Tabatznik with his Yiddish Theatre group.



Yiddish Folkschool summer camp, Muizenberg, 1949-1950

Beginnings

In January 1929 Tabatznik, in partnership with Mischa Szur, an educationalist associated with YIVO in Vilna, founded the first modern Yiddish Folkschool under the auspices of the Yiddish Literary and Dramatic Society. Known as *der Fareyn*, this society was a pivot around which intellectual life in Johannesburg revolved, with the weekly Yiddish journal *Der Afrikaner* helping to publicise its activities. When Mischa left, Mendel became principal of the school. He was aided by Dovid Fram, the well-known Yiddish poet.

The fledgling school faced great opposition from the Talmud Torah schools and from Zionists who were opposed Yiddish and to the school's avowedly 'secular and radical' program. This resulted in its closure after just two years. It was only when the dynamic young Yiddish intellectual Itzkhak Charlash was sent out, on behalf of YIVO in Poland, as a Yiddish cultural emissary that the Yiddish Folkschool started in earnest in September 1937. Its first premises were in Walter Wise Building in the CBD and Charlash was the

principal.

There were conflicts. Rabbi Yitzchak Kossowsky, Rabbi of Beth Hamedrash Hagadol and head of the Beth Din, supported the teaching of Yiddish but denounced the school for rejecting religion. Chief Rabbi Landau was likewise antagonistic. As a passionate Zionist he would not countenance the Yiddishists' anti-Zionist stance. There was also opposition from the SA Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) and the SA Jewish Board of Deputies. Not until 1939 was the school fully recognised and supported by the SABJE. It was clear by then that it was fulfilling a real need for the community.

Charlash epitomized the spirit of Yiddish intellectualism upon which the school was founded. To cater for young adults he inaugurated the Yiddish 'Humanistic College' where each week he gave a two-hour lecture. He dominated the *Yiddisher Kultur Fareyn* until his departure from South Africa in 1948. Yiddish newspapers and publications proliferated in this climate, with Doornfontein a crucible of this vibrant Yiddish intellectualism. Newspapers and journals such as *Di Afrikaner Tzaytung*, *Yom Tov Bletter* and *Tsukunft* (published in New York) were popular. An added attraction was the regular contributions from famous Jewish writers such as Isaac Bashevis Singer, Israel Zangwill and Shmuel Josef Agnon, as well as local writers. This milieu of intense Yiddish activity continued until after the war, when the disillusionment of Stalin's purges, whose victims included the great Yiddish writers such as Shlomo Mikhoels, Perets Markish and Dovid Bergelson, led to a sense of betrayal for many of the Yiddishists.

Yiddish Folkschool in 1937 – the heyday of Yiddishism

The Tabatznik residence in Doornfontein was home to the Yiddish kindergarten before it moved, firstly to a house at 30 Upper Meyer Street and then, in 1945, to more spacious double-story premises in the same street along with the burgeoning afternoon school. The memories of many ex-pupils are connected to that place, which continued to function until the 1960s, by which time a new school had been established in Sydenham. Mary Lazarus (nee Tabatznik) reminisces nostalgically of those early days, when their home and property pulsed with Yiddish education, culture and community activities: "My father was a *melamed*, so we had little material wealth but the intensity of being part of this Yiddish ambience which pulsed with richness was indescribable" she says. In the photos celebrating the first anniversary of Yiddish Folkschool, a young

Mary is seen holding the flag aloft, the picture reminiscent of a socialist rally. The persons in these historic pictures remained committed to the ideals of the school throughout their lives. They were the teacher and committee members who dedicated themselves to the school's success.

In 1945, when the Tabatzniks moved out of Doornfontein, their property remained the centre of Yiddish life as premises for the Jewish Workers Club (*Yiddisher Arbeter Klub*). Post-war, there was a belief that the Yiddish community "could and would – as Jewish workers – promote together with Jewish values, their own language, the advancement and further development of Jewish literature".² In this brave new post-war world the workers would unite to create a more equitable future. The Club promoted values of the Bund, a socialist workers party, which had been founded in Vilna in 1897. It was anti-religion, anti-Zionist and Marxist in leaning, but besides its political affiliations the Club served as a centre for social and Yiddish cultural events, in particular a vibrant Yiddish theatre and choir performances. For a time the Club dominated the Yiddish life of that immigrant society. It was also renowned for its extensive Yiddish library. In October 1948 the house in Upper Ross Street was destroyed by arson and all its records and membership lists were destroyed. After twenty years, the Club ceased to exist.

Yiddish Folkschool pupils attended classes in the afternoons, after having spent their mornings at primary schools, mainly Jewish Government Primary and Doornfontein Primary schools. They were fetched by the Yiddish Folkschool bus, from surrounding suburbs such as Bertrams, Doornfontein and Troyeville. In the late afternoons, they were returned to their homes. Shirley Skikne (nee Klonner) and her sister Edith were pupils there in the 1940s. Their posed Folkschool photos show the girls dressed in pale blue dresses, bows in their hair, looking every bit like *shtetl* children. One notes the absence of boys in the picture. The emphasis on afternoon school sport took precedence over Yiddish education, which most families in any case regarded as being unimportant in the new world. Even though Yiddish was the *mameloshen* of these children of immigrants, without formal instruction they could neither read nor write in it. The Yiddishist founders of the school understood implicitly that no matter how fluently one spoke the language, literacy was the key to Yiddish's survival.

Support for Yiddish Folkschool:

Most of the parents who supported the school were part of the inner circle of

Yiddishists and members of the *Yiddisher Arbeter Klub*, but within that diverse community of Eastern Europe Jews others also supported the school. The early photos show the dominance of Bundist families such as Voronof, Feldman, Kartun, Shulman and others.

The Klonnars represented typical Yiddisher parents, who did not ally themselves to the political doctrines and Bundist philosophies, but were traditional, religious and Zionist. Their insistence that their daughters, Edie and Shirley, attend the school was simply to ensure that they would be literate in Yiddish and have an understanding of Yiddish culture and its rich history. To know from where you came was all important. But for Hymie, the Klonner's son, football was an obsession hence he absented himself from Folkschool. Later he became a famous soccer star, but his parents were 'not enthusiastic about their *Ingele* chasing after a ball'. Usually, boys from traditional families went to *cheder* in the afternoons in order to prepare for their barmitzvah. For many Bundist families a barmitzvah for a son was not regarded as obligatory. Jo Dane recounts how even though he attended Folkschool, at his extended family's insistence, he was forced to rather go to *cheder* to prepare for his barmitzvah, which was held at the Bertrams shul. His Bundist father's objections were overruled. Still, to this day Jo is wont to sing Yiddish ditties to his grandchildren: "*mit mayne kleyne hammerle ikh klap klap klap...*"

Instruction began with mastery of a Yiddish primer, *Ikh lern Zikh Yidish*. As pupils progressed and became proficient at reading, they read the classics and the works of modern Yiddish authors. General knowledge included the use of the Yiddish encyclopaedia as setworks. On the closure of the Sydenham school, among the old abandoned books were copies of *Algemayne Entziklopedia*, published in 1935 and featuring illustrations of the up-to-date technological inventions of the time. In particular there were lessons on Jewish history and the principles of Jewish ethical morality. The school did not espouse religious practice but the pupils were "imbued with the ideals of the prophets and the principles of social justice" comments Feldman.

Although the focus was on Yiddish, the study of Hebrew was introduced from the second year. Feldman concedes, "as we have two national languages, Yiddish and Hebrew" Much of the instruction was done creatively through the medium of acting and singing, inculcating a love of dramatization and theatre in the pupils. At the end of each year a highlight was the school concert of drama and music. There was an operetta,

poetry reading and dramatic presentations, in which past pupils participated, acting in plays such as *The Holtzmans* by I. Mingon. Performances of the works of Peretz and Shalom Aleichem were always popular and the community attended in droves.



A scene from I L Peretz's 'The Land Tenant', by pupils of the Yiddish Folkschool (circa mid-1950s).

As a young teacher Rosa Woolf, who was an avowed Communist, was well acquainted with modern teaching developments of avant-garde educators in France, Austria and Germany. She was a follower of the famed German educator Friederich Froebel (1782-1852), who had opened the first *Kindergarten* in 1837, as well as being familiar with the theories of German teacher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), whose system of education is still adhered to today in many schools named after him. As principal of the kindergarten, Rosa incorporated many progressive educational ideas. Froebel believed that the teacher of the *Kindergarten* exerted an immense influence on the child's natural development. This should be furthered by freely encouraging their creative sense through games, exercises and through play, particularly with his innovative equipment. (The acclaimed Froebel blocks were said to have been the seminal creative inspiration of genius architect Frank Lloyd Wright, whose mother had acquired them for her son at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876).

1945 – 1960: The move to Sydenham

In order to accommodate the expanding intake, in 1945 the Yiddish Folkschul committee bought a double story house at 45 Upper Meyer Street. These were the halcyon years of the school. In spite of the fact that the secular schools, even Jewish Government Primary, paid no heed to the culture of its immigrant pupils, but served rather to denigrate their Yiddish background, there remained an overwhelming atmosphere of *yiddishkeit* which permeated life in Doornfontein. This was predicated by the social geography of the

place, the homogeneity of that Litvak society and the ubiquitous use of the *mameloshen*.

The founding headmasters of Jewish Government School in Doornfontein, A.M. Abrahams, followed by I.H. Harris, were English. The ethos of the school emulated that of the English Public School. Both principals were products of the famous Jews Free School in Whitechapel, London, whose academic success was founded on strict discipline and unwavering commitment to English cultural values. Abrahams was an ardent Zionist. His stance as President of the SA Zionist Federation was one which would not countenance the Yiddishists' and Bundists' anti-Zionist views of Jewish nationalism. Abrahams believed that in order to acculturate his immigrant charges, the 'foreign elements' of Eastern European immigrant pupils needed to be exorcised, even going so far as to insist that pupils change their foreign sounding names to English names.

The denigration of Yiddish was formalised at these schools, where pupils learnt only of "our glorious English Colonial Empire". The immigrant parents acquiesced in this. They wanted their children to enter the mainstream as rapidly as possible and saw mastery of English as the means to upward mobility. Many who could afford the fees sent their sons to private Christian schools, such as Marist Brothers Christian College and St Johns College, in spite of Rabbi Landau's urging community members to refrain from this practice. Telling too is the recollection of Sheila Saffer (nee Bakst) of how her mother would instruct her: "*ven ikh reydt mit dir in Yiddish, must tu entfernen in eyngels*" (When I speak to you in Yiddish, you must answer in English). The aim was mastery of English as soon as possible for the whole family. Many of the older generation never mastered English completely and with their demise, particularly of the *bobbas* and *zeidas*, the imperative to speak Yiddish fell away. Many immigrant children simply 'forgot' their *mameloshen*, sometimes by design or simply by non-usage. The forces of assimilation and acculturation into the host society could not be halted. With the exodus from Doornfontein, that close-knit urban *shtetl*, came dispersion to suburbia and a decline in *yiddishism*.

Yiddish Folkschool, once a bulwark against forgetting, could not withstand the onslaught. Its death knell began with the curtailment of new immigrants due to the Quota Act of 1930 and was compounded by the fracture and destruction of *der heim*. The Holocaust finally extinguished the life-blood of Yiddish culture. The Yiddish strongholds of Eastern Europe were no more. Following on the

founding of the Hebrew Teachers Seminary in 1939 and the Jewish Day Schools (King David School in 1948), the emphasis was exclusively on Hebrew. The dominance of Hebrew in education was further entrenched by the miracle of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Yiddish was relegated to obscurity not least by the very negative attitude towards it by the Zionist leadership in Israel.

With the demographic shift northwards and the resultant demise of Doornfontein, Bertrams and the surrounding suburbs as Jewish residential areas, the Yiddish Folkschool relocated to Sydenham in 1954. For a short period, both the Doornfontein and Sydenham schools ran simultaneously. A new building, designed to accommodate the kindergarten and afternoon classes, was built in 1960. It was designed by architect Mannie Feldman, whose family were founders and patrons of the Folkschool. The building was a trailblazer in school design here, a symbol of modernism celebrating the machine aesthetic of steel edged framing in a modular design. The building created an environment of spatial volumes, suffused with light and sunshine, where inside and outside were seamlessly enjoined. Sculpture and murals complemented the building. Mannie himself sculpted the entrance sculpture welcoming people to the school, while his friend, artist Harold Rubin, created the mural alongside the paddling pool. Here was a place where a remnant of our Yiddish culture might have been fostered, a place which might even have served as a repository of our immigrant memory. However, the tide could not be turned and soon the afternoon classes were discontinued. All that remained was the preschool, today also defunct.

One is plagued with regrets for the lost opportunities and the misplaced optimism of the founding fathers of Yiddish Folkschool. Their dream of handing over that rich heritage to future generations was aborted. As custodians of our past they failed us. Eight million of our people once created a rich tapestry of life in Yiddish. All that we have now to remember that civilization are a few popular songs, jokes and comedy acts and a smattering of colloquial words. A few centres of Yiddish learning and sporadic attempts to revive our lost legacy cannot reverse the tide. Even the remarkable Aaron Lansky and his Yiddish repository of books at Hampshire College, Amherst Massachusetts, cannot impact sufficiently. Did we try hard enough, are we victims of indifference and amnesia? Does it no longer matter?

At Yiddish Folkschool's closing function, an address was given by a former teacher Freda Shreevo, whose mother before her

had taught at the school from its inception. Speaking from her heart in flawless ‘Vilna Yiddish’, her address might have served as a worthy requiem for the school. But as I surveyed the crowd, both young and old, it was obvious that only a handful of persons understood what she was saying. An instamatic picture of the reality! The disconnect of place and culture was absolute. No words can express the pathos of that final ending, of the futility of the dream.

For Leibl Feldman, his belief in the Folkschool as an essential cultural anchor connecting us to our past had fuelled his optimism as to its future. On the schools 20th anniversary he wrote, “In spite of some antagonism towards our schools, the Yiddish Folkschool is now generally recognized as an important element in Jewish education in this country and a factor making for the survival of our people”.³

Currently, a new phenomenon has emerged which attracts many tourists – a desire to visit *di heim* to reconnect with their roots. But the reality is that our memories as second and later generation immigrants reside not in Eastern Europe but in the immediacy of those new world *shtetlekh* here, where the

dichotomy of life – the harking back and the embracing of the new - went side by side. Yiddish, the immigrants’ most valuable baggage, once dominated that society. Those places, which were an intrinsic part of the immigrant experience, serve as a trigger for our memories. Their loss is not just of the physical place, but of continuity, of our not so distant past history.

Yiddish culture is erased from our memory. Once there were evenings celebrating Yiddish literature, new theatrical productions, presentations from the works of great writers, a flowering of literary output, a vibrant press, films – a whole Yiddish creative cultural milieu which disappeared.

The demise of Yiddish Folkschool is a symbol of that loss.

NOTES

- 1 ‘The Yiddish Folkschool: Its contribution’, *Jewish Affairs*, October, 1957.
- 2 Shapiro, Jack, *The Streets of Doornfontein*, Johannesburg, 2010.
- 3 ‘The Yiddish Folkschool: Its Contribution’, *Jewish Affairs*, October, 1957.



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THE BLUE NEWSBOY AND THE DOCTOR

*

Glenda Woolf

The first Jewish doctor in South Africa was Moshe ben Sechel - Sechel Fraenkel - known as Siegfried Fraenkel. In 1808, he received a license from the Supreme Medical Committee to practice as a surgeon, and set up practice from his house in Roeland Street, Cape Town.¹ Since then there have been many South African Jewish doctors, whose contribution to the care of their patients, the growth of scientific knowledge, and the teaching of medicine has been enormous.

Books have been written about the South African Jewish contribution to business, mining and politics, but none to record the achievements of these men and women of healing. There was, however, a special issue of *Jewish Affairs* (Winter 2001) on the theme of "South African Jews and Medicine", with articles devoted, among others, to Nobel Prize winners Drs Aaron Klug and Sydney Brenner. Mention was also made of Drs Sidney Kark, Walter Phillips, Issy Segal, Philip Tobias, Jack Penn and Leo Schamroth. But that journal issue only touched the surface. There are many other South African Jewish doctors whose lives and contributions are worth recalling.

To mention but a few who attained fame in England: Two were knighted – Baron Solly Zuckerman, OM KCB FRS,² and endocrinologist Sir Raymond Hoffenberg, President of the Royal College of Physicians. Hoffenberg left South Africa after being banned under the Suppression of Communism Act as he was the chairman of the Defence and Aid Fund. Others who attained high positions in the UK were the surgeon George Sacks, editor of the *Lancet*, Henry Walton, Professor of Psychiatry, Edinburgh, and Siamon Gordon, Professor of Pathology, Oxford. Other Jewish South African doctors became well known in America. They include anatomist Ronald Singer, Professor of Anthropology, Chicago, Aubrey Milunsky, Adjunct Professor of Obstetrics, Gynaecology

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and Reproductive Sciences, Tufts University School of Medicine, and founder and Co-director of the Center for Human Genetics, Boston, Hymie Gordon, Professor emeritus of medical genetics at Mayo Medical School³ and behaviour therapist Joseph Wolpe, Professor at Temple University. Wolpe's many awards include the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Award and the Association for the Advancement of Behavior's Lifetime Achievement Award.

In South Africa too, Jewish doctors made distinguished contributions to medicine despite the difficulties Jews had because of unspoken antisemitism. It was said that the most important advances to come from the UCT medical school were the frog test for pregnancy (Prof Hillel Shapiro and Prof Harry Zwarenstein) and the heart transplant - both advances involved Jewish doctors. The South African textbook on pharmacology was written by Prof Norman Sapeika. Pharmacologist Prof Peter Folb was President of the Medicine Control Council, Prof Jack Metz was Director of the SA Institute of Medical Research and Prof Ralph Kirsch was President of the SA Medical Association. UCT's Professor of Medicine was Solly Benatar and Wits Professor of Pathology was Charles Isaacson.⁴

When I worked as a pharmacist at Groote Schuur Hospital in the sixties, I was aware of the high regard held by everyone for the surgeon Dr Toddy Schrire and the cardiologist Dr. Val Schrire, who was part of Dr Chris Barnard's heart transplant team. In the dispensary we made up bottles of a mixture for pain relief called "Mist Mirvish", developed in earlier years by the first gastroenterologist in South Africa, Dr. Louis Mirvish, son of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Mirvish. He was one of the first two medical graduates in South Africa.⁵ In the field of teaching and diagnosis, Prof Frankie Forman's name was renowned. In that of welfare his wife, Golda Selzer, a doctor in the field of pathology, began the free clinics in the coloured township of Windermere in 1943. This enterprise became known SHAWCO, and was run by medical students.⁶

The list can go on and on and there will be many complaints about missing names. However, that is not the point of this article. Rather, my intention is to write about my

father, the dermatologist Prof Walter Gordon, zt"l, with particular reference to an incident that occurred during his years as a general practitioner in Bloemfontein.

My father Walter Gordon was born in Cape Town to parents from London and Vilna. He graduated from the University of Cape Town Medical School in 1939 at the age of 21, having entered medical school aged sixteen. Some country locums were followed by service in the army as a doctor during the war. After some years as a general practitioner in Thaba Nchu, he sold his practice and, leaving his wife and two young daughters, he studied at Edinburgh University. There, he speedily passed his exams and, in 1949, returned to South Africa with an MRCP. However, unable to find a post as a Registrar, necessary to register as a specialist, and needing to support his family he began to work as a general practitioner in Bloemfontein.



Professor Walter Gordon (1917-2002)

My father built up a large practice, which kept him busy from morning till late at night and sometimes all through the night as well. Yet somehow he found time to referee hockey matches at the Ramblers Club - at UCT he had been on the Western Province hockey team. He also made time to serve the Jewish community on the shul board. He disagreed with the rabbi who wanted to build a massive new shul and hall, believing the money would be better spent on education. However, when the vote went against him he worked with everyone and eventually the beautiful old shul was knocked down, the land sold and two expensive new edifices erected. Today, Bloemfontein has little more than a minyan and those new shul buildings now host an evangelical group's church and hall. As for

the Jewish community who once lived in the city, their children and grandchildren are scattered through the world. My father was correct - money for education would have been more sensible than for large buildings for a shrinking community.

The story I want to tell is of the Jewish mitzvah relating to the saying, "He who saves a life is as if he has saved the whole world." It concerns an incident involving one particular patient, which made the headlines of the Afrikaans newspaper, *Volksblad*.⁷ My father's handwritten notes record the story as follows:

One day as I walked into the entrance of the building housing my consulting rooms I was offered a newspaper by a newsboy who was in a squatting position and appeared blue. Realising what was wrong with him, I phoned the editor of the newspaper (who happened to be a friend, and a patient) to send the boy and his mother to see me in my surgery. The appointment was duly kept.

The *Volksblad* tells the story slightly differently. According to the article the doctor said: "Listen boy, come on Monday morning at eleven o'clock to my surgery, above, in this building and we will see if we can't help you with your tiredness. But Foena was afraid. He had too many times been through the injection needles of the doctors. On Monday he didn't appear. But the doctor didn't forget the boy. He immediately contacted Mr. D.F. Blignault of the circulation department of the *Volksblad* to be in touch with the mother. The next day Foena was taken by his mother to the doctor...."

My father's notes continue the tale:

And he turned up with his mother. I informed her that he had a deformed heart valve. She said she knew that but doctors had told her that nothing could be done. The boy was now twelve. I informed her that now [1953] there was an operation and she agreed to the procedure. I referred her to the local provincial hospital with the request that she be sent to Johannesburg for surgery. The consultants refused to authorise this.

Why did the doctor refuse this request? Was it because of the cost? Was it professional pride at the thought that another hospital could do what they could not? Was it, to be charitable, a feeling that the boy would be given false hope? We will never know. However, my father was not prepared to take 'no' for an answer, knowing that the new surgical techniques in the Johannesburg

Provincial hospital could help. According to his notes, he “told the mother to go to the Johannesburg General Hospital and give her sister’s address in Benoni (the appropriate Province) as she was poverty stricken and could not afford to pay for the procedure”.

I was amazed at this act of duplicity on my father’s part. Even white lies were difficult for him. He used to say that the story of George Washington was not suitable for Jewish children, since simply because he told the truth, his father had *not* punished him. “A Jew tells the truth no matter what the consequences” he would say. Yet, here he actively encouraged a woman to tell a falsehood. The aim, of course, was to cure the boy. If the woman gave her sister’s address in the Transvaal instead of her own in the Free State, as a resident of the Transvaal the medical attention at that hospital would be automatically given and without payment. He clearly thought this justified the action.

The operation was duly performed and was a great success, but when it was discovered that the mother was from another province, the authorities in the Transvaal sent her a substantial account, which their Orange Free State counterparts refused to pay. My father then called his friend, the editor of the *Volksblad*, who published the relevant facts in the paper. The article appeared on the front page on 19 November 1953 under the headline ‘*Gegrypende Optrede van Stadsdokter*’ (The gripping actions of a local doctor). It told in great detail of the meeting on the street, the journey to Johannesburg and the successful outcome of the operation. It then went on to describe the difficulties the family now faced:

But now...there is an account that must be paid. The friendly doctor in Bloemfontein didn’t ask for anything for his services, and the hospital services were also free. But for the surgeon and the accessory services £115 must be paid, although this is a lot less than half the normal price. Then there is £5 for the x-ray photos. The parents have five other children and in the past they had doctor’s bills to pay. The father is a worker in a furniture factory and his salary is not enough to cover these costs.

The *Volksblad* launched an appeal for funds to assist the family. My father’s notes continue:

Many *braaivleises* were held, raffles were organised, items were auctioned and at last the account was paid in full, with some left over for his education. He suddenly gained in height, became a full bowler

in the cricket team and eventually found work in the civil service. He married happily and had three children.

I was at school at this time. One day I was writing a composition for homework. The title was “The Little Newsboy”. The teacher had told us to write about the poor child, his heavy burdens and how he should be doing homework and not selling newspapers. My father looked at it and said angrily. “No, start again. Write about how brave he is, how he knows his family needs money and so he goes out and earns it. Write he is a hero. He is to be admired, not pitied.”

Well what could I do? I wrote as instructed. The teacher was not pleased. She gave me a low mark. In those days the teacher’s word was law. Free expression was as yet an unheard of concept! I understand my father’s anger. Here was this little boy, blue from lack of blood pumping correctly, sitting on the ground from tiredness, still trying to help his family.

Thirty years later, Foena needed another operation – this one was not successful and he died. My father was devastated by the news. I think it was after this that he sat down and wrote the words I now have before me:

Thirty years later I decided I must look him up. He was sick again. He was now about 39 years of age. I advised another operation, and confirmed that Prof Barnard had seen him and recommended this. I persuaded him to have this. Since his first operation a new technique had been developed - besides which he was now so bad that he had only a short time to live. He then agreed to have the operation, but never recovered.

Joy and happiness followed by sadness, all part of a doctor’s life. But joy was my predominant feeling. As doctors we see patients and tell them there is no known treatment, and that is where we fail, because daily advancement in medical science brings cures where none previously existed, and it has since become my approach, when telling patients there is no treatment, to phone me every six months asking if anything has been discovered.

Now all these years later, as I look at the old notes and faded newspaper article, my thoughts are filled with admiration at this brave little boy, at the few good years he did have, at the family he left behind. Where are they? Do they have children and grandchildren now?

Our stay in Bloemfontein stay came to an

end after sixteen years when an advertisement for a registrar in the Dermatology department of Groote Schuur Hospital appeared. My father applied and was accepted. He completed his years as registrar and rose in time to become head of the department. As the departmental research gained an international reputation, he was made the first Professor of Dermatology at Groote Schuur Hospital.

Groote Schuur at that time was an exciting place to be. The heads of most departments were in the forefront of research. It was also a very complex place as the laws of what was termed apartheid began increasingly to affect the organization of the hospital.

Black doctors or students were forbidden to attend to white patients. Rather than humiliate the black students by excluding them from white wards, my father avoided such wards altogether. He regretted this, since certain skin diseases appeared only on white skins.

One incident from that time stands out in my mind. The doctors were told by memo that since Black doctors required less money to maintain their standard of living, their salaries would be reduced. My father led a delegation to the local government Administrative Head of the hospital. He later told me of the conversation. It went like this:

WG: You say that we must be paid according to our needs.

Administrator: Yes. Black doctors, they eat pap. Their houses in the locations cost less. They need less money.

WG: Well I am surprised that you want to introduce communism here.

Administrator: Communism! [To be a classified as a communist in apartheid South Africa came with severe consequences as the afore-mentioned Dr. Hoffenberg had experienced].

WG: Yes, that is what they believe, from each according to his ability and to each according to his need. But anyway, if that is what you believe, then who am I to argue? But of course then we will have to double the pay of black doctors.

Administrator: What nonsense is this?

WG: No, you see a white doctor has to care for his direct family, his wife, and his children. In the Black community it is different. When a man achieves such status, then he is obliged to all his family, his brothers and cousins and their children. He must see that they are properly fed and clothed and educated. So clearly he needs a salary larger than the white doctors, if he is to be paid according to his needs, rather than the standard set down for everyone.

After that, the change in salaries was never referred to again. Caring for his black colleagues was to my father a part of his obligation as a doctor.

The strange thing at that time when apartheid at its height, and people were classified by skin colour and having a light skin colour meant privilege the white community was fixated on getting a tan during the summer. This was a world-wide trend, but in the South African context it is more than a little odd.

The black community, meanwhile, were attempting to whiten their skin colour using cosmetics containing harsh, potentially harmful, substances. The result was that the Dermatology Department dealt with many cases in its non-white out-patients' clinic of the bad effect of the ingredients in these whitening agents, while in its white out patients' clinic they dealt with cases of bad sunburn during the summer months. After a newspaper article extolled the benefits of large doses of Vitamin A to enable suntan without sunburn, white people started appearing at the clinic suffering from Vitamin A overdoses.

My father decided to study the effects of sunlight on the skin. The beginning of his doctoral thesis on 'Sunlight Photosensitivity Testing' states, "Artificial light sources had thus far been used in these studies, and since the effects of sunlight might be due to the synergistic or additive effects of the different wavelengths (Runge and Watson 1962) Magnus (1960) suggested that 'the sun should be the light source of choice.'"

He arranged for a technician to construct boards to fit on a patient's back on which different colours of glass had been inserted into holes. The patient would happily sit and talk to the doctor, while wave lengths of sunlight penetrated through the glass. Photos were taken, comparisons were made and slowly a pattern emerged. As well as investigating the effect of sunlight on normal skin, the effect of sunlight on certain types of skin diseases, and the effect of specific drugs on the degree of sensitivity of the skin to sunlight were investigated.

In 1964 we all watched proudly as my father, in a red gown, went onto the stage to receive his doctoral degree.⁸ Later an international dermatology conference was held at Groote Schuur. After my father had read out the results of his research, a distinguished doctor from England, Dr. Magnus, began his talk with the words: "I am in the difficult position of giving precisely the same lecture as the one before. Our results tally precisely. However, what he did with pieces of glass I did with a Rolls Royce."

Dr Magnus had made use of an expensive

machine that was able to focus different wavelengths of light onto a patient. The fact that these experiments on actual sunlight and artificial sunlight were so perfectly matched was a “eureka moment” in dermatology. Now it was known precisely which rays caused tanning, and which were harmful. The fact that sunshine could be harmful was a new concept.

From there research followed. The result has saved lives. Today we have a mass of products with sun protection factors. School children in Australia wear sunhats as part of their uniform. The advertisements of sun tan lotions have totally changed in character. Advice is given to people living in hot climates on how to avoid being hurt by harmful rays from the sun.

The little news boy in Bloemfontein is the story of one life saved. The story of research into the effect of sunlight on the skin is the story of many lives saved. What of the confrontation with the Administrator and the issue of discriminatory pay? Who knows what the effect could have been if he had been allowed to proceed with his plan?

But this is only part of the story. Over the years, in England and now in Israel, I have met doctors who trained as students under my father. They have told me amazing stories about him, his diagnostic skills, his lectures, what they learned on his clinical rounds and how valuable they regarded the time spent with him. In many different places people have come up to me and said, “I just heard that you are Walter Gordon’s daughter. You know he saved my life when.....” and then a story would follow.

Oh, but why did I not write all this down then? My hope is that others will tell the story of the history of Jewish doctors in South Africa. I, however, want to tell the full story of my father, Professor Walter Gordon. Dr Sarina Drusinsky, a dermatologist in South Africa, will join with me in this project. We plan to write about the contribution of this one man, about his medical work, about Bloemfontein and Groote Schuur, and times and events long gone, but hopefully not forgotten.

I thank Dr Zelda Isaacson and Dr Sarina Drusinsky for their advice and support and Gwynne Schrire for her assistance in editing this article. Readers who have any information they would like to share about Walter Gordon in Bloemfontein or Groote Schuur, please contact us at: gmwoolf1@gmail.com, sarinablechinger@gmail.com or charlesi@worldonline.co.za.

NOTES

- 1 Louis Herrman (*A history of the Jews in South Africa*, 1930, p91) incorrectly stated that “The earliest Jewish settler who actually professed and practiced the Jewish religion was Dr. Siegfried Fraenkel, who settled in the Cape in 1808”. In fact, he did not practice the Jewish religion - he was married out of the faith, baptised his children by his wife and mistress, and was not buried in the Jewish cemetery. He did attend services once a Jewish congregation was established until he fell out with them so badly that they did not even mention his death, although their records mentioned the deaths of all the other members. Furthermore he did not call himself a doctor as he had not completed his medical qualifications; however, he had worked as a ship’s surgeon and was recognised by Cape authorities as a doctor. Friedman-Spits, Clara, *The Fraenkel Saga*, South African Medical Association, Pinelands, 1998, p93.
- 2 His parents were keen Zionists. His father started the Bnoth Zion Association whose life time president was his mother. Solly was enrolled as the only boy in the girls’ Hebrew nursery school established by the association.
- 3 The son of the Rabbi of Woodstock, he also had a vast knowledge of the works of Maimonides.
- 4 I would like to thank Dr Ashley Robins for his assistance in compiling this list.
- 5 Julian Mirvish, in association with Gwynne Schrire, ‘Dr Louis Mirvish: Doctor, Philanthropist, Art Lover’, (*Jewish Affairs*, 2004, 59. 1)
- 6 Van Heyningen, Elizabeth, *The History of SHAWCO 1943-1975*, SHAWCO. 1975. ed. Ralph Kirsch and Catherine Knox, (ed) *UCT Medical School at 75*, UCT Dept. of Medicine, 1987.
- 7 *Volksblad*, Bloemfontein, 19-11-1953, XLIV no.41.
- 8 Sunlight and Photosensitivity Testing, Dept. of Medicine UCT, Walter Gordon. 1964.



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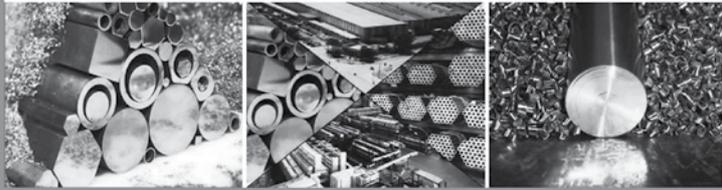
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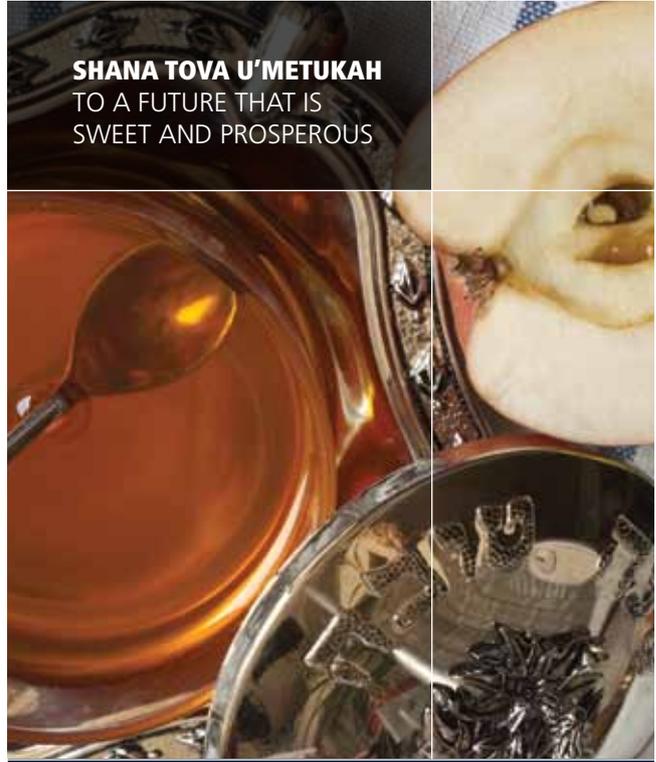
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FAMILY BUSINESS

*

Eugenie Freed.

It was in 1955 that Boris received the call. The unknown man on the line spoke with a strong Yiddish accent.

“Boris Aronstam?”

“Yes, and who am I speaking to?”

“Are you Sam Aronstam’s son?”

“Yee -es, I am. Who is that?”

“Shmulkin – Mendel Shmulkin. I’m calling from Johannesburg. I want to come to Port Elizabeth to see you.”

“To see me? Uh – about what?”

“Family business.”

“What family business?”

“I’ll tell you when I see you.”

* * * * *

In the winter of 1895, in the town of Eragola in Lithuania, Hodel was giving birth to her thirteenth child.

Propped up in a birth-chair, tilted back, she was supported on one side by her housemaid, and on the other by the midwife’s assistant. Hodel herself had inserted her prayer-book between the two pillows supporting her head, so that the name of God on its pages would protect her from the demon Lilith, eternally hostile to Eve’s descendants, and especially vindictive towards women in childbirth.

Hodel had begun her labour during the previous night. Before her husband Micah Shmulkin left for work at the local tavern, a thriving *pundak* owned and run jointly by himself and his brothers, he had sent for Sarah the midwife, who had attended Hodel at other births. Sarah and her assistant had come through the snow to this house that had grown ever larger as Hodel’s family had increased. Now, it was a large brick edifice to which rooms had been added at the sides and back, and a loft set into the steep roof.

Sarah was not one of your old-fashioned superstitious *povitukhas*. She had attended a training-course in Kovno, where she had learned to wash her hands and to use forceps – she had even acquired a pair of these herself. However, as a gesture of respect for tradition, Sarah had brought with her an amulet, a piece of paper with the names on it of the three guardian angels who shield Jewish mothers and their new-born infants from the envious Lilith. She folded the amulet into a round locket and strung it on a ribbon around Hodel’s neck before sitting down on the midwife’s stool in front of her patient. The curtains were closed, though it was midday, for bright light was said to be dangerous to a woman in labour. The only light within came from the charcoal brazier. Sarah asked for a lamp, and the housemaid placed one on a table near the stool. The waft of the glowing charcoal mingled with the aroma of dried rosemary twigs that Miriam, Sarah’s assistant, was burning in a metal pot, to sweeten and purify the air. Swathed in a black apron, Sarah began her examination at the lower end of Hodel’s swollen body, while issuing a string of instructions to Miriam.

Hodel’s pains were now racing in like the tall breakers of a spring tide, closer and closer to one another. She clutched at the grips on the arms of the birth-chair, moaning as the

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agony surged through her body. Please God make it quick, she prayed through clenched teeth. Please God, give me peace; no more children, she silently begged the Almighty, in a pause between the crashing of giant contractions.

The hours passed, but time stood still. At last Sarah said "The head's coming." Hodel groaned as Miriam's hands took hold of her feet and thrust them into the stirrups attached to the legs of the birth-chair. Miriam was urging her to brace herself, to put out the last of her strength and force this infant into the world. She heard Sarah and Miriam shouting encouragement, felt Sarah's hands between her thighs taking up a slippery form, heard an uncertain little cough, followed by a tremulous wail. Hodel closed her eyes and sighed with relief.

"A boy!" Sarah cried, and then – "Oy, there's another one coming!"

"Push! Push!" Sarah and Miriam exhorted Hodel, but she whispered "I can't".

One by one Sarah inserted the arms of the forceps into Hodel's body, and as Miriam watched with awe, she locked them and slowly drew out the head of a second little human creature. She squeezed her hand and arm into the bloodied cleft to help its body into the dim light. As the second twin slid into Miriam's waiting hands, he sneezed and whimpered; through her pain Hodel heard both infants protesting in shrill staccato gasps against the wintry world into which she had delivered them.

"Two fine boys!" Sarah exclaimed. "Now, the afterbirth ..."

But Hodel's exhausted frame could do no more. Sarah and Miriam between them did as much as they could, but at this birth Lilith was determined to defy the angel guardians. The women lifted Hodel from the birth-chair and placed her in the marital bed, packing pillows so as to raise the lower part of her body. An owl hooted and chuckled in the darkness outside: a bad omen, Sarah thought. With a sinking heart she continued trying to stanch the bleeding. Anyushka the housemaid got down on her hands and knees and scrubbed the wooden planks of the floor with a bucket of snow-water. She bundled up the bloody linen and left the room to take it to the basket for the washer-woman, but Miriam had to call her back.

Despite Anyushka's scrubbing, despite the changes of linen, the burning herbs and the cold of the winter, by morning the smell of Hodel's life-blood commanded the whole house. On the second night of her twins' lives in this world, she was granted the peace she had prayed for. Hodel was forty-three years old when she died. She had been married for twenty-five years, and was already the grandmother of five children.

After Hodel had been laid to rest in the old Jewish graveyard, everyone in the community assembled at the Shmulkin house for prayers. Mirrors in the house were covered with sheets to ward off the evil eye, for Lilith had not yet done her worst; the twin boys still clung to life. One of Anyushka's younger sisters was taken into service in this family emergency. She administered goat's milk, dripping it haphazardly into the infants' mouths from a cloth, until Hodel's elderly aunt, Chayah-Basha Aronstam, found Olga, a local woman who had recently given birth. Olga was hurriedly hired as the twins' wet-nurse.

Micah Shmulkin sat in a low chair, surrounded by members of the family, dolefully wiping his eyes with a handkerchief and occasionally letting out a groan of self-pity. Neighbours came to the house on every day of the *shivah*, the seven days of ritual mourning. Many were Hodel's former clients, for she had been a skilful seamstress and a popular dressmaker. They brought food— hard-boiled eggs and round beignets, to symbolize life - and they stayed to gossip. Chayah-Basha brought baked potatoes, salt herring and black bread to feed the family. She sat apart from the low-voiced chatter, a matronly figure draped in black, wiping away the occasional tear. Hodel's other children sat with the mourners each day; even her unruly younger sons joined them for as long as they could sit still.

On the eighth day of their lives the twin boys were circumcised, in fulfilment of God's covenant with *Avraham avinu*. Though usually an occasion for celebration, this was a sad and muted affair. Five of the men from the *shivah*, and the three eldest of the twins' brothers, joined the tearful Micah, wearing black hats and solemn expressions; the *mohel* muttered blessings and cut away the foreskins, and that was that. The two youngest of the Shmulkin family, now bearing the names Zelic and Mendel, screamed for twenty minutes and were not much comforted by sops of kosher wine trickled into their mouths by their sisters, Fruma and Gittel, the first two of Hodel's brood. They hastily passed their infant brothers over to Olga, who attached one to each of her dripping teats and sat back impassively as two small hungry mouths made their fumbling attempts to suck from her solace for their pain as well as nourishment for their bodies. To Olga, children were one of life's afflictions; she'd had many of both.

All the talk in the community was about the tragedy that had befallen the Shmulkins. Who would raise these two motherless newborns? What would happen to Hodel's other

children, and what about that miserable man, Micah Shmulkin?

Fruma and Gittel had both married at eighteen, like their mother, and were now in their early twenties. Fruma lived far away in Vilna and Gittel in a village on the distant Polish border. Fruma already had three young children, Gittel two; neither they nor their husbands had any inclination to take in these new-born twins as well. There was a third daughter in Hodel's family: Faiga, her sixth child. Faiga was fourteen, the only girl left at home. Fruma and Gittel let it be known to the neighbours and relatives that their younger sister was a marvel of capability, a precocious *Berya*, well able to undertake the running of the household and the mothering of her youngest siblings. When the *shivah* ended, they kissed Faiga fondly, advised her to "Look after the *bubbeles!*" – and hurried back to their own homes and families.

Faiga flounced out of the living-room and clattered up the spiral staircase to her loft bedroom. Her sole privilege, as the only girl still at home, was that she had a space to herself, while her brothers squabbled and slept, three or four together, in the rooms beneath hers. She sat down on her narrow bed and took out the hand-mirror she kept hidden under her night-clothes. Glaring at her own angry reflection, she thought about her sisters. "Look after the *bubbeles!*" Why should she? Faiga had always hated household work - women's work, the tasks that had to be done over again every day for the men in the family. While her mother was alive she had usually managed to avoid them, because she was willing and able to help Hodel with the sewing and dressmaking; she enjoyed that, and her mother had praised her dexterity and quickness. As an unwilling nanny to her younger brothers, Faiga had developed a serious dislike of babies and toddlers. And now here were these two wretched little creatures she was supposed to look after! The only emotion she felt for the new additions to her family responsibilities was exasperation. It was too bad of her mother to die, leaving these twins to be minded by ... who? One thing Faiga had decided already: she was not ever going to get married. She was not going to live like her mother and sisters, forever either pregnant or breast-feeding. And from all she had seen and heard, life in her community offered no other option to a young woman. In your eighteenth year you got married, to a man of your parents' choice, and after that, you spent the rest of your life either cooking and cleaning yourself, or supervising the servants who cooked and cleaned, if your husband could afford them. And you did this in the intervals of giving birth to one child after another, feeding them, wiping their *tochases*, getting up in the middle of the night Not for me, Faiga decided. I'm leaving this place. First chance I get.

* * * * *

After Hodel's death, the household descended into anarchy. Pots and pans disappeared from the kitchen, *milchik* and *vleischik* plates and cutlery were confused, food was burned, and the younger boys bunked their *cheder* school. The older sons – supposedly working for their father and uncles at the *pundak* – appeared at the workplace irregularly if at all, causing their father to tear his hair and hold up his hands to heaven in protest at the unfairness of his lot in life. Zelic and Mendel struggled through the early years of their existence, but stubbornly continued to survive and grow, like weeds rooting in the cracks of a rock. When Olga the wet-nurse had fed them in their infancy, after each feed she handed the swaddled twins like wrapped parcels over to Kristina, Anyuschka's sister, and then went away. Kristina too treated them like parcels; she was generally indifferent to the boys, though perhaps she resented them less than Faiga did; after all, she was getting paid. When they were three years old Faiga, who had inherited Hodel's sewing-machine as well as a little of her talent, announced that she was going to Kovno to work for a dressmaker she had chanced to meet at the home of a friend. She was seventeen. Ignoring the feeble protests of her father, she left the chaotic family home, taking both the sewing-machine and her nineteen-year-old brother Menachem. At about the same time their eldest brother Moishe, aged twenty-three, made it known that he intended to follow the many young men – including Sam Aronstam, Chayah-Basha's only son - who had already left Eragola to make their fortunes in South Africa. Micah wept, but Moishe left anyway; his parting words to his younger brothers were "I'll send for you." Shortly afterwards Kristina vanished, rumoured to have run away with a young man from another village. Anyuschka, bitter about Kristina's defection, demanded that Micah hire additional help in the house. The busy young woman who joined the household caught the eye of second brother Lazar, then twenty-one, but avoided the twins.

Then how was Micah, always deploring the ill fortune that was his lot, to cope with his remaining offspring? He did the only thing he could think of: he sought a step-mother for them. But even though Micah was reasonably well-to-do, he had no luck. Any woman

who showed interest – or was so misguided as to feel sorry for this affluent but pitiful man who was so sorry for himself - was quickly driven away by the horde of wild boys inhabiting his big house.

Zelic and Mendel grew up snot-nosed, grubby, and neglected. Their father and brothers never learned to tell them apart. They were always angry, without quite knowing why. Sometimes they visited Chayah-Basha in her modest log cabin nearby. From the tap of her brass samovar she would fill glasses with strong black tea; she put a sugar-lump into each glass and stirred into it a teaspoon of jam she had made from forest berries. The boys found an inexplicable comfort in the flavour and warmth of Chayah-Basha's tea, and in the sweetness of the nutty tea-cakes that came with it, crunchy little balls rolled in powdered sugar.

The twins relied on one another for survival. Chatzkel, one of their older brothers, would tease them by pummelling the air around them with mock punches, every third or fourth blow finding a solid target on one or the other of the twins. By the age of five, they had learned to turn on him as one, and Chatzkel became wary of them. When they were six, Mendel found a small dishevelled black dog scavenging at a rubbish-heap. He took him home and named him Grisha. Mendel fed his dog on scraps from the messy kitchen, and Grisha slept under, and often in, the twins' bed. One day, big brother Yudel took Grisha by the tail and whirled him around, yelping in pain and fright. Mendel and Zelic tackled Yudel together, kicking, punching, scratching and biting. He soon learned to leave them and Grisha alone.

The twins were stocky and heavy-browed, youthful troglodytes, but physically surprisingly strong. They had learned early in life that aggression was their best defence, and that they should be as wary of their siblings as they were of everyone else. But they were not quite as much alike as their father and brothers thought. Zelic's set jaw and habitual surly expression warned his brothers and the rest of the world not to interfere with him. But Mendel would sit with Grisha on his lap, talking to him in a private language, and at such times his face softened and lit up. When the twins were seven years old, Micah sent them to the *cheder* to begin their studies. Within weeks they were both sent home, deemed intractable and unteachable. Their father threw up his hands and deferred the problem to another year.

It was soon after the *cheder* rejected them that Mendel took ill.

When they woke up one morning in the spring he told Zelic his throat was sore; he wanted to lie in bed. Zelic went out to kick a ball around by himself, but when he looked in later he found Mendel flushed and feverish, begging for water. Zelic fetched a jug and a cup from the kitchen and set them by the bed.

"You want to eat something?"

Mendel shook his head and whispered "Wipe my face."

Zelic dipped the corner of a towel in water and wiped down Mendel's face and his chest. Grisha, lying on the bed beside Mendel, licked his hot cheeks and pushed his nose into Mendel's neck.

Nobody except Zelic noticed that Mendel did not appear at suppertime.

Next day Mendel's throat was worse, and he was burning with fever. As the day passed Zelic, watching his twin anxiously, noticed that he seemed to be having trouble in breathing. Mendel began to cough, a hoarse sound like the bark of a dog.

Zelic was alarmed. They needed help, and it was no use turning to their father. Micah and a drinking-acquaintance were sitting on the porch outside the front door of the house. Micah was smoking his pipe, nursing his schnapps and holding forth on his constant theme of how unfairly life had treated him, when Zelic ran past them, straight to Chayah-Basha's house.

Chayah-Basha too was sitting before her open front door, enjoying a quiet moment in the twilight. When she saw Zelic running towards her, alone, she knew before he spoke why he had come. She walked with him, as fast as her legs and feet would allow, back to the Shmulkin house, listening as he tried to describe what was happening to Mendel. Owls were calling to one another, "uhoo-hoo-hoo" among the pine trees, as Chayah-Basha greeted Micah perfunctorily on the front porch of the rambling brick house. She said, "I've come to see Mendeleh," and walked through the open front door. In the cramped back bedroom the twins shared, Chayah-Basha put her hand on Mendel's hot forehead and listened to his cough. She took her spectacles out of her pocket, settled them on her nose, and said to Zelic, "Bring the lamp here to me, *bekeleh*." To Mendel she said "Open your mouth for me, *bubbeleh*". Holding the lamp close, she looked carefully into Mendel's throat, then stroked his face, straightened herself up and turned to Zelic.

"Zelicush," she said, "go call your father. Bring him here, right now."

Micah appeared at the door, looking frightened. He had seldom seen Chayah-Basha since Hodel's death; when he did see her, and she looked at him, he felt guilty, quite unreasonably. He was not even aware that the twins visited her. She was standing at the head of the bed, one hand on Mendel's forehead.

"Micah, this child is very sick."

Micah gasped. "Sick? What's wrong?"

"It's the throat-disease. The old people called it *oysvargne malekh* – the strangling angel. That's what it does – it strangles children to death. And everyone else in the house can get it too."

Micah's mouth dropped open, and his face paled.

"*Oy, a broch tzu mir!* What can I do? There's no hospital here in Eragola, no doctor ... *Oy, vey es mir, vey es mir!!*"

Chayah-Basha looked at this miserable man, consumed with self-pity, this hero who had given her beloved Hodel child after child, until she died. For a moment, Chayah-Basha despised him so much that she wanted to spit on him. But instead she looked down at Mendel, Hodel's last child, his face inflamed with heat, his head rolling on the pillow as he coughed that strange, brassy, barking cough.

She said, "He can't stay here– *das wil onraysn der ganze mishpochah* – all Hodel's children will get sick, and some will die. I can't let it happen. Take Mendele to my house. Take the dog with him. I will look after them. If I get sick, *Gottse danken*, I've had my life."

* * * * *

Zelic dreamed a dream that came back every night. In it, Mendel was struggling with a huge dark shape. Sometimes he and Mendel together were wrestling with the powerful figure; sometimes Grisha was helping them, barking and snapping at the assailant – but Zelic always woke up, shivering, alone in the bed, before the contest ended. During their brief spell at the *cheder* they had heard the story of Ya'akov, who had wrestled with an angel and prevailed. Zelic lay in bed wide-eyed, whispering to Hashem: "Don't let the angel strangle Mendel – please let him win!"

Zelic walked slowly towards Chayah-Basha's little wooden house. He had made this solitary visit every morning since Mendel, Grisha and Chayah-Basha had disappeared into that house. Its walls were of upright wooden slats and its black roof-tiles sharply pitched. A red flag on the front door warned passers-by that the dwelling harboured a dangerous infectious disease. Zelic did not go to the door. He would loiter about for a while in the street in front of the house, and then shuffle back home, kicking a pine-cone. But this morning, he caught a glimpse of Chayah-Basha through one of the narrow windows on either side of the red-flagged door, and she must have seen him. The door flew open, and there she was, in the doorway, smiling and waving. Grisha came bounding out past her long skirts to dance around Zelic in the street, yapping joyfully. Zelic gasped. From the door Chayah-Basha called out, "Zelicush! I can't let you in yet – but he's getting better!"

* * * * *

On a tranquil summer evening in 1975, in the city of Johannesburg in South Africa, Evelyn was chatting to Boris, who had come up from Port Elizabeth on a short business trip. He had phoned to say he was in town, and she had invited him for dinner with herself and her husband at their luxurious house in the north of the city.

After the meal, relaxing on the wide veranda of the house as the air cooled down, Boris and Evelyn were discussing their roots.

"I've always known we were related somehow," Boris observed, "but I've never known how exactly. Do you know?"

"I think it's got something to do with your grandmother," Evelyn said. Boris frowned, trying to recall childhood conversations with his late father and stories passed on by his mother after his father's death.

"I never met my grandmother – my father's mother. She died back in Lithuania, before I was born, but that was many years after my father came to South Africa. I believe she lived to a great age. My father, Sam, was her only child."

"What was her name?"

"Basha, I think – I'm not sure. But I know I was named for her."

"I was named in memory of a woman called Chaya-Basha, who lived in Lithuania," Evelyn said. "My Hebrew name is Chaya."

Boris wondered how much Evelyn knew about his dealings with her late father. Would it be indiscreet ... ?

There was a silence. Then Evelyn mused: “My father never said much about his early life. It couldn’t have been easy, him being the youngest of such a huge family – fourteen children! And their mother died when he and his twin brother were born. So those two never even knew what it was like to have a mother.”

There rose in Boris’s mind the memory of the telephone call he’d received twenty years earlier from Evelyn’s father, Mendel Shmulkin.

Boris had heard of the Shmulkin family and knew that they were distantly related to him in some way. At the time when Mendel Shmulkin called him, in 1955, Boris was in his twenties, starting out in life; he had a young wife, and their first child was three months old. Money had always been scarce; Sam Aronstam had never been able to make much of a living, and he had passed away when Boris was twelve.

A week after the phone-call, Mendel sat opposite Boris in the tiny one-roomed flat in Port Elizabeth that he and his wife were renting at the time. Mendel was bald and stocky, a little bent, with hooded eyes. He wasted no time on pleasantries.

“I want to buy you a decent house. You can’t bring up your child in a place like this. And I want you should start your own business. I’ll help you. No strings.”

Boris could not believe what he was hearing. He had heard that Zelic and Mendel Shmulkin - always spoken of in one breath - had made serious money in property in Jo’burg in recent years; he had also heard that the twins had jointly earned the reputation in business circles of having ice in their veins. He had even heard the comment that their teeth were their softest parts. Boris could not imagine why Mendel Shmulkin should make so extraordinary an offer to a distant relative like himself.

“Why are you doing this?” he asked Mendel.

Mendel hesitated, shifted in his chair, looked out of the window at the blank brick wall of the building next door. Then he turned to face the grandson of Chaya-Basha.

“Your *bobba* gave me my life,” he said in his thick Lithuanian speech. “She took me into her house when I was a child, she looked after me when I was so sick that no one else wanted me.”

He took out a large handkerchief, wiped his face, and blew his nose.

“She could have died of that illness too, but she didn’t get sick, and I got better. For her sake I must look after you and your children.”

On that cool Johannesburg evening in 1975, Boris turned to glance at Mendel’s daughter Evelyn in the half-light spilling from a louvred window opening on to the veranda of her opulent home.

“Did your father ever speak of being very ill as a child?”

“Yes, yes, he did. He told me that this old woman, Chayah-Basha, nursed him in his childhood when he was sick, and saved his life. That’s why he gave me her name ...”

Evelyn looked down, rearranging the pleats of her elegant satin skirt against the cushioned chair on which she sat. “So, in memory of her humanity, I bear the name of Eve, the mother of mankind.”

“The mother of mankind ...” Boris repeated. “Chayah-Basha. We both have her name.”



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MAKING DAVID INTO GOLIATH

*

Gary Selikow

I have often wondered how from being supported by the greater part of the world (barring Arab/Muslim and Soviet Bloc countries), including by the non-Stalinist Left, Israel has become a victim of unrelenting hatred, including in the United Nations, media, EU, Third World regimes and many churches. Today, Palestinian privilege means that Palestinians can carry out continual acts of terror against Jewish Israelis and still be regarded as the victims. In his insightful, penetrating and hard hitting work *Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned Against Israel*, Joshua Muravchik grapples with this question.

The introduction refers to the perfidious 2009 Goldstone Commission, which unjustly charged Israel with committing ‘crimes against humanity’ during Operation Cast Lead in late 2008-early 2009, an operation aimed at preventing Hamas from launching rockets at civilian Israeli targets. Comments Muravchik, this “underlined a dramatic change in international opinion that would have seemed unthinkable a few decades earlier. Little more than forty years had elapsed since the underdog Israel had fought a six-day war against its Arab neighbours in which the Western world had cheered for its victory ... by 2009 this sympathy seemed a distant memory in the United Kingdom and the rest of Western Europe, and the United Nations was arrayed overwhelmingly against Israel In short the global community had stamped Israel as an outcast. What had happened in the intervening decades to occasion such a dramatic turnaround?”

The first reason is that the Arab world is no longer seen as the massive axis threatening tiny Israel. Instead, the Palestinian cause has become an extremely ‘progressive’ and

fashionable one. Israel has certainly become a major military power, but however much the Palestinians are outgunned and however much they might be suffering heavier casualties, they remain the aggressors. This is a one sided war, writes Muravchik, in that only one side - the Palestinians and Muslim world - want it. And while Israel has always engaged in defensive measures and targeted terror networks, the Arabs have made no bones about their strategy of targeting civilians.

What has changed the paradigm to a large degree is the abandonment by the Left of the class struggle for that of supporting dark-skinned Third World people against the demonized West (particularly whites). In this worldview, the former can do no wrong (unless they align with the West) and are always the victims, while Westerners are the epitome and root of all evil in the world (West vs the Rest). Israel, despite half its Jewish population being dark-skinned and originating from the Middle East and North Africa, are seen as Western and white and therefore evil, while the Palestinians are regarded as noble, dark-skinned oppressed victims.

A current example of this anti-white racism is how left-wing feminists, who historically campaigned against rape and the right of women to dress as they please, now defend Muslim migrants in Europe guilty of participating in what has been termed a ‘rape jihad’ against European women and girls, going so far as to say the victims are at fault for dressing in a way that ‘provokes’ the attacks. This world view has also led the global Left to support some of the worst tyrannies of modern times, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Zimbabwe, not to mention Saddam Hussein’s genocide of the Kurds and Communist China’s suppression of Tibet.

Then opening chapter takes the story from the 1917 Balfour Declaration through to the

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1967 Six-Day War, the time “when Israel was admired (almost all around)”. Chapter Two details how the Arab cause became ‘Palestinian’ and ‘progressive’ (“No longer was it Israel versus the Arabs. Now it was Israel versus the homeless Palestinians. David had become Goliath”). The Palestinians, having realized they could never win militarily, launched a two pronged strategy of terror combined with the greatest propaganda campaign since the Third Reich (perhaps even greater, as it is more widespread and global). Comments Muravchik, “No longer did Israel enjoy the public relations gifts of opponents who were collaborators of Hitler and Goebbels. Now they faced the comrades of such chic romanticized figures as Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh. Not only had David become Goliath but on the other side the frog had become a prince”.

Making David into Goliath explains in successive chapters about the Palestinians’ use of terrorism, the use of the Arab oil weapon to pressure the world against Israel, the Arab takeover of the United Nations and how the latter became a body apparently bent on destroying the Jewish state. It records how, under the malignant influence of Austria’s Jewish-born Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, the Socialist International was turned against Israel, and how “Edward Said conquers academia for Palestine”. There is a chapter on Israel’s own internal political culture and one dealing with the International Solidarity Movement, which supports the killing of Israeli civilians and refuses to work with even left-wing Israeli groups. Their poster girl Rachel Corrie (who was accidentally killed while interfering with an Israeli anti-terror operation) herself showed scant compassion for Israeli victims of terror.

The author further explores the world of Jews who nurse a pathological hatred of all things Israeli. They include academic Norman Finkelstein and the UN Human Rights Council ‘Special Raconteur on Israel’s

violations’ Richard Falk, who supported the Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Republic of Iran, describes Israelis as Nazis and praises suicide bombings as “legitimate resistance”.

Chapter Eleven, entitled ‘Israel in the Dock’, describes the pillorying, demonization and delegitimization of Israel in the wake of the so-called ‘Second Intifada’ of 2000-2005, including its even being brought to trial in the International Criminal Court for a purely defensive measure - the Security Fence, built in response to the deaths of over a thousand Israelis in terror attacks on buses, religious ceremonies (such as the 2002 Netanya Pesach Seder), discotheques and pizza parlors. Implied by this was that Israel has no right at all to defend herself against terror by any means at all.

Muravchik describes the irony of how Israel is consigned by the Left to darkness and villainy even though according to the latter’s nominal values, such as freedom of speech and thought, religious tolerance, racial and sexual diversity and social justice, it is among the world’s best whereas its enemies rank among the worst. In his conclusion, he points to what the demonization, delegitimization, isolation and onslaught against Israel could lead to: “Should Israel’s enemies succeed, the result would be a second Holocaust. This would be a tragedy of unspeakable proportions for the Jews but not only for them. The world would have lost one of its most creative countries and the devastation of the Jewish people would cause incalculable harm to the spiritual life of the West and perhaps beyond”.

This remarkable book is vital reading for anyone who wishes to know why and how Israel has gone from being one of the most admired countries in the world to one of the most reviled and the sheer injustice of this.

Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned Against Israel by Joshua Muravchik, Encounter Books, 2014, 296pp.

FINAL SOLUTION – THE FATE OF THE JEWS 1933-1949

*

Isaac Reznik

Isaac Reznik is a well-known Johannesburg journalist, historian and Jewish communal worker, with a specialized knowledge in the history of South African Jewry, in particular its religious leadership. He is a member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs.

The late David Cesarani’s *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949* is a staggering and minutely detailed account of the defamation, violation and ultimately murder of the Jews by various parties during the 1930s and ‘40s. Cesarani’s account pulls no punches as it shines the light of truth on

why so many innocent people were murdered and who they were. To his credit, he breaks boundaries by detailing how Jews sometimes fought, denounced and betrayed one another, which tells its own tale of misery. Cesarani argues that the Holocaust was not simply a case of antisemitism, though clearly that was a huge factor; it also stemmed from the war itself. Hitler and the Nazis were always deeply antisemitic but they rarely had clear long-range plans; policies were created on what was often an ad hoc basis.

I have an extensive library on the Holocaust/Shoah (or whatever one wishes to call one of the most horrific and cruel episodes in human history). It has fascinated me ever since I was young boy when, at the age of nine years, I heard the late Rabbi Ephraim Oshry zt”l, speak at the Jeppe shul on his experiences in the ghettos. It took me more than four weeks to finish Cesarani’s book,

and it is hard to summarize or even give a solid impression about a study so large and complex. I don’t imagine that anyone who reads this review will want to read the book and would not recommend doing unless one has a special interest in the subject. This is not a casual or holiday read and requires a strong stomach.

David Cesarani, Research Professor of History at the Royal Holloway University of London, died at the age of 58 in October 2015. His examination of the Holocaust is depressing, frightening, essential and a major work of scholarship. Let it stand as a warning to all of us, as well as an appropriate memorial to its author.

Final Solution – The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949 by David Cesarani, first published by Macmillan, 2016, 1056pp.

MEMOIRS OF A HOPEFUL PESSIMIST

*

Gwynne Schrire

In this autobiography, Dr Debbie Weissman describes the events in her life that turned her from a child born to secular Zionist parents living in America during World War II into the *Shomer Shabbat* woman living in Israel. It is a compelling and beautifully written memoir by a modest, unassuming woman whose life was far from unassuming. How many people could say that on the same day, they visited Arafat’s grave (which was empty) and made gefilte fish? And if there were such people, she probably knew them. And if she did not record her memories, they would be lost. Hence her book, *Memoirs of a Hopeful Pessimist: A Life of Activism Through Dialogue*.

Weissman writes simply and honestly, and her integrity and concern for human rights for all people shines through. She describes herself as a modern person living in a post-modern world, which, she says, is hard. She gives as an example an inter-religious study trip she attended in Bosnia over Tisha B’Av.

Gwynne Schrire, a veteran contributor to Jewish Affairs and long-serving member of its editorial board, is Deputy Director of the Cape Council, SA Jewish Board of Deputies. She has written, co-written and edited numerous books on local Jewish and Cape Town history.

A mosque allowed her to use an anteroom to chant the *Book of Lamentation* - alone and a little lonely. She completed the reading shortly before the muezzin began his call for the evening prayers. The only other Jewish delegate, an otherwise observant Jew, took the other participants to a restaurant for a meal. The book is full of such reminiscences.

Weissman describes growing up in a Jewish home in mainstream Christian America. Both her parents were social workers and as a child she accompanied her mother on feminist marches. Because her father worked for the Jewish community, they were frequently transferred to different Jewish community centres. Debbie joined Young Judea, becoming national president and, aged 17, was a youth delegate to the World Zionist Congress. During her studies, she spent a year in Israel, which was a culture shock. On her first Shabbat there, a policeman knocked on their door. In America the students called them pigs or fuzz. Why was he bothering them? Had there been a complaint about the noise? Was he looking for drugs? No. Knowing they were newly arrived students, he had come to wish them Shabbat Shalom.

On Weissman’s return to college in America, where she obtained an M.A. in sociology on the history of the Bais Yaakov

movement in Poland between 1918 and 1939, she became observant and also campaigned for the release of Soviet Jewry, going into Russia to smuggle Jewish ritual objects in and names of refuseniks out. When she made aliyah in 1972, her activist parents organised a support group for parents of children who had gone on aliyah. This grew into PNAI, Parents of North American Israelis, with dozens of chapters and thousands of members.

In Israel, she obtained a Ph.D. in Jewish Education from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, on the social history of Jewish women's education. She started training high school teachers, becoming known for her courses on Judaism, Jewish sources, festivals and feminism, Biblical interpretation and issues in the Palestinian-Israeli relationship, including teaching courses to the IDF and Jewish Agency emissaries going abroad.

In 1978 she was invited to South Africa to run seminars for Jewish youth. She accepted with hesitation, determined that she would not use a segregated toilet - only to discover that there were no others. She got into trouble twice, both involving Israeli dancing, which she loved. The first time was north of Johannesburg when she took the hand of a black onlooker to bring her into the dancing circle, and was told afterwards by the youth leader not to do it again as it was a criminal offence. The second time was at a campsite at Muizenberg where a passing rabbi noticed that the dance involved teenage boys taking the hands of teenage girls dancing next to them. She was told that in future she could only teach the girls. She writes, "Thus I got into trouble in South Africa twice for mixed dancing – once by race, the second time for gender. If I lived in South Africa I would have continued doing this – and probably other, even more significant 'offences' – but then I would not be around to bear the consequences. I realized that at the end of the month I would be returning to Israel so it wasn't really fair for me to jeopardize the locals".

When she was asked to teach Christians about Judaism, she took it on reluctantly only to find that she loved doing so as she found that most people were eager to learn and that their questions were always stimulating. She began hosting students for Shabbat and *chagim* and discovered that doing so enhanced her own spirituality. She was then invited to teach on the faculties of numerous Christian educational centres in and around Jerusalem. Her reputation spread and soon she was receiving invitations to speak on interreligious friendship and dialogue at major interfaith gatherings around the world. The book is enriched with stories about these experiences.

Weissman returned to a different South Africa in 2011 and 2016, the most recent time as the first Jewish woman President of the International Council of Christians and Jews, the recipient of its Sternberg Interfaith Gold Medallion and an active leader in the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel. She was the guest lecturer for the annual Jacob Gitlin Memorial Lecture at Cape Town's Jacob Gitlin Library.

From her years in interfaith work, Weissman concludes that the achievement of such dialogues cannot be taken for granted because of a backlash in some places, with trends in all the religions toward a more fundamentalist approach, wanting to return to an imagined idealized past. There has been a resurgence of antisemitism, of bigotry, xenophobia and hate crimes. South Africa is not alone in this. On the positive side she observes that the churches are no longer part of the problem but part of the solution and are our allies in fighting antisemitism.

Weissman's call for equal respect to be paid to other faiths has also extended to her call for equal respect to be paid to worshippers of both genders. She writes that "Feminism is the radical idea that women are human beings, and religious feminism is the even more radical idea that rabbis are human beings ... Rav Lichtenstein, son in law of Rav Yosef Soloveitchik, said it is high time to stop questioning the sincerity of women who want to take on more active roles within Judaism. After all we don't question the motives of men who are seeking honours in the synagogue". She helped to establish and was a founder member of a modern Orthodox synagogue in Jerusalem, Kehillat Yedidya, a halachically-based community that is equally concerned about traditional Jewish values, social justice and democracy in Israeli society. Kehillat Yedidya supports tolerance for "the other" and has become well-known, both for its friendly relationships with other streams of Judaism, and for its hospitality in hosting multi-faith groups from around the world.

As an aside Kehillat Yedidya, with Weissman's active support, agreed to host the Israeli grand-daughter of this reviewer for her batmitzvah when she wanted the opportunity to lein from the Torah just like a barmitzvah boy. A *mechitzah* separated the men and Weissman led the service with an appropriate shiur, followed by a small *brochah* for the family.

Looking back at her decision to go to Israel, Weissman writes that she made aliyah to a largely secular, left-leaning country where the kibbutz movement was disproportionately influential, but now lived in a right wing, religious and traditional

society where there were almost no traces left of socialism and, where, like in South Africa and Europe, racism was on the rise. However although over the years she had experienced alienation from some aspects of her Israeli identity, especially over the occupied territories, she has never wavered from her primal Jewish identity.

Why the title of her book? She explains that her teacher, philosopher Prof Mike Rosenak, Mandel Professor of Jewish Education at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, used to say that Jews were pessimists in the short run and optimists in the long.

“Perhaps that’s what I am. What has made me feel pessimistic recently is the realisation that I probably won’t live long enough to see peace in the region. In some ways it is better now. We have much more religious pluralism, feminist values that are anchored in progressive legislation, something that has been called a Jewish cultural renaissance and more room for all kinds of people who previously were confined to the periphery”.

“One of our problems is that both Israelis and the Palestinians see themselves as the victims of the conflict. They seem to be competitors in what I call a Suffering Sweepstake. One of the problems with victimhood is that it prevents the victim from assuming responsibility for his or her actions, including the victimisation of others. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I believe that both sides are victims and both sides are victimizers”.

For readers who enjoy insights like these and episodes like some of those quoted, *Memoirs of a Hopeful Pessimist* is for you. It is a book for everyone who is a hopeful pessimist, who believes, like Dr Weissman, that the pursuit of peace is a religious imperative.

Memoirs of a Hopeful Pessimist: A Life of Activism Through Dialogue by Debbie Weissman, Ktav Publishing, Urim Publications, Jerusalem, New York., 2017, 199 pp with 4 appendices.

THE OCHBERG ORPHANS AND THE HORRORS FROM WHICH THEY CAME (VOLUME II)

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Lionel Slier

In 2011 the name Isaac Ochberg became well known in local Jewish circles. The main reason was that year, David Sandler from Perth, Western Australia, issued a book about Ochberg, a Capetonian who in 1921 went to Eastern Europe and brought out some 200 Jewish orphans, most of whom came to South Africa.

Sandler spent the years 1954 - 1969 at Arcadia Jewish Orphanage in Johannesburg. After qualifying as an accountant, he immigrated to Perth in 1981, but kept in touch with the ‘Old Arcs’ by circulating a world-wide weekly newsletter. He later compiled two books of memories of Arcadia from letters he received, *100 Years of Arc Memories* (2006) and *More Arc Memories* (2008). In the letters which he received, he came across Ochberg’s name and issued

an appeal for information about him. This reviewer happened to see his newsletter and as my mother was an Ochberg orphan I wrote to him with what information I could give. Sandler decided to pursue the Ochberg saga further, and asked people connected to him to send in their stories. The prevailing sentiment among Ochberg descendants was, “If you don’t send your information about your connection, Sandler will still bring out a book - your family would be absent, and you would regret your reluctance”.

From the information received, Sandler put together his compilation *The Ochberg Orphans and the horrors from whence they came*, which appeared in 2011. The re-discovery of Isaac Ochberg led to a gathering in Israel of descendants of these orphans. It was a tremendous success.

Now Sandler has issued a further compilation, with the same title, but called Volume II. This 353- page book continues with stories of the horrors from which the

Lionel Slier is a regular contributor to South African Jewish publications, including Jewish Affairs and the South African Jewish Report.

orphans were delivered - war, hunger, disease, pogrom murders and more. It includes an impressive collection of documents and photos and also reports and pictures of the unforgettable 2011 meeting in Israel. There is a description about the unveiling of the Ochberg Memorial Site at Ramat Manasse and its mound with plaques listing the names of all the orphans who came to South Africa. Also in the book is the little known complementary story of orphans taken to Canada from the same area in Europe.

In 2012, an exhibition on the Ochberg story was mounted in Brest, Belarus, from where many of the orphans came. It was attended by many prominent Belarussians as it was combined with the celebration of 'Twenty Years since the return of Jews to Brest after the Great Patriotic War (1939-45)'. The opening was broadcast live on Belarussian television.

The book informs us that in the 1930s, Ochberg donated a sum of money in a bequest, which is the largest amount made by an individual to the Jewish National Fund, Keren Kayemet le Yisroel. The funds were used to buy land, which included the kibbutzim Dalia and Ein Hasofet (today known as Nachalat Yitzchak, after Ochberg). He also donated a wing to the Hebrew University in

Jerusalem in memory of his daughter, Ruth, who died as a teenager.

Sandler's contribution to the narrative of South African Jewry is massive and invaluable. No history of the Jews of South Africa can be complete now without reference to his various compilations. Besides those about Arcadia and the Ochberg Orphans, these include a book about the Pinsker Orphans, *Memories of Orangia* (on the Jewish children's home in Cape Town), two books about and entitled *Our Litvak Inheritance* and a very recent one about the *Machalniks*, the South African volunteers in Israel's War of Independence. The books are on sale and available in many countries. Sandler neither receives nor wants any money from the sales, asking instead that buyers make a donation to Arcadia Children's Home in Johannesburg, Orangia Children's Home in Cape Town or the local Chevra Kadisha. Banking details of where these donations can be made are in each of the books.

The Ochberg Orphans and the horrors from which they came (Volume 2), compiled by David Sandler, 2017, 353pp. Copies, as well as of previous books compiled and edited by D S Sandler, can be obtained from the author at sedsand@iinet.net.au.

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new POETRY

VIE!

Vie Ken men spatzirren oif aza heilike Erd
Vu zeks miljonnen hobben leben batzholt!
Far die 'Zind' tsu zain a Yid?
Der ganze Europa is a bes-oilem
Do liggen Miljone brider und swezters
Zair ash in zamd un blotte eingevekelt!

Maurice Skikne

*[HOW! How does one walk on such Holy
Ground/Where Six Million paid
with their Lives/For the 'Sin' of being a
Jew?/The whole of Europe is a cemetery!/
Here lie millions of brothers and sisters/
Their ashes mixed with
sand and mud!]*

Poetry

I pondered and wondered
Where the difference lay
Between poetry and prose
Between these words and those

I questioned and listened
Contemplated and read
And finally wide-awake
But still dreaming in bed
The answer appeared
Aligned in my head

.....

Poetry is the fusion of
Word art and word music
It is mind images encapsulated
In charismatic cadence

It is word magic

Poetry portrays the sense and sensitivity
Embedded in the psyche
It intensifies experience and emotion
Insight and imagination
Into consummate expression

Poetry is the mortal sound of the soul

Charlotte Cohen

THE PATCHWORK OF MYSELF

Now that a few months have passed
I'm trying to make sense of it all.
I know for sure
There were three occasions whereby I put
on that flattering green gown
And was wheeled into the operating unit.
One can only imagine the turmoil and
trauma that prevailed.

I was told the ENT and NEURO surgeons
together
Went through my nostrils with their sharp
instruments
To patch up the holes in the bone
surrounding my brain.

So I sit on my couch and I ponder to
myself for many moments
About the unknown places deep inside my
head.
After having recovered from three long
brain surgeries.

That patchwork has had an enormous
effect on who I am you know.
I no longer feel the same anymore
Or no longer think the same anymore
And even more poignantly
I no longer dream the same anymore.

So, while these patches heal deep inside
my head
I too need to patch myself up.
So that I can become whole again.
As there are many helping me sew up the
patches of my soul
I have faith that soon
The patchwork will become intact again
With all the various colours
Of my many paintings shining through.

Abigail Sarah Bagraim



L'Shanah Tovah

Wishing you health, happiness and success in the New Year!



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sealed for a sweet year.

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