

# JEWISH AFFAIRS

## Pesach 2011



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# JEWISH AFFAIRS

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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.

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# A BRIEF JOURNEY THROUGH GERMAN JEWISH HISTORY

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Bernard Katz

Already in the Talmud, there is a reference to the military strength of 'Germania' (or 'Germamia') and its threat to the Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> Accompanying the Roman legions manning the German border were the first Jews to settle in Germany, merchants who lived in the Roman towns along the Rhine. Some historians cite reports of a Jewish presence as early as 300 BCE, and there are legends of Jews in the city of Worms petitioning Herod to save Jesus from crucifixion.<sup>2</sup> The earliest reference to the presence of a Jewish community in German territory is a decree which dealt with the Jewish councillors sent by the Roman Emperor Constantine to the Cologne city council in 321 CE.<sup>3</sup> The original of this document resides in the Vatican library.<sup>4</sup> There is, however, no evidence of a continuous Jewish settlement in Germany during those times.

Emperor Charlemagne (768 – 814) was favourably disposed to Jews, and during his reign invited them to settle in his territories and freely practice their religion. It was even possible for an imperial deacon, by the name of Bodo, to convert to Judaism without running the risk of being burned alive (which would have been the outcome a few centuries earlier, and would be so later).<sup>5</sup> Our knowledge of actual Jewish history in Western Europe begins with the rise of the Carolingian dynasty (Charlemagne's descendants). Jewish legend has it that Charlemagne himself invited the great Italian Talmudist Rabbi Kalonymus to settle in Mainz, where he founded a yeshiva.<sup>6</sup>

The first mention of Jewish settlement in Mainz dates from c900 and in Worms to 960. In 1084, the archbishop of Speyer invited Jews to settle there "in order to enhance a thousand-fold the respect accorded to our town".<sup>7</sup> Together these three towns are known as Shum, an acronym based on the initial letters of their Hebrew names.

Around the year 1000, Rabbeinu Gershom became head of the yeshiva in Mainz. He was the symbolic "founder of Ashkenaz", and his yeshiva became the pre-eminent yeshiva in the Jewish world. Around this time, the rabbinic and Talmudic authority of Babylon was approaching its end and was being passed to Ashkenaz.<sup>8</sup> Rabbeinu Gershom is well known for a number of new laws enforced under a *cherem* – known as the "*Cherem* of Rabbeinu

Gershom" – which included the famous prohibition against polygamy. Max Weinreich describes this "*Cherem* of Rabbeinu Gershom" as the "declaration of independence of Ashkenaz".<sup>9</sup>

Around 300 CE, approximately one million Jews lived in the Western Roman Empire, but of these only 5000 to 10 000 survived as Jews by the year 800. As late as 1170, it is estimated that there were only 100 000 Ashkenazi Jews.<sup>10</sup>

Despite persecution and the destruction of many communities, Jewish cultural and religious life enjoyed a golden age between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries. As a rule, the kings and emperors took a benevolent attitude towards the Jews during that period, but their power mostly proved too weak to protect the Jews from attacks by the Crusaders.

German Jewry ultimately lost its primary place in the Ashkenazic world as a result of plagues, pogroms and emigration. Starting with the First Crusade in 1096 and followed by further Crusades until 1270, the *Rindfleish* massacres (1293–1303) and the Black Death (1348–50), Jews began to move eastwards to Poland and later Lithuania. The year 1500 is taken as the symbolic shift in Rabbinic and Talmudic authority from Germany to Poland.<sup>11</sup>

Martin Luther (1483–1546) ushered in the Reformation. Initially, he was well disposed towards the Jews, but when they refused to convert he became a bitter enemy. Paul Johnson writes that Luther's pamphlet "On the Jews and their lies" was the first work of modern antisemitism and was a giant step forward on the road to the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup>

By the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries, such dangers and difficulties had reduced the Jewish population to insignificant numbers. The re-immigration of Jews from Poland, Lithuania and western Russia became the major source for the survival and rebirth of German Jewry from the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards.<sup>13</sup>

The founding of the modern Jewish community of Berlin, capital of Prussia, dates to 1671, when fifty wealthy Jewish families who had been expelled from Vienna were permitted entry by King Frederick I.<sup>14</sup> Given Prussia's importance as the preeminent German state, this effectively constitutes the date of the founding of the modern German Jewish community as a whole. Frederick was not moved by the Jewish plight but wanted to stimulate a stagnant economy. To become his *Schutzjuden* (protected Jews), each had to pay him 2000 thalers (roughly \$90,000 today), promise to set up certain industries, and agree "not to establish a synagogue".<sup>15</sup>

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In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, a small number of Jewish merchants and financiers, known as Court Jews or *Hoffjuden*, began acting as advisers to the rulers of the decentralised German states. Most Jews, however, lived a marginal and restricted existence outside the mainstream of German life. These early *Hoffjuden* were the forerunners of the great families of European Jewry, which included the Oppenheims, Wertheimers and Rothschilds.

One of the more colourful stories concerning a Court Jew was that of Joseph Suss Oppenheimer (1692-1738). "Jew Suss", as he was known, was advisor to the Duke of Wurttemberg. He was arrogant and corrupt but was responsible for the financial recovery of Wurttemberg. After the duke died, he was tried and sentenced to death by public hanging. Put on public display in a cage, it was expected that he would save himself by conversion, but he refused and went to the gallows reciting the *shema*.<sup>16</sup>

Meyer Amschel Rothschild (1743-1812) became friendly with William, later elector of Hesse-Cassel through their mutual interest in collecting old coins. This relationship set the Rothschild family on the path to fame and fortune. The sons of Meyer Amschel settled in England, Frankfurt, Paris, Vienna and Naples and so began an international operation on a large scale. The House of Rothschild became known as the sixth Great Power of Europe.<sup>17</sup>

The philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86) arrived in Berlin in 1743 at the age of 14. A modern German guidebook to Berlin claims that the history of literature in Berlin began on the day Mendelssohn arrived in Berlin, which was through the Rosenthal gate, the only one open to Jews and cattle.<sup>18</sup> Mendelssohn, a strictly Orthodox Jew, was an early promoter of the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) and made it his mission to integrate Jews into German culture. He believed that this would speed up their emancipation and make them full citizens.

The *Haskalah* led to conversions to Christianity on an epidemic scale. In Berlin, no less than 50% of Jews converted, including four of Mendelssohn's six children. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, only four of Mendelssohn's 56 descendants were still Jews.<sup>19</sup> The German Jewish writer Heinrich Heine also converted - he regarded it as his "entry ticket to European culture". However, he retained some affection for his Jewish heritage and commented that his conversion could not be honest since no Jew could believe any other Jew to be Divine.<sup>20</sup>

Conversion did not always produce the sought-after solution. Some converts found themselves rejected by both Jews and Christians; their descendants married other converts or descendants of converts, in a pattern that sometimes continued for two to three generations.<sup>21</sup>

Frederick II ('The Great', reigned 1740-1786) continued the business-friendly policies of his predecessors and enlarged the territory of Prussia by wars. In both these endeavours, he was assisted by wealthy Jews. The acquisition of territory added 170 000 Jews to his realm.<sup>22</sup> Frederick was tolerant towards the practice of the Jewish religion but

intolerant towards Jewish civil rights.<sup>23</sup> It was he who introduced the so-called "Jews' porcelain", whereby Jews were forced to buy porcelain on marrying, on the birth of a child and on the purchase of a house. They were forced to take whatever was available, and if they wanted to sell they could only do so outside Prussia.<sup>24</sup> (More than half a century later, the porcelain became valuable and those that had kept it made a healthy profit). In 1773, the Prussian Academy of Sciences elected Moses Mendelssohn to full membership, but Frederick refused his assent. Notwithstanding such discrimination, Frederick the Great was respected by Jews, probably because of his shielding them against anti-Jewish incitement.<sup>25</sup>

Around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, salons became the focal point of social and intellectual life in Berlin society. Those of Henrietta Herz, Rahel Varnagen and other Jews became places where Jews and Christians interacted. Nevertheless, Varnagen later complained that neither baptized nor unbaptized Jews were ever invited to the social functions of their Christian guests.<sup>26</sup> These salons were a short lived phenomenon. Of the eighteen best known salon hostesses in Berlin, all but one eventually converted, mostly long after their establishments had closed down.<sup>27</sup>

Rabbi Berel Wein views Mendelssohn as the father of Reform Judaism (something disputed by the Reform leadership).<sup>28</sup> Reform arose as an alternative to conversion, with its first Temple opening in 1810. The major driving force behind Reform Judaism was Abraham Geiger, who argued, *inter alia*, for a rejection of Talmudic Judaism, circumcision, the covering of heads during worship and Saturday services.

By the 1870s, Reform had become dominant in virtually all the major cities in Germany. Memoirs testify to the growing estrangement of Jews from their tradition. Victor Klemperer, who became a Protestant pastor, recalled that when his mother received a telegram from his father notifying her that he had been accepted for a position at the new Reform temple in Berlin, she immediately went and purchased an assortment of non-kosher cold meats. At home she tasted the meats and with a radiant expression on her face said, "This is what the others eat. Now we may eat it too".<sup>29</sup>

But Orthodoxy mounted a strong counter attack. Its major figure was Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808- 1888), who became the founder of what became known as Neo-Orthodoxy. Wrote Rabbi Wein: "Hirsch attacked Reform head on. He borrowed all of Reform's 'positive' aspects - education, social acceptance in manners and dress, and the veneer of Western culture - and integrated them into a thoroughly traditional, punctiliously observant Jewish community. He not only refused to compromise with Reform, he refused to associate with it."<sup>30</sup>

Initially, American Jews originated mostly from Germany. From 1830-60, Jewish immigration from Central Europe may have been as high as 200 000, raising the total Jewish population in America to

300 000 by 1870.<sup>31</sup> Poor economic conditions, in addition to antisemitism and discrimination, were contributory causes.

The ideas of the French Revolution and conquests of Napoleon had had an impact on the people of Europe. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the assimilation of Jews into German life progressed so rapidly that the historian Fritz Stern described it as possibly “one of the most spectacular social leaps in European history”.<sup>32</sup> At the beginning of the century 70% of Prussian Jewry (where most German Jews lived) had led marginal, insecure lives and many were wandering peddlers and beggars. By 1870, that figure had dropped to 5%. Three generations after Moses Mendelssohn, Jews were Germans in language, dress, and national sentiment.<sup>33</sup>

By 1870, Otto von Bismarck, after victories over Austria and France, had consolidated the thirty independent German states into one Reich, which became the most powerful nation on continental Europe. This led to the emancipation of the Jews, making every sphere of German life (except government) accessible to them. In practice, however, Jews were not appointed officers in the army or professors at universities, and at the social level they remained less than fully accepted.<sup>34</sup>

When, in 1871, Bismarck demanded large reparations from France, the French president protested that even had a beginning been made at the birth of Christ, such a sum could never have been brought together. “That” replied Bismarck (who was accompanied by the Jewish Berlin banker, Gerson Bleichroder) “is why I have brought with me as adviser one who begins to reckon his years with the creation of the world”.<sup>35</sup>

Bismarck pioneered Jewish emancipation in Germany and had made the memorable statement that the breeding of a “German stallion” and a “Jewish mare” would provide the country with its most valuable offspring.<sup>36</sup> He was also associated with several Jewish bankers whom he respected. However, by 1881 he was persuaded that antisemitism was an indispensable weapon in wooing lower middle class support and, while opposed to it, he took no action to stop it.<sup>37</sup> The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) wrote, “I have never met a German who was favourably inclined to the Jews”. Former US Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal, who wrote a book about Germans and Jews, remarks that even allowing for hyperbole, Nietzsche was essentially correct.<sup>38</sup>

Over 100 000 Jews fought for Germany during World War I and 12 000 lost their lives. Nevertheless, Jewish patriotism was questioned. In 1916, the war minister ordered a “Jew count” to prove that relatively fewer Jews were serving at the front and that relatively more Jews were shirkers. This “Jew count” led to an increase in antisemitism as it created the perception that the allegations must be valid. It turned out that the allegations were not valid, but the results were never published.<sup>39</sup>

Following Germany’s defeat, the Weimar Republic was established. Jews were strong

supporters of the Republic, and Walter Rathenau served as its foreign minister before being assassinated. Weimar adopted a democratic constitution and Jews were finally accorded full emancipation.

Jews made a significant and highly visible contribution to German life. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, they comprised approximately 1% of the German population but contributed 15% of the lawyers and 10% of the doctors. In Berlin, these percentages were much higher, with 30 – 40% of the doctors being Jewish.<sup>40</sup>

In business, Jews dominated such fields as textiles, department stores and private banking. Half the private banks were Jewish owned, and of the public banks hardly any were not under Jewish ownership or with at least several directors.<sup>41</sup> Jews helped organise the banks that today dominate the German economy. Industrialists included Emil Rathenau, founder of AEG, and the shipbuilder Albert Ballin, and Jews were the major owners of newspapers. Of the 25 richest Germans in 1909–11, 40% were Jewish or of Jewish descent.<sup>42</sup>

Amos Elon writes that much of what is remembered and admired today as the golden age of Weimar culture was created by German Jews. Major Jewish figures in German scientific and cultural life included Fritz Haber, Paul Ehrlich, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler in the sciences, Heinrich Heine, Max Born and Franz Kafka in literature and Gustav Mahler, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Arnold Schoenberg in music, amongst and many others.<sup>43</sup>

Einstein and Haber were friends, but whereas Einstein was a pacifist who hated German militancy and hoped that Germany would be defeated in World War I, Haber, a baptised Jew and put himself at the disposal of the war effort seeking to develop the ultimate weapon, poison gas. After the war, Haber developed the deadly gas Zyklon B. On this Fritz Stern comments, “The horror of Haber’s involvement with the gas that later murdered millions, including friends and distant relatives, beggars description”.<sup>44</sup>

Shortly after Hitler came to power, it became impossible for Jews to be employed at universities. In 1934, the Nazi minister of education, Bernhard Rust, visited the University of Gottingen, a world renowned centre of advanced physics and mathematics. At a banquet, Rust sat next to the famous mathematician David Hilbert and asked whether the institute had suffered from the expulsion of the “Jews and their friends”. Hilbert answered: “Suffered? It hasn’t suffered, Herr Minister. It no longer exists”.<sup>45</sup> Elon writes that the hierarchical structure of universities facilitated their total submission to Nazism. Writing after a visit in 1965 he was dismayed even then by the ‘grovelling’ and ‘submissiveness’ of students.<sup>46</sup>

The Nuremberg laws adopted in 1935 stripped Jews of citizenship rights and forbade marriage and sexual relationships between Jews and Aryans. A further 13 supplementary laws would subsequently outlaw Jewish participation in national life almost



completely.<sup>47</sup>

Most historians agree that there was no “big bang” theory for the origins of the Final Solution and believe that the decision-making process was prolonged and incremental.<sup>48</sup> Initially, emigration was the favoured solution to the “Jewish problem” and even Palestine had been considered as a possible destination. By 1938, Hitler was moving away from emigration towards a territorial resettlement (Madagascar was considered but the notion ultimately proved unworkable).<sup>49</sup>

Emigration as a policy to rid Germany of its Jews failed. Only one quarter of Jews living in Germany in 1933 had emigrated by October 1938. In 1937, Adolf Eichmann had suggested pogroms as the most effective way of speeding up emigration. On 7 November 1938, the murder of a German diplomat in Paris by a desperate seventeen year-old Polish Jew, Herschel Grynszpan (whose parents were amongst 17 000 ex-Polish Jews who the Germans dumped on the Polish border without food or water) provided the Nazis with the perfect pretext.<sup>50</sup> What followed on 9-10 November was *Kristallnacht*, a state-sanctioned and organised pogrom by the Nazi regime against its Jewish citizens. It resulted in the destruction of some 100 synagogues, damage to several hundred others and the destruction of about 8 000 Jewish shops. Around 100 Jews were murdered, 30 000 were sent to concentration camps and many committed suicide.<sup>51</sup>

In the months following the June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, the vague vision of implied genocide of the Jews evolved into “the Final Solution to the Jewish question”. Most scholars are of the view that no decision or order for the murder of all Soviet Jews had been given before the invasion.<sup>52</sup> By the end of October 1941, the conception of the Final Solution had taken shape - the Jews of Europe were to be deported to secret camps designed to perpetrate mass murder.

At the Wannsee Conference, held on 20 January 1942, the extermination of European Jewry became official state policy. Here, the organizational and technical details of the “Final Solution” were discussed and decided. It was convened by Reinhard Heydrich and attended by 15 senior Nazi officials – eight of whom held doctorates. After Wannsee, those who had attended the conference could have had no doubt about the scope of the policy – the killing of every Jew in Europe.<sup>53</sup>

By the time of the conference, gassings had already commenced at Chelmo and killings on the Russian front had been in progress since June 1941. Heydrich desired obedience to his leadership in the work of extermination and decided that it would be achieved by a conference with all would-be pretenders to the title of “Commander of the Final Solution”.<sup>54</sup> Heydrich reiterated on authority from Goering to coordinate – without regard to geographic boundaries – a Final Solution to the Jewish question. The conference lasted 90 minutes and was followed by lunch overlooking the lake and yacht club.<sup>55</sup>

Eichmann prepared the minutes but at Heydrich’s

instruction did not include details of the discussion in them. At his trial in Jerusalem, Eichmann testified as follows: “...they spoke about methods of killing, about liquidation, about extermination”. Eichmann recalled that Heydrich “[had] expected considerable stumbling blocks and difficulties”. Instead he had secured “...an agreement which had assumed a form which had not been expected”.<sup>56</sup>

The source of Hitler’s hatred of Jews is a mystery, despite numerous biographies. There is no evidence that he ever had a bad experience with Jews. A Jewish doctor had tried hard to save his mother’s life and a Jewish officer, Lieutenant Hugo Gutmann, went to considerable lengths to secure Hitler an Iron Cross for bravery during World War I, despite reservations from the divisional commander. Gutmann not only convinced him but personally affixed the medal to Hitler’s chest.<sup>57</sup>

In his book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Daniel Goldhagen argues that the particularly unique and virulent form of German antisemitism, which was ‘eliminationist’ and ‘exterminationist’ in nature, was what enabled the Holocaust to happen. The perpetrators were ordinary Germans, of whom about 100 000 played an active role. They did so ‘willingly’ and ‘zealously’ because they were brought up to hate Jews. It was these circumstances that allowed Hitler to carry out the Final Solution.<sup>58</sup>

Goldhagen’s chief opponent in this debate is Christopher Browning, who was influenced by the experiments conducted by Stanley Milgram. The latter found that most people will follow orders even if they find them reprehensible. Browning argued that the perpetrators killed out of obedience to authority and peer pressure, not blood lust or primal hatred.<sup>59</sup> The genocidal commitment of the regime was not shared by “ordinary Germans”, he claims, quoting Kershaw’s memorable phrase: “the road to Auschwitz was built by hatred, but paved with indifference”.<sup>60</sup>

At the community’s peak in 1933, 564 000 Jews lived in Germany. During first six years of Nazi rule, around 350,000 emigrated, leaving some 214 000 by 1939. Of these, 180,000 perished. Possibly 19 000 remained alive in Germany at the end of the war, which would mean that approximately 15 000 left after the war began.

In the 65 years since 1945, significant improvements in German-Jewish relations have taken place.

Since the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952, reparations of over €25 billion have been paid to victims of Nazi persecution living in Israel.<sup>61</sup> This deal was extremely controversial in Israel and met with strong opposition, eventually being approved by the Knesset by 61 votes to 50. Menachem Begin, who led the opposition against any deal with Germany, was suspended for three months from the Knesset due to “his unruly and emotional behaviour” during the debate.<sup>62</sup>

In 1965, West Germany and Israel established diplomatic relations, which led to Egypt breaking off relations with West Germany. In 2008, Chancellor

Angela Merkel visited Israel and in a speech to the Knesset said that “The Shoah fills us Germans with shame. I bow before the victims. I bow before the survivors”. In the same speech she added: “Israel’s security is non-negotiable”.<sup>63</sup> Today Germany is Israel’s third largest trading partner after the USA and China.

Of the 19 000 Jews who survived the war in Germany, 14 000 were married to a non Jewish partner and the rest were hidden.<sup>64</sup> Approximately 11 000 returned from exile, some of these leaving again later.<sup>65</sup> Of the Displaced Persons, approximately 6–8000 joined the re-established Jewish communities. Most were aged pensioners, half-Jews or those married to non-Jews. As Howard Sachar writes, “Few appeared to be likely material for a communal revival”.<sup>66</sup>

The assumption after World War II that Jews would not resettle in Germany has not proved to be correct. In 1950, with West German government financial support, the Central Council for Jews in Germany was established and this became German Jewry’s main representative body. Prior to unification in 1990, approximately 20 000 Jews lived in Germany.<sup>67</sup> Since unification, there has been a massive immigration from the former Soviet Union as a result of liberal German immigration policies, and this revitalizing Jewish community life in Germany.

In 2007 there were 107 Jewish communities in Germany, numbering 107 000 individuals. Berlin, Frankfurt and Munich are the largest communities. It is estimated that Jews who are not affiliated with the organized community number about 90 000.<sup>68</sup>

Ignatz Bubis, former president of the Central Council, entitled his 1993 autobiography *I am a German Citizen of the Jewish Faith*. However, in a 1999 interview just before his death, he expressed his pessimism about Jewish life in Germany and chose to be buried in Israel. Charlotte Knobloch, the last of the Holocaust survivors to chair the Central Council (2006–2010), is more optimistic: “For me, the point about immigration is that the Jewish community in Germany should blossom as it did before Nazi times. I want to experience the revival of Judaism as it was before 1933, which made such a cultural and intellectual contribution for the country. I hope that Germany can again be proud. It would be good if the population could become aware that the existence of Jews in Germany could help win back Germany’s reputation in the world”.<sup>69</sup>

The treatment of Jewish Germans can be regarded as a barometer of national democratic and humane values. Otto Schilly, former Interior Minister, said, “The immigration into the Jewish congregations is, not least, a considerable demonstration of trust in the stability of German democracy and in the openness of our society”.<sup>70</sup>

In the last two decades, significant funds have been spent on new synagogues, community centres and Jewish museums. In 2003 a law passed contained a government pledge of €5m per annum for the building of further Jewish communities in Germany.<sup>71</sup>

## Some Leading Centres of German Jewry Today

Mainz, Worms and Speyer, situated along the Rhine, were the leading Jewish communities in medieval Germany. In **Mainz**, a new synagogue and community centre is almost complete. The design contains the letters of the Hebrew word *Kedusha*.<sup>72</sup> An old German man who sees us taking an interest in the building tells us that when he was eight years old in 1938, he witnessed the burning of the original synagogue on this site.

The Mainz Jewish community numbers around 1,300.<sup>73</sup> Mainz has a rabbi and services are held in a synagogue inside the community centre.

The Jewish cemetery in **Worms** contains approximately 3000 graves,<sup>74</sup> dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and is the oldest in Europe.<sup>75</sup> The two most famous tombstones are those of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (died 1298) and Alexander ben Salmon Wimpfen. Rabbi Meir was imprisoned and refused to allow the Jewish community to pay the ransom in order to discourage the repeated use of this tactic. Fourteen years after his death Wimpfen, a wealthy merchant, paid the ransom for his remains on the condition that he be buried next to him – a condition which was honoured.

The Worms synagogue can be found on the *Judengasse* (Jewish alley) in the Jewish Quarter. First built in 1034, it has been destroyed and rebuilt a number of times. The latest destruction took place in the years 1938–42, but the building was reconstructed in 1961. A *mikve*, built in 1184, is one of the oldest in existence. Worms’ Jewish community numbers about 400 and services are held every second week.

Rashi Chapel, completed in 1623/24, is a yeshiva or study room named in honour of Rashi, who studied in the yeshiva in Worms around 1060. At the one end of the room is a stone referred to as the Rashi Chair, from which, legend has it, Rashi lectured. The official booklet discounts this legend on the basis that the chair cannot be older than the Yeshiva.<sup>76</sup> Rashi House was used as a dance and wedding hall and today serves as a Jewish museum and archive.

In the Jewish Quarter of **Speyer** is a complex containing the ruins of a synagogue and a *mikve*. The synagogue was consecrated in 1104 and its eastern wall is reasonably well preserved. An annex was constructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, which the women used as their prayer room. Two of the original six slots enabling the women to listen to services still exist. The *mikve*, first mentioned in 1128, is well preserved and is the oldest north of the Alps.<sup>77</sup>

There are approximately 130 Jews living in Speyer and a synagogue is being built. The woman on duty is a Christian German, who told the author she had been to Cape Town, where she visited two synagogues. A board on the site reads, “More than 50 years after the downfall of the National Socialist dictatorship, in 1996, Eastern European Jewish immigrants re-established a Jewish community in Speyer”.

**Berlin** has the largest Jewish population in

Germany, numbering approximately 25 000. Although the founding of the modern Jewish community of Berlin dates back to 1671, the history of Berlin Jewry is almost as old as the city itself. Jews are first mentioned in a 1295 letter from the Berlin local council forbidding wool merchants from supplying Jews with wool yarn. Jews were regularly expelled from Berlin and in 1571 were expelled 'forever'.<sup>78</sup>

The Jewish Museum was designed by the architect Daniel Libeskind, who called his design "Between the Lines". The floor plan, which has a zig-zag layout resembles a broken Magen David and is intersected by a single straight line. The intersection points are marked by 'voids' – empty spaces that run the entire length of the building and represent the absence of Jews from German society. A piano donated by Tessa Uys is on display. It was brought to South Africa by her mother when she left Germany in 1936. It was only after her mother's death that Uys discovered that she had been Jewish.

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was completed in 2005. It consists of 2711 grey coloured concrete *stelae* (blocks) each measuring 0.95 metres in width by 2.38 metres in length but of different heights. It is unusual in that it has no symbolic significance or relationship to the number of victims. Underground is a museum, one of whose exhibits comprises fifteen personal accounts from letters and diaries of victims.

The Jewish Community Centre is located in the wealthy neighbourhood of Charlottenberg in western Berlin. Inside is Berlin's oldest kosher restaurant, where Friday night dinner is available. Around the corner is Berlin's main Orthodox synagogue at *Joachimstaler Strasse*.

Berlin's first synagogue was consecrated in what became East Berlin in 1714. Permission to build was conditional on the building not exceeding the height of the surrounding houses. The ground floor was lowered to below ground level, which made the requirement to separate men and women architecturally possible. With the consecration of the New Synagogue in Oranienstrasse in 1866, this synagogue became known as the Old Synagogue. It survived *Kristallnacht* but was destroyed by Allied bombing in 1945. In 2000, the foundations were uncovered and can be seen today.

The New Synagogue is of Moorish design and was consecrated in the presence of the Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck. It was the largest synagogue in Germany and could seat 3000 congregants. On *Kristallnacht*, the district police chief Wilhelm Krutzfeld managed to stop the SA from setting fire to more than the men's vestibule. He was punished for his action by being transferred and in 1943 went into early retirement. In 1995, a plaque to commemorate his bravery was put up on the façade of the synagogue. Allied bombing raids in 1943 severely damaged the building and in 1958 the destroyed main hall of the synagogue was demolished. The reason for this is still not known. The synagogue restoration was completed in 1995 but the main hall

was not rebuilt. In 1998, a small prayer room was opened for egalitarian services.<sup>79</sup>

The "Women's Block" commemorates the women's protest and is a sculpture of human figures and Jewish symbols. On 27 February 1943, the SS rounded up 7000 Jewish men, mostly married to Christian women, in preparation for deportation to Auschwitz. Between 28 February and 11 March, several hundred women successfully demonstrated for their release. This protest was the only large scale protest by Germans on behalf of Jews.<sup>80</sup>

In Berlin and elsewhere in Germany, brass plates providing the names and biographical details of Nazi victims are set into the pavements where they once lived.

The oldest cemetery for Jews in Berlin was founded in 1671 and used until 1827. It once contained over 12 000 graves until it was destroyed by the Gestapo in 1943. The single gravestone standing in the cemetery today marks the spot where Moses Mendelssohn was buried.

At Bebel Platz, in 1933, some 25000 books were burnt by the Nazis. A monument commemorates this event. It is located below ground level and consists of empty shelves covered by glass at ground level. Heine, a German Jew who converted to Christianity, predicted accurately, "Where books are burned, human beings will be burned too".<sup>81</sup>

The House of the Wannsee Conference, in the exclusive Berlin suburb of Wannsee, houses an exhibition of the Final Solution. The room in which the conference was held contains the minutes.

**Munich** is where Hitler gained control of the Nazi Party in 1921 and unsuccessfully tried to seize power in 1923, and was where 11 Israeli athletes were murdered in 1972.

The first reference to Jews living in Munich is in 1229, when a Jew called Abraham from Munich appeared as a witness at a Regensburg trial. In the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Munich appears to have had a sizable Jewish community; the Jews lived in their own quarter and possessed a synagogue, a *mikve* and a hospital.<sup>82</sup>

Dachau Concentration Camp is 16 kilometres from Munich. Opened in 1933, it was the first formal concentration camp. Over 200 000 prisoners passed through this camp and 40 000 died.<sup>83</sup> At the entrance appear the words common to other camps "*Arbeit Macht Frei*". This camp had gas chambers, but for unknown reasons these were never used. It was remarked that certainly pity paid no part. A memorial to the Jewish victims has been built.

The Menorah Memorial marks the spot where Munich's main synagogue was destroyed on *Kristallnacht*. On 9 November 2006, a modern synagogue was consecrated. Built of glass and steel, the base stone (similar to the Jerusalem stone of the Kotel) symbolises the Temple whereas the top represents the tent that housed the Tabernacle. An underground passage leads from the Community Centre to the synagogue and contains the names of the 4500 Munich Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust. This complex also houses the Jewish



Museum of Munich.

Munich's Jewish population is approximately 10 000.

A Jewish community has existed in **Frankfurt** since at least the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, when a few Jewish merchants from Worms settled in the city.<sup>84</sup> In 1462, Jews were confined to live in a ghetto, which originally contained 110 inhabitants. By 1743, Frankfurt was perhaps the most oppressive place for Jews in Western Europe – the ghetto contained 3000, Jews equivalent to more than one person per square metre.<sup>85</sup> The ghetto was dissolved in 1796 under the influence of the French Revolution.

The *Judengasse*'s most famous resident was Mayer Amschel Rothschild. Frankfurt is the financial capital of Germany but today there are apparently no more Jewish bankers in Frankfurt.<sup>86</sup>

The Museum *Judengasse* shows excavations from the *Judengasse*, which include the foundation walls of five houses, two *mikves*, two wells and a canal. In 1987, the ground was being prepared for a new building when these remains were discovered.<sup>87</sup>

The Frankfurt Jewish cemetery contains burials from 1272 and was used until 1828. There were more than 6000 gravestones, but two-thirds were destroyed by the Nazis. The enclosing wall of the cemetery contains a memorial to the Jews of Frankfurt murdered during the Holocaust - 11000 little blocks each bearing the name, date of birth, date of death and place of death.<sup>88</sup>

The Jewish Museum in Frankfurt exhibits Frankfurt's Jewish history. Its highlight is the model of the Frankfurt *Judengasse*, comprising 194 buildings. The Westend synagogue was the only synagogue in Frankfurt to survive *Kristallnacht*. Before the war, this was a Reform synagogue but today it is Orthodox.

The Jewish population of Frankfurt is approximately 10,000.

In April 1979 the historian Fritz Stern and the philosopher Raymond Aron were walking in Berlin. As they passed some bombed out ruins, Aron turned to Stern and said, "It could have been Germany's century".<sup>89</sup>

German Jews desperately wanted to be Germans, a desire not reciprocated. When Erich Maria Remarque, the exiled German author of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, was asked whether he missed Germany he answered, "Why should I? I'm not Jewish".<sup>90</sup>

A survivor, Arthur Eloesser, wrote, "We Jews, especially we who were justified to consider ourselves quite assimilated have, in the face of so many strokes of misfortune, the one compensation – the happy insight that it has enabled us to rediscover ourselves as Jews...to renew the long buried roots of our history".<sup>91</sup>

To Germany, a vibrant Jewish community is important in order to achieve reconciliation with its past. The climate in the country today is such that few of the current generation would appear to be "sitting on their suitcases". They would agree with Ben-Gurion's assessment that "the Germany of Adolf

Hitler is no more".<sup>92</sup>

Could it be that the Jews from the former Soviet Union, whose heritage is Ashkenaz, will help rebuild a proud and vibrant Jewish community in Germany? The future will be fascinating to watch unfold.

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Jewish friends  
a happy Pesach  
Chag Sameach



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# ANTISEMITISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

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Chuck Volpe

I wish to approach the matter of the delegitimation of Israel in a slightly different way.

Firstly, the metaphor of 'a trial' is an appropriate one to describe the structure of the delegitimation project - Israel is the defendant in the dock, its enemies are the prosecutors, the venue is the court of Western public opinion. Like the protagonist in Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*, Israel faces accusations that are multifarious and indeterminate and hence difficult to counter. There is a sense that the verdict has been reached even before evidence is led; and no matter what the evidence, nothing can undo the guilty verdict, for the sin of which Israel is accused is primal, original, and existential. In this bizarre forum, all that is clear and real is the venom behind the charges.

Secondly, the delegitimation of Israel has its counterpart in the Christian delegitimation of the religious Jew in the Middle Ages. Delegitimation in this sense punished the 'stubborn' Jewish rejection of Christian revelation by treating Jews as outcasts from the Christian communion and consequently from the moral community. In quite a literal sense, the Jew was regarded as being 'outside the law' - in this case the moral law - thus denying him full moral consideration. The implications of this should not be missed. Denying people 'full moral consideration' means being able to treat them as less than human; it is to strip them of those aspects of their humanity which would 'stay our hand' in dealing with them. It is upon perceptions such as this that the death camps were built.

The delegitimation of Jews as individuals in the post-Holocaust world is anathema. No decent person would want to be associated with such a project. But antisemitism is protean in its nature and has found another form in which to express its poison, namely, in the delegitimation of the Jewish collective. The antisemite is reborn as an anti-Zionist, a convenient transfiguration since gives cover to his Jew-hatred. The desire to destroy Jews is reconfigured as the desire to destroy or dismantle the Jewish State. The alleged risk to global peace and security is no longer the 'Jewish peril' but the 'Israeli peril'. The assumption is that Israel must be eradicated, either by violence as Ahmadinejad would do, or peacefully,

as some in the Liberal Left would prefer. No matter how it comes about, its dissolution is regarded as imperative and inevitable.

It is crucial to understand that this delegitimation project is a clear and serious threat to Israel. Talking Israel down is taking Israel down. The cumulative effects on Israel's reputation of such words and expressions as 'shitty', 'Nazi', 'racist', 'apartheid', 'ethnic cleanser', 'occupier', 'war criminal', 'violated international law', 'use of disproportionate force', 'liability' etc. have been devastating. No other state in the world is talked about in such terms.

## How to respond?

It is pointless directing ones efforts towards those who would destroy Israel by violence - groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran. One cannot negotiate with those who want you dead. These enemies must be met in their own currency - with military force. In respect of those who are less militant - the Liberal-Left, multiculturalists and similar ideologues - the chance of persuasion by reasoned argument is small in the face of their strongly-held ideological beliefs. Occasionally, perseverance does pay off, for, like the early morning mist, ideology can be dissolved when exposed to the harsh light of truth. But this should not be our main focus.

The target of our efforts must be the court of Western public opinion. While this court is notoriously fickle and simplistic, with no judge to explain and moderate the verdict; where nuances are lost and impressions are everything; and where, more often than not the outcome depends on the rhetorical cleverness of the opponents, we have no choice but to make the best case we can. We must work to retain our supporters, to swing those who are as yet undecided and ensure that Jews around the world continue to believe in the Zionist dream and the future of the Jewish people.

## Claim: "Israel is not free, is not a democracy and abuses human rights"

In its report *Freedom in the World 2010* Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization that supports democratic change, monitors freedom, and advocates for democracy and human rights, 194 countries and 14 select territories were surveyed. Nine countries judged to have the worst human rights conditions were: Burma, Equatorial Guinea,

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Eritrea, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as one territory, Tibet, whose inhabitants suffer similarly intense repression. Within these entities, 'state control over daily life is pervasive, independent organizations and political opposition are banned or suppressed, and fear of retribution for independent thought and action is ubiquitous.'

Another eight countries appear near the bottom of Freedom House's ratings scale: Belarus, Chad, China, Cuba, Guinea, Laos, Saudi Arabia, and Syria; included are two territories - South Ossetia and Western Sahara. These countries and territories 'offer very limited scope for private discussion while severely suppressing opposition political activity, impeding independent organizing, and censoring or punishing criticism of the state.'

Israel is noticeably absent from this list. In fact, Israel is the only country in the Middle East deemed by Freedom House to be classified as 'Free'. Most Middle Eastern countries are deemed 'Not Free', with a few deemed to be 'Partly Free'. These facts demand an answer to the question: why is Israel the primary focus of those concerned about freedom, democracy and human rights?

### **The tyranny of ideology**

The Liberal Left, as represented in certain parts of academia and the media, have since 1990 been struggling to replace their vision of utopia which disappeared with the fall of the Soviet Union and communism. Unlike Fascists who were forced to come to terms with their ideology when the death camps were opened after the Second World War, the Left never had to come to terms with their blindness to the horrors of communism in the same way. For this reason they were able to replace (quite seamlessly) one set of ideological fantasies with another. Just as their loathing of Western society and humanist values blinded them to the horrors of communism, so have they become blind to the profoundly antidemocratic politics of the Arab world. They blithely overlook the abuse of women and homosexuals, deride secularism, pour scorn on enlightenment values, and recast religious terrorism as the direct result of Western brutality. They will support any group that stands in opposition to the West, and as a result have become 'fellow travellers' with some of the world's most loathsome ideologies and regimes.

Frankly, this is no mean feat given the fact that these ideologies are open to view and unequivocal regarding their nature. Jew-hatred in the mainstream Arab media is peddled openly, indeed ostentatiously, every day of the week. It's all there - the cartoons of Jews portrayed as demons and murderers, depicted as the origin of all evil and corruption and the authors of an unrelenting conspiracy to destroy Muslim society in order to eventually take over the world (confirming The Protocols of the Elders of Zion). Judaism is shown as a sinister and immoral religion based on cabals and blood rituals. This unrelenting campaign to delegitimise Israel as the Jewish state

and the Jews as a people is dehumanising in the extreme.

Indeed it goes further. Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas explicitly call for the obliteration and destruction of all Jews. Surely the similitude to the Nazi regime - the absolute low of human degradation - should draw some condemnation from the 'humanistic' Left. Apparently not.

### **Israel is an apartheid or racist regime**

In comparing Israel to apartheid South Africa, or even to Nazi Germany, the impression is created that Israel no more 'deserves' to exist as a state than the Third Reich or apartheid-era South Africa did.

Any cursory study of apartheid South Africa and Israel today would yield the conclusion that the two simply do not resemble one another. Labelling Israel an apartheid state reflects less on Israel than on those who would so delegitimise it. The latter show themselves to be historically illiterate, guilty of bias and intellectually dishonest.

Briefly, an apartheid Israel would not allow Moslems to vote; the country's literary prize would never have gone to an Arab; its universities would not be open to Arab students; anti-Israeli human rights organisations would not be allowed to operate; hostile Palestinian authors such as Edward Said would not be translated into Hebrew; and its Supreme Court would not defend the human rights of Israeli Arabs and Palestinians against army interventions or considerations of national security.

It is as well to consider that the apartheid analogy with Zionism originated as part of the Soviet 'anti-imperialist' policy in the 1960s, in particular after the embarrassing defeat of the Soviet Union's Arab clients in the Six-Day War. This neo-Stalinist fabrication was part of a Soviet disinformation policy, which included accusations that the Zionists had collaborated with the Nazis in implementing the Holocaust. Furthermore, the notion of a 'chosen people' was said to imply a call by the Jewish God to rule over colonised people, i.e. the Arabs. Arab governments lost no time in assimilating these horrendous fabrications to their own propaganda. Zionism was merged with 'racism', 'imperialism', 'colonialism' and 'militarism' to form a nexus of evil in a Manichaean worldview that appealed strongly to those with a grievance. Of course, antisemitic stereotypes served as an impelling catalyst to this noxious mixture. From the outset, the intention was to delegitimise, isolate and reduce Israel to pariah status. Indeed, it has provided the basis for the recent academic and trade boycott resolutions in the United Kingdom, Canada Norway and South Africa, not to mention the infamous Durban UN World Conference against Racism in 2001.

If one seriously wishes to find an analogy to apartheid in the Middle East, one would do well to look at some Arab states in their treatment of women, other religions, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities (for example, the way Palestinians have been treated by Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and some of the Gulf

states).

The Liberal Left as is evident, is unperturbed by these facts. Having supported the minting of false coin during communist times, they have no difficulty in peddling some of its remnant forms in the present.

### **The moral requirement of 'universalizability'**

"A moral imperative must be applicable to everyone" says the 18<sup>th</sup> Century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. If "thou shalt not kill", for example, is to become a moral law it must apply to everyone. The same applies to all moral laws - they must be applied universally or not at all. In other words, consistency is required with respect to the application of moral principles.

This creates a problem for those who would treat Israel differently to other nations - for example, to deny Jews national determination while upholding it for other comparable peoples; to affirm international law but not in Israel's case; to be outraged by the Jewish nature of the State of Israel, but to be untroubled by the Islamic nature of Iran or Saudi Arabia; to regard as racist the social inequalities between Jew and Arab in Israel, while being indifferent to the legal inequalities between Muslim and non-Muslim in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim states; to regard Jewish nationalism (that is, Zionism) as uniquely pernicious amongst all the world's nationalisms; to be reluctant to take a position on the Chinese occupation of Tibet or the Russian actions in Chechnya, while holding the Israeli occupation of the West Bank an indefensible evil of global consequence; to excoriate alleged racist sentiments among Israelis but to refuse to acknowledge the virulent racist themes towards Jews in much of Arab nationalist discourse. What is evident is that these voices are not speaking the language of morals but rather indulging in ideological discourse whose goal is clearly the delegitimation of Israel. In any court of decency, this is unacceptable. Their hypocrisy must be exposed, their giddy self-righteousness shown to be no more than narcissism, their unwillingness to take on the real totalitarian human-rights violators nothing more than cowardice.

### **How might Israel best assist your organization in upgrading its response to the assault on Israel's legitimacy?**

Jews in the Diaspora overwhelmingly believe in the idea of Israel as the Jewish state, that is, a state for all Jews including those in the Diaspora. Exactly what this means has been debated since at least the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and is still not resolved. But while the jury is still out on the intellectual definition of the Jewish state, the emotional ties to Israel are intact and strong.

At a time when Israel's very legitimacy is being questioned it is vital for Israel to define itself in some vital aspects. In particular, what are its borders - the Green Line or the Jordan River? What sort of state is it to be - democratic or otherwise? If Israel defines

its border along the Green line, its Jewish and democratic status is guaranteed; if the Jordan River becomes the border, either its Jewish status or its democratic status is compromised. The lack of clarity on these issues fuels the delegitimation project and creates uncertainty on the part of good people - Jews and non-Jews - who wish Israel well and support its cause.

Gaza is no longer 'occupied' but the West Bank - a territory which exists 'in limbo' pending an exchange of land for peace in a final settlement - continues to fuel calls to end the 'occupation'. It is this so-called 'occupation' that is central to the delegitimation campaign. This brings us to the issue of the settlements. While the settlements remain, it is very difficult to distinguish between Israel's vital security needs and the impression that it is involved in a 'land grab'. Furthermore, the cost of the settlements and the exigencies required to protect them from the native Arab population creates an enormous financial burden on the state as well as the impression that 'separate development' (as in apartheid) is taking place. The many social problems - education, poverty, etc. from which the country suffers - is possibly the price Israel is paying for the diversion of funds to the West Bank. As important is the corrosive aspect of the occupation on what could be termed 'Israel's soul'.

These are difficult issues to grapple with, but if we do not do so now and make the necessary decision, the future will be placed in the hands of other forces over which we have much less control.

The logo for KINGRA, featuring the word in a bold, stylized, blocky font with a slight shadow effect.

*Wishing  
all our  
Jewish Friends  
a  
Happy Passover*

# HOLOCAUST, HISTORY AND MEMORABILIA: THE SAJBD CAPE COUNCIL AND THE PRESERVATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH PAST

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Gwynne Schrire

Despite the losses incurred through the centuries from pogroms, persecutions, book burnings and looting, Jews have always treasured their religious artefacts and the Cape Town Jewish community is no exception. Since the 1940s, their members had collected such articles, which were donated to the Jewish Museum when it was established in 1958. In 2000, this museum was replaced by the ultra-modern South African Jewish Museum, a major tourist attraction, with a different focus and interactive high-tech attractions. Earlier items belonging to its predecessor no longer considered suitable were carefully packed and put into storage.

In 2008 the Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council), as trustees of the former Jewish Museum, suddenly found itself in possession of a proud collection of religious, historical and cultural items. As one of the Board's functions is "enriching and maintaining Jewish life through cultural and educational programmes", the Cape Council, under its then chairman Owen Futeran, willingly agreed to take on the added responsibility. A special cultural department was duly established under the treasurer Joe Fintz and deputy director Gwynne Robins [author of this article – she writes for *Jewish Affairs* under her maiden name] to take on the curatorship of this inheritance. With the assistance and specialist knowledge of Jeff Fine, Judaica specialist and curator of the Johannesburg Jewish Museum, these were sorted and since 2010 are on display in specially built cabinets in the Samson Centre.

The original Cape Town Jewish Museum was opened on 3 August, 1958. In his opening speech its founder, Dr Louis Mirvish, said: "We approached the Board of Deputies for help... we did not manage to make any progress. We could not manage to make any impression on those Gentlemen in those days. Then a year or two ago, things did start moving at last... and the Board realised that the Museum was a worth-while venture and they voted us the sum of £500."<sup>1</sup> In fairness to the Cape Board, the lack of progress had not been their fault and three years earlier its Chairman, Justice David Cohen, had stated

that arrangements were being made to establish such a museum.<sup>2</sup> Continued Dr Mirvish:

Every generation feels impelled to re-interpret the past afresh, and in doing so we stamp it with our own problems and pre-occupations. That is why the study of history is more than an academic subject- the story of the past is pregnant with the doings of today.... But the records of the past must be preserved and treasured. I think that our Jewish community in Cape Town has risen to the occasion and has decided to value its treasures in the correct spirit.<sup>3</sup>

The existence of museums to preserve its community's treasures dates back long before Biblical times. Archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley wrote that the treasury of Sumerian temples in Ur (c.2300 BCE) were regular museums of antiquities.<sup>4</sup> If they contained idols from Abraham's father's workshop, these have not been recorded, but clay tablets have been unearthed describing the museum built by Babylonian Princess Bel-Shari Nannar in 550 BCE.<sup>5</sup>

Bel-Shari Nannar was the sister of Prince Belshazzar, son of Nabonidus (not Nebuchadnezzar), last king of Babylon - modern-day Iraq. It was for Belshazzar that Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall while the Prince's one thousand guests ate and drank wine out of gold and silver vessels looted by the Babylonians from the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> (The Tanach states that Belshazzar drank as much wine as his thousand guests!) The oldest object in the princess's collection was already 1500 years old - an inscribed arm from a large statue of King Shulgi<sup>7</sup> of Ur, from 2058 BCE. She also owned an ancient mace head, a foundation cone from 2000 BCE, school children's slates and tablets with old Sumerian text, even a catalogue label.<sup>8</sup> Their father King Nabonidus died in 539 BCE soon after his kingdom was conquered by Cyrus, the ruler who let the Children of Israel, who lived by the waters of Babylon and had not forgotten Jerusalem, return to their homeland.

Six hundred years earlier the Elamite kings in Susa - modern-day Iran - had an underground museum where they preserved relics of earlier eras – stamps and cylinder seals imported from Eastern Iran which were already more than two thousand years old as well as old axe heads. These museum pieces were kept to reinforce the ruler's claim to descent from the wife of the first Elamite king 800 years earlier, rather

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like the family idols that Rachel stole from her father Laban.<sup>9</sup> Under Mesopotamian law, someone could claim most of the family estate if they possessed their household gods so that possession of such items would ensure that both Jacob and the Elamite kings held legal title to inherit.

Art critic Natalie Knight had written that “a visit to the Jewish Museum in Cape Town will show examples of the ritual objects such as candlesticks, menorahs and magnificently illustrated books, all of which bind Jews culturally to their past.”<sup>10</sup> Thus the Cape Council, having inherited these objects which do indeed bind our community culturally to its past, has also become the heirs to that past.

What were these objects? When the door of the storeroom above the Ladies Gallery in the Gardens Shul was opened, Robins found an artistic, religious, historical and cultural treasure house. The Cape Council’s collection cannot boast of anything quite as old as those in the collections of the Babylonian princess or the Elamite kings, but its oldest holdings are clay lamps and pottery dating back fully two thousand years. There is further a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Century fluted glass jar and a thousand-year-old limestone bench-style *chanukiyah*. All these are from the Holy Land.

But then the record of the Babylonians and Elamites as the first collectors themselves pales into insignificance when compared to the anonymous Australopithecine art enthusiasts from Gauteng who found a 260-gram red jasperite stone that looks remarkably like a human face and carried it 32 km to their cave in Makapansgat north of Pretoria some two to three million years ago.<sup>11</sup> The only way that large pebble face could have got into that cave was if some Australopithecine collectors had carried it in.<sup>12</sup> Once again, Africans did it first.

But the Cape Council does have something that travelled much further than 32 km. These are silver *rimonim* and the bottom of a spice container that was given by Bokharan Jews to *landsleit* who established a congregation in Oranienburg, Russia, near the Kazakhstan border. There was no electricity in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bokharan synagogues, so the *rimonim* are hinged to enable a candle to be inserted in a special holder inside to provide light for the Torah reading. When Michael Eliasoff, the last Jew of this group in Oranienberg, returned to Bokhara and then moved to Jerusalem around 1880, he took these cherished objects with him. Later, he moved to England, finally settling, together with the *rimonim* and *bessamim* box, in Upington in the 1920s. In 1974 his son, HM Elias, donated them to the Museum, still wrapped in old scarves, and they have ended their journey in the Samson Centre.

The most moving items found were the objects responsible for the establishment of the Jewish Museum itself. These came from the vast hoards of ceremonial silver and other religious artefacts looted by the Nazis from European synagogues and homes and recovered by the Allies. Some of these sacred articles were discovered in salt mines and castles, others squashed into ammunition boxes on trains to

Switzerland where they were to be melted down to make coins.<sup>13</sup>

The US Army, as part of the ‘Jewish Reconstruction’ programme of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organisation, decided to distribute these to Jewish communities around the world and allocated 5% to South African synagogues to be disbursed by the Jewish Board of Deputies.<sup>14</sup> A few items were received in 1950 while the rest arrived at the end of January, 1951.<sup>15</sup>

An undated, anonymous and very touching report from the National Jewish Board of Deputies representative who cleared the items from Customs, possibly the Board’s Cultural organiser, Dr Abt, stated that it was his task to give the Customs Officials a detailed description as to the nature of the Ceremonial Objects.

There were three cases which had to be unpacked, every item had to be registered. My task was heart-breaking, I had to give explanations of a factual nature but every item I touched with my hands seemed to cry out to me, and I am not ashamed to say that I could hardly keep back my tears. Every item had been the most treasured possession of Synagogues in Europe, till the Nazis came, burned the Synagogues, murdered the worshippers ruthlessly in circumstances of unspeakable horror and took possession of the silver as a reward for their crimes against humanity.

He added that:

“(f)uture visitors [to the proposed museum] will become conscious of the immense tragedy hidden behind every single item which tells of the biggest robbery ever committed in history. Visitors will see the blood dripping from silver candelabra. They will see eyes opened widely with horror, they will hear the cries of agony of death with which the silver will be connected for them.”<sup>16</sup>

Because of the conditions under which the objects had been looted, nearly all were in need of repair.<sup>17</sup> In all, 176 items were received, plus an additional 23 pointers, which were distributed before the 1953 High Holydays to 122 congregations around the country who had sent in requests for items which they lacked. No congregation was allocated more than one article. Each had to sign a form acknowledging the receipt on loan with the proviso that if the congregation was dissolved, the item was to be handed back to the care of the Board. (As the Jewish Reconstruction Programme emphasised that these objects should not become the property of any institution or society but remain the property of the Jewish Board of Deputies, it is a moot point whether this has been done in the case of all country congregations that received such items. Chairmen come and go and memories go with them.)

Because of their artistic and historic value, 49

items were held back as these were considered to be of sufficient merit to be placed in a museum. The Johannesburg Board of Deputies wished to centralise these in a Jewish Museum in Johannesburg.<sup>18</sup> This decision was met with howls of anguish from Chief Rabbi Israel Abrahams of the Great Synagogue, Cape Town who, since 1941, had been on the committee with Dr Louis Mirvish of the Jewish Historical and Museum Society, serving as its President, with Dr Abt as Curator before he left for Johannesburg.<sup>19</sup> When the news of the possible allocation was made public, his secretary wrote (16 August 1949) to ask that Cape Town receive a share. The Chief Rabbi received an “unqualified assurance” from Dr Karpas, acting chairman of the Cape Committee, that “Cape Town would definitely receive an equitable portion of the books and silver”.<sup>20</sup>

Two years later the matter still had not been resolved and an undated Memorandum of Distribution of Ceremonial Silver suggested ... that no allocations for a museum should be made to any other city than Johannesburg. The Board holds the Ceremonial Silver in trust on the understanding that due consideration will be given to the perpetuation of the memory of the destroyed Jewish communities of Europe. In view of the concentration of at least two-thirds of the Jewish population of South Africa in Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand area, Johannesburg is undoubtedly the most suitable venue for a Central Jewish Museum”.

In the end, Cape Town obtained a fair distribution and the Cape Board arranged an exhibition in the Old Synagogue. Such was the drama of their provenance and their symbolism that thousands came to view them. The Cape Chairman, Mr Justice David Cohen, in his 1953-1955 Conference Report stated:

An outstanding exhibition of Jewish religious art was arranged in the Old Synagogue in Cape Town that was visited by thousands, both Jews and non-Jews. The nucleus consisted of some of the ceremonial silver salvaged from Europe presented to the South African Jewish community by “Jewish Cultural Reconstruction” that had been brought to Cape Town by Dr H Abt... supplemented by pieces from private collections in Cape Town and elsewhere. A portion of the “Jewish Reconstruction” collection has been allocated to Cape Town and arrangements are now being made for the establishment of a permanent Jewish museum in the Old Synagogue.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, Justice Herbstein had written to the Cape Committee “pointing out that valuable historical material and oral information was available from the older members of the community reflecting the history of the part played by the Jewish community in South Africa and this information and material should be gathered before it is too late.”<sup>22</sup>

The “Jewish Reconstruction” collection, supplemented by the valuable historical material from the older members of the community and from

private collections, was to form the nucleus of a permanent Jewish Museum in the Old Synagogue. The latter was established with the assistance of the Cape Committee of the Board together with material collected since 1941 by the Cape Town Jewish Historical and Museum Society Committee.

When the door of the storeroom above the Ladies Gallery in the Gardens Shul, was opened, these were all part of the artistic, religious, historical and cultural treasure house that was found and opening the boxes one could imagine “the blood dripping from silver candelabra... the eyes opened widely with horror (and) the cries of agony of death with which the silver” was connected.

After ten years in storage, the unwanted articles from this museum including the items looted by the Nazis not required by the new SA Jewish Museum are now displayed in a purpose-built cabinet in the foyer of the Samson Centre thereby fulfilling the terms of the original Memorandum on Distribution of Ceremonial Silver which stated that “The Board holds the Ceremonial Silver in trust on the understanding that due consideration will be given to the perpetuation of the memory of the destroyed Jewish communities of Europe.”<sup>23</sup>

What else is the Cape Council’s collection? One cabinet is devoted to Sephardi artefacts, such as a large silver mezuzah cover, *rimonim* and amulets, including amulets intended to protect one from bee and scorpion stings, in childbirth and from ill health.

There are sections displaying religious artefacts used for Shabbat (such as Western European Shabbat lamps and Eastern European Shabbat candlesticks); *Megillat Esther* for Purim; an *etrog* box for Sukkoth and for Pesach a Ponovez Yeshiva Pesach plate and 18<sup>th</sup> Century pewter plates engraved with Biblical stories. There is even a chocolate box given to the children who attended the Maitland Synagogue Simchat Torah service in 1934 (without the chocolate unfortunately).

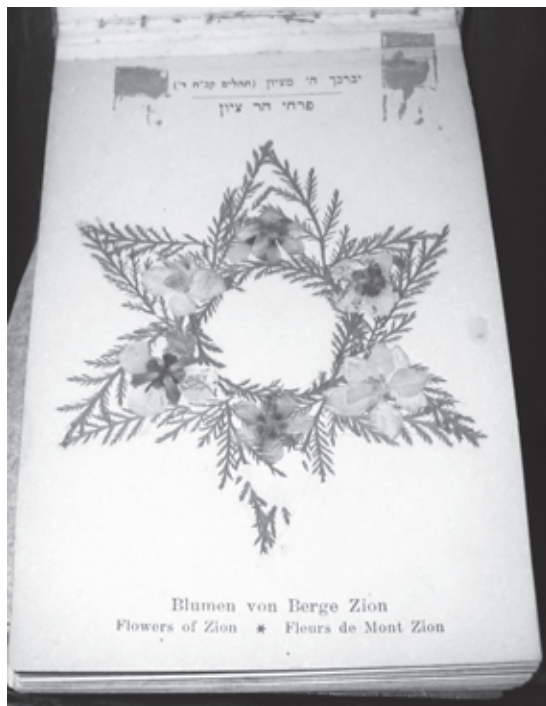
One section displays Bezalel ware from the academy founded in 1903 by the early Zionists to create a distinctive style of Jewish art for the new nation they were building. The school closed down in 1929 because of the depression, but reopened in 1935, with teachers and students from Germany, many of them from the Bauhaus school which the Nazis had shut. These objects were souvenirs from trips to Palestine and represent the firm Zionist identity of the donors.

One Bezalel item given to the Museum was a carved olive wood writing slope, containing ruler, inkbottle, blotter and brush. It had been the Hebrew prize awarded in 1926 to Jack Shrier, one of 200 “Ochberg Orphans”. When Isaac Ochberg, President of the Cape Jewish Orphanage, read a plea from the British Chief Rabbi that “1 000 000 human beings had been butchered and that for three years 3 000 000 persons in the Ukraine had been made ‘to pass through the horrors of hell’” and that “there were something like 600 000 homeless children, 150 000 orphans and 35 000 double orphans in the Ukraine who would die from cold, hunger or disease unless

Jewish hearts remained human and came to the rescue<sup>24</sup>, he contacted Prime Minister Jan Smuts and gained permission to bring orphans to South Africa. A massive fund-raising campaign was launched and Ochberg set off for Eastern Europe going from town to town choosing eight orphans from each orphanage. Some of the children were sent to Oranjia in Cape Town, some to Arcadia in Johannesburg, many were adopted, and they rapidly became part of the South African Jewish community.<sup>25</sup> As an old man, Jack Shrier donated his treasured prize to the Museum.

Another Ochberg relic inherited by the Cape Council was a large bronze plaque found in the old Zionist Hall, moulded with the head and shoulders of "Isaac Ochberg, President of the Dorshei Zion Association".<sup>26</sup> When Ochberg died in 1937, he left what was then the largest single bequest to the Jewish National Fund, called Nahalat Yitzhak in his honour. Today, the kibbutzim of Dalia and Ein Hashofet stand on this land. Later in 2011, the descendants of the Ochberg orphans will be holding a reunion in Israel to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their rescue. The Cape Council has donated the plaque which has been erected at Kibbutz Dalia and will be a feature of the commemorative event.

There are objects with relevance to the Board of Deputies. Interesting examples include a book bound in Israeli olive wood containing *Readings From The Holy Scripture* by Chief Rabbi Hertz for the Jewish Members of His Majesty's Forces, presented in 1943 by the Jewish Board of Deputies "With best wishes from South African gifts and comforts" to the Jewish servicemen in the Middle East as Xmas gifts; a collection box from the United South African Jewish War Appeal established in 1941, in partnership with the SA Zionist Federation, that operated under the auspices of the Board and worked through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee,<sup>27</sup>



and a brass Dutch *chanukiyah* given to Morris Alexander, a founder of the Cape Board of Deputies, at the 1907 World Zionist Congress in The Hague by Rev Hechler, Herzl's most famous Christian disciple.

From the First World War there is an olive wood-covered book in German and Hebrew *Blumen von Heiligen Land*. The word *Jerusalem* is inscribed on the front and inside are pictures made of pressed flowers and ferns. But someone has pasted inside the cover a red, white and blue British military ribbon attached to dried brown leaf on which is written in gold ink, *Dardanelles 1915*.

The campaign in the Dardanelles (Gallipoli) was amongst the biggest Allied disasters of the First World War. Among the Australian, New Zealand and Ghurkha units fighting there were 700 men in the Jewish Brigade established by Josef Trumpeldor and Zev Jabotinsky - Palestinian Jews with Russian citizenship and Sephardic Palestinians keen to liberate Palestine from Turkish rule. Orders were given in English and Hebrew, the Grand Rabbi was nominated Honorary Chaplain and the Jewish officers were paid 40% less than the British.

After a nightmarish fiasco, Britain evacuated its troops to Egypt where they reformed and regrouped. General Sir Ian Hamilton, Commander-in-Chief in the Dardanelles, later wrote in his diary, 'I have here, fighting under my orders, a purely Jewish unit - the Zion Mule Corps. As far as I know, this is the first time in the Christian era such a thing has happened. They have shown great courage taking supplies up to the line under heavy fire' and proved 'invaluable to us. (Although invaluable, Britain later refused to grant the men of the Zion Mule Corps regular British army pensions.)<sup>28</sup>

Presumably one of the soldiers went to Palestine on leave and sent this memento as a gift to a loved one in the Cape, attaching the carefully preserved leaf as a souvenir of the hellhole he had survived.

From the South African War there is a walking stick carved by Moses Segall, who spent fifteen months as a prisoner on Darrel's Island in Bermuda. He was arrested by the British, not for fighting, but for trading with the enemy. His shop in Vlakkfontein was looted and he was sent to the Green Point POW camp in Cape Town, and then to Bermuda. "The food and treatment were very bad and having no money I was obliged to take what they gave me", he gumbled. Unfortunately his trunk was ransacked on the island, and he complained to the British that a great number of things had been stolen, including "numerous curios in silver and carved wood, a good number of them bearing my name and which I valued greatly."

<sup>29</sup> These were never found, nor was any compensation paid to him by the British for the seizure of his property back home on the grounds that he was a Russian, not a British citizen.

One can imagine Moses' distress because the superb quality of his workmanship can be seen in this one souvenir of his stay on the island that has survived - a walking stick with his name "M. Segal, Darryl's Eiland, Bermuda krygsgevang July 1901". He has also carved on it the armorial crests of the



Orange Free State and the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek surmounted by an eagle, a hand with (President) “P.R.D.T. M.T. Steyn” on its cuff that is holding a stick piercing the head of the snake twisted round a frog with the snake’s tail in the mouth of another snake twisting up the other side of the stick.

There are items of local historical significance. There is a silver tray presented to Bertha Solomon MP by the “United Party Women Members Constituency Constantia in appreciation for the Women’s Disabilities Act”. Solomon, a chairman of the Women’s Suffrage campaign, was one of the first practising women advocates and one of the first women’s rights activists in South Africa. The Matrimonial Affairs Act of 1953, called Bertha’s Bill by Prime Minister DF Malan, gave women legal right to their property, income and children. One of the pictures in the collection was presented by her father Idel Schwartz, founder of the Dorshei Zion Society in 1899, and is a reproduction of the painting *The Opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem by the Rt Hon The Earl of Balfour, K.G. 1.4.1925* by Leopold Pilichowski - the original measured 16 ft by 8 ft. Schwartz attended the opening and donated a chair of Post-Biblical Hebrew Literature to the university.

Many of the items in the collection belonged to defunct congregations. These also include the silver trowels presented at the laying of the foundation stones and the keys given at the inauguration of many Jewish communal buildings and synagogues, many from country communities or suburbs where there are no longer viable Jewish communities.

There are trowels from the laying of foundations stones of synagogues in Maitland, Muizenberg, Observatory/ Mowbray, Woodstock/ Salt River, Worcester, Beth Hamidrash Hechadosh, Wynberg, the Cape Jewish Aged Home, the Zionist Hall and other places. There are engraved keys presented at the opening of synagogues and communal buildings in Maitland- Brooklyn, Malmesbury, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Upington, Wellington, Herzlia School and elsewhere. At the suggestion of Jeff Fine the trowels and keys have been framed in boxes making poignant and striking displays

Although the congregations have moved from many of these areas, these objects remain as a tribute to the Jews who worked and raised money to ensure that they would be able to worship and teach their religion to their children wherever they were.

Among the objects found in the store room were many works of art. Art curators Dr Rayda Becker of Parliament and Philip Todres examined these and selected the best which were reframed and hung. Some had been brought to Cape Town by Jews fleeing from Germany who were only allowed to take out ten marks, but could take certain personal possessions including family portraits. Some of these were offered for sale to the Jewish Museum when the refugee owners became old and in need, some were donated while others were later bequeathed to the Jewish Museum in gratitude for the welcoming home Cape Town provided them.

Two paintings are by Hermann Hirsch, who killed himself in Germany in 1934 when he was no longer allowed to sell his work. His niece, Hilda Jeidel, a refugee, later bequeathed these paintings to the Jewish Museum along with a generous bursary for academic study administered by the Cape Council. In 2009 the German city of Göttingen, wanting to compensate for their treatment of this great artist (and of his community who had made enormous contributions to their country’s culture, music, art, literature, science, medicine and economy) decided to host a major exhibition of Hirsch’s work in their Städtisches Museum. Tracing existing paintings was not easy, especially as the Gestapo had marched into Hirsch’s studio and destroyed all they saw. However, family put them in contact with the Cape Council which, at their request, provided photographs of these works for the Göttingen Städtisches Museum and in due course the Board received copies of the poster and catalogue of the commemorative exhibition, held in October 2009.

These are not the only paintings with Holocaust reverberations. Hilda Jeidel also brought paintings by Meta Cohen, who adopted the name of her fiancée, Jeidel’s nephew, when he died fighting for Germany in the First World War. Meta fled to America where her work now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. There is a monotype of an old anguished tallis-wrapped Jew drawn by Lippy Lipshitz in 1945 when the facts of the Holocaust emerged – later Lippy went on aliyah.

On one wall hangs the horn, bone and ebony walking stick of Hyman Liberman, first Jewish Mayor in Cape Town, who laid the foundation stones of both the City Hall and the Gardens Synagogue and whose house forms part of Astra, the Jewish Sheltered Employment Agency. Alongside his walking stick is the original sketch by sculptor HV Meyerowitz of the magnificent Hyman Liberman memorial door carved from Burma teak illustrating Jewish migrations that is now the pride of the SA National Gallery. It traces Jewish migrations from the pyramids of Egypt, the Temple in flames, Jews by the waters of Babylon, the expulsion from Spain, Jews in Holland and in Mediaeval Germany, Russian emigrants boarding a ship and early Jewish colonists in the Cape, including a ‘smous’. The War affected Meyerowitz too – he committed suicide in 1945 when he learnt of his mother’s death.

There are pictures showing Jewish traditions and celebrations - woodcuts of Purim, of Yom Ha’atzmaut and other biblical themes. A bronze mirror with a hand carved teak surround by Lippy Lipshitz shows Simchat Torah celebrations. Originally, this was given to the SA National Gallery, which agreed, because of its specific Jewish theme, to exchange it for something else from the Jewish Museum. There are *ketubot*, *Omer* calendars, an 1877 deed of ownership for seats in the Great Synagogue in Telz, Lithuania and *mizrachs* - pictures designed to hang on the wall facing Jerusalem so that people would know in which direction to pray.

There is an engraving showing emigrants on a

crowded ship; pictures of scholars hunched over the Torah, including an engraving by EM Lilien, a founder of Bezalel, and known as the first Zionist Artist; pictures and a commemorative glass plate of Moses Montefiore - the stained glass windows in the old synagogue, now serving as the entrance to the new Jewish Museum, were erected in 1901 in his honour.

There is a macabre engraving called "*The Wedding*" by British artist John Henry Amsheiwitz, a rabbi's son, which illustrates a belief that an unmarried person would not go to heaven. It portrays an old woman on her deathbed, being married by a rabbi to a passer-by. As the ring is placed on her finger, she expires!

The precocious talents of Amsheiwitz led to his admission to the Royal Academy School and he soon won important commissions, until he fell from a ladder while painting a mural, breaking his thigh. He came to South Africa in 1916 on a six-month contract as an actor, and stayed for six years before returning to England, and fame as an artist. There was a scandal in South Africa when the SA Honorary High-Commissioner for Palestine commissioned Amsheiwitz to paint murals for London's South Africa House, and the Afrikaans painter Pierneef complained about a non-South African artist winning the commission. Amsheiwitz later 'immigrated' to Muizenberg.

In the store room, I was excited to recognise a pencil drawing by Amsheiwitz of an anxious man, supporting a fainting woman and knocking vainly on a door. It was called "*The Jew and the ever closed door*".

Doing research some years previously at the time of the Cape Council's centenary, I had opened a *South African Jewish Chronicle* of 24 December 1942 and seen that same picture on a full page advertisement for a "Jewish Day of Mourning and Intercession - A Citizen's Mass Meeting to be held in the City Hall to Express Sympathy with the Millions of Victims of Nazi Barbarism" - the systematic killing of the Jews had just become known. This event, which was to become the fore-runner of the annual Yom Hashoah commemoration services, took place on 29 December 1942.

"The Jews were being murdered", reported the *Zionist Record*, "by the most satanic means the deranged mind of men can devise... there were no tears to mourn this dire catastrophe; its magnitude is beyond all weeping."<sup>30</sup> All Jewish shops and businesses were asked to close and leaflets and posters in English and Afrikaans were distributed by the Board of Deputies and Western Province Zionist Council explaining the purpose and meaning of the day of mourning. Synagogue services were held, followed by a mass meeting in the Cape Town City Hall addressed by the mayor, Chief Rabbi Abrahams, the Anglican Archbishop and a Dutch Reformed Church minister in a demonstration of solidarity with the Jewish community.<sup>31</sup>

This pencil drawing was the original design that Amsheiwitz had made for that poster. It was one of

the last things he did as he died in Muizenberg soon after. His wife donated the drawing to the Museum. It has now been framed together with a reduced copy of the advertisement for the Day of Mourning and Intercession and hangs in the building.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Jewish poet Yehuda Alcharizi<sup>32</sup> wrote, "I hurried to guard a stranger's vine/ And yet in my haste abandoned mine." The Cape Council is determined to treasure, not to abandon, its own cultural heritage. To quote Berl Katnelson, the Zionist leader, in a different context, "a generation that is innovating, creating, does not toss the legacy of the generations onto the garbage heap."<sup>33</sup>

Through the actions of the Cape Council who have restored to view the unwanted items that had been languishing for ten years in a store room, the looted religious artefacts "which tells of the biggest robbery ever committed in history... (and) the immense tragedy hidden behind every single item"<sup>34</sup> are once more accessible to the Jewish public. The original picture and story of what was to become the first Yom Hashoah ceremony has been found. Some of the paintings of Hersch have come to light and received their rightful recognition in his home town. Ochberg's plaque has been found and mounted on land he bequeathed to Israel. The Hebrew prize of an Ochberg orphan can be admired. Bertha's Bill can be recalled and as ephemeral an object as the box containing the Simchat Torah chocolate enjoyed by an unnamed child 70-year ago can be viewed long after the synagogue itself has closed its doors.

The late Dr Mirvish would be satisfied to see that the Jewish community in Cape Town had risen to the occasion and valued its treasures in the correct spirit. We must give credit to the Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council) for agreeing to take on the additional responsibilities involved in caring for the community's cultural heritage and displaying its history on its walls. We must also give credit to the tenacity of Rabbi Abrahams, who fought for several years for the right of the Cape Town Jewish community to obtain a share of the looted religious artefacts.<sup>35</sup>

Subsequent events sadly showed just how fortunate that division proved to be. In the early 1990s, the Johannesburg share of the allocated "Jewish Reconstruction" collection vanished from the Johannesburg Jewish Museum over a long weekend, along with the Russian security guard, and has never been traced.

## NOTES

- 1 This money enabled them to obtain the services of a Curator, Newman, Richard, *The Jewish Museum Catalogue*, Introduction, undated typed manuscript, v
- 2 South African Jewish Board of Deputies Report, June 1953-August 1955, 66
- 3 Newman, Richard, op cit
- 4 Woolley, Sir Leonard, *Spadework*, (1953), 99
- 5 Purcell, Rosamund & Stephen Jay Gould, *Finders, Keepers: Eight Collectors* (1992)

- 6 Daniel - Chapter 5: 1-2; 12-13
- 7 Shulgi, formerly incorrectly pronounced as Dungi, son of King Ur-Nammu, ruled Ur (either 2429-2371 BCE or 2029-1982 BCE), and built the Great Ziggurat of Ur. He was the first to try to codify civil and criminal law and also the first to arrange for himself to be deified both in his lifetime and after his death – hence the erection of statues for his worship. Rostovtzeff, Mikhail, *A History of the Ancient World: The Orient and Greece*, p 29, Google Books; Hastings, James, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Part 21, p75, Google Books
- 8 The desire to collect can go to extreme lengths - King Augustus 11 of Poland who was reputed to have sired 350 children was so keen to add some of his rival Frederick William 1 of Prussia's Chinese porcelain to his collection, that he arranged to swap 600 soldiers for 117 pieces of china. Then there was the bookseller Don Vincente who could not bear to part with a book and would follow the purchasers, kills them and retrieve the book. His only regret when found and tried was the discovery that one of the books he had reclaimed was not unique but that a second copy existed. Genesis 31.
- 9 Knight, Natalie "Jewish Art- not the weakest link", *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 60 No 21 Winter 2003,.12
- 10 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makapansgat\\_pebble](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makapansgat_pebble)"; Bednarik, Robert G. "Makapansgat cobble analysed". University of Melbourne. <http://web.archive.org/web/20030330065452/http://sunspot.sli.unimelb.edu.au/aura/MAKAPANSCHAT.htm>.
- 11 Other cave dwellers who chose to decorate their home with antiques were Neanderthals who some 35 000 years ago possibly fleeing a pogrom from a Homo Sapiens tribe had to abandon in their cave in Grotte de l'Hy'ene 'a Arcy-sur-cure their carefully assembled collection of fossils and lumps of iron pyrites. There was also an ancient Egyptian fossil collector who had a catalogue label in Egyptian hieroglyphics for his fossil sea urchin from the Eocene period (40 - 55 million years ago) carefully detailing his name, the date and the locality of the find on it Today this can be seen in the Egyptian museum in Turin. Purcell, & Gould, op cit.
- 12 Edsel, Robert, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*(2009), by Center Street, a division of Hachette Book Group
- 13 Letter to Dr Abt, SAJBD, from Jewish Restitution Successor Organisation, Frankfurt Regional Office, US Army, dated 2 July 1949, Beyachad Archives
- 14 Letter dated 13 February 1951 from Dr Abt to Chief Rabbi Professor I Abrahams These and the following letters are all contained in a memorandum dated 26 February 1951 from JM Rich to IA Maisels.K.C., BA Ettlinger,K.C., SN Kuper,K.C.,AB Klipin, J Daleski, Saron, Druion and Dr Abt, Beyachad Archives
- 15 "Tragedy in silver" undated unsigned typed document, Beyachad Archives
- 16 Letter dated 13 February 1951 from Dr Abt to Chief Rabbi Professor I Abrahams, Beyachad Archives
- 17 Memorandum on Distribution of Ceremonial Silver, undated unsigned typed document, Beyachad Archives
- 18 Newman, Richard, op cit
- 19 Letter dated 16 February 1951 from Chief Rabbi Professor I Abrahams to MH Goldschmidt, Chairman of the Cape Committee, Beyachad Archives
- 20 SAJBD Report, June 1953-August 1955,66
- 21 *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 16 Oct 1953, Beyachad Archives
- 22 Undated Memorandum of Distribution of Ceremonial Silver, Beyachad Archives
- 23 [www. ochbergorphans.com](http://www.ochbergorphans.com)
- 24 Eric Rosenthal, *The Story of the Cape Jewish Orphanage*, (1960), 11-18
- 25 Established 1899, the Dorshei Zion Association united with other Zionist organisations to form the Western Province Zionist Council in 1943
- 26 Large sums were sent to transport refugees from the Balkans to Palestine, to assist Jewish refugees in Switzerland Greece and Spain, to Jewish communities in Algiers, Tunis and Casablanca, to the Association of Lithuanian Jews in Palestine who sent parcels to Jews who had escaped into Russia and for relief in Palestine itself. Money was also sent to the Teheran child refugees, and while allowed, to Stockholm, to provide food parcels to prisoners in Bergen-Belsen and Birkenau .
- 27 Sugarman, Martin, The Zion Muleteers of Gallipoli (March 1915 - May 1916); [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/gallipoli.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/gallipoli.html)
- 28 Mendelsohn, R, A Jewish Family at War; The Segalls of Vlaktefontein, *Jewish Affairs*,55:3,24
- 29 *Zionist Record* 27.11.1942
- 30 Green, M, *South African Jewish responses to the Holocaust 1941-1948*, MA Thesis (Unisa 1987), 50-77
- 31 Born in Spain, 1170.
- 32 Rubin, Barry, *Assimilation and its Discontents*(1995), 255-256
- 33 "Tragedy in silver" undated unsigned typed document, Beyachad Archives
- 34 Cape Town now has a dynamic Jewish library, the Jacob Gitlin Library, and a Museum, the South African Jewish Museum. The looted books are secure in the library of the Kaplan Centre of Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town and the looted artefacts are on display in Durban, in the SA Jewish Museum and in the collection of the Cape Council of the Jewish Board of Deputies on display in The Samson Centre.



# THE BOBBE MALKE – A WOMAN’S TALE OF VANISHED EASTERN EUROPE

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Cedric Ginsberg

## 1) Introductory Essay

On a recent visit to Israel, I discovered two unusual Yiddish volumes in a second-hand bookstore in Jerusalem. These intrigued me because they had both been published in the former Soviet Union in the 1960s. I had read about a Yiddish literary journal called *Soviet Heimland*, published from 1961<sup>1</sup> in Moscow, but was surprised to see these collections of short stories and novellas. It emerged, after some research, that these books were part of the process which permitted the publication of the Journal at that time, under the editorship of Aaron Vergelis. I bought the volumes and, for a long time, they stood on my bookshelf unread.

Towards the end of last year, I was looking for a Yiddish story to read with a monthly Yiddish reading group, in the course of which I rediscovered the two books. The first was a collection of short stories and novellas written by Dovid Bergelson,<sup>2</sup> a highly accomplished Yiddish writer in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He was murdered by Stalin in 1952 in the purges that followed the so-called “Doctor’s Plot”<sup>3</sup>, along with other Yiddish writers and intellectuals. I did not choose a story from this collection because it was presented in the most extreme form of Soviet Yiddish orthography, making it difficult to read by those used to the standard orthography in general use in the West. As is well-known, Yiddish makes use of the Hebrew script. The YIVO convention is that the language is written phonetically in Hebrew characters, except for the Hebrew and Aramaic words. These appear in the text as they are written in the source languages, but are *pronounced*, when read, as in Yiddish. Below are a few examples taken from the novella *Nokh alemen* written between 1907-1917 (p83):

Translation	Transliteration	YIVO orthography	Soviet orthography
A scholar	ben-toyre	בן-תורה	בנטוירע
close (friend)	mekurev	מקורב	מעקורעוו
North-eastern	tzofn-mizrekhdikn	צפון-מזרחדיקען	צאפן-מזרעכדיקען

There was apparently no objection to the use of the Hebrew alphabet for Yiddish texts in the Soviet Union. However, there was the strong imperative to remove any direct connection between Yiddish and Hebrew. The rendering of words of Hebrew origin in phonetic spelling rather than the Hebrew spelling, makes those words like any other word in Yiddish, thereby de-emphasizing their Hebrew origin. The use of the medial form of the letters *ë, ô, ö, î, ð* at the end of a word instead the Hebrew final form *ê, ó, õ, í, ÿ* is very disturbing for the reader accustomed to the standard usage of the medial and final forms in Hebrew.

I thus turned to the second book, an anthology of short stories<sup>4</sup>. Published a few years later than the Bergelson book, it used a softened form of the strict Soviet orthography. Here, the Hebrew words are rendered phonetically but the final forms of the letters are used throughout. Once again, the phonetic spelling of words of Hebrew origin serves to blur or fudge the Hebrew connection. Within the process of reading, the immediate recognition of a Hebrew word is disturbed because of the discrepancy between the spelling and the pronunciation. The phonetically rendered Hebrew word becomes simply another Yiddish word. It is only the reader literate in Hebrew who would be able to recognise its Hebrew origin. Below are a few examples from the story *Di Bobbe Malke*:

Translation	Transliteration	YIVO orthography	Soviet orthography
cemetery	besoylem	בית-עולם	בעתוילעם
Malke (proper name)	Malke	מלכה	מאלקע
besides	akhutz	אחוץ	אכוץ

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The Soviet citizen who read Yiddish probably knew very little Hebrew (apart from the alphabet). This was the case particularly a generation or two after the Russian Revolution. For him (or her) the text was recognisably Yiddish (from the Hebrew characters) and there was no reason to delve into the etymology of any word – be it of German, Hebrew or Slavic origin.

I chose the story *Di Bobbe Malke* because the name of the author, Shire Gorshman, was familiar to me. I had read a story written by her, published in the Israeli Yiddish literary journal *Di Goldene Keyt*. Set in the Lithuanian countryside, in the summer, it told of the time spent by a little girl with her *Zeyde* before the First World War. It was written in beautiful racy language reminiscent of a child frolicking in a field on a summer's day.

*Di Bobbe Malke* is a very different tale. It was written in 1948 and tells the story of an elderly woman in the war-torn Soviet Union. In Yiddish, the word *Bobbe* may mean 'granny' or 'a midwife'. The variation *babke* can mean a peasant woman or an old woman and is similar to the Russian *babushka*. In the case of *babeshi* (gran, or gran dear) the suffix is a familiar diminutive akin to *tatenu* (daddy) All these variations depend on the context for their meaning. The reader is given very little information as to the setting of the story. It is clearly somewhere in Eastern Europe – but one is not sure whether it takes place in Lithuania. The only clue is given towards the end of the story, when Vlades, one of the central characters, remarks with reference to the home-brew of liquor Malke has taught him to make: *...zey veln bay mir aropshlingen di tzingen! Ekh Bobke, host litvishe hent un a litvishn kop oyf di pleytzes!* (...They will swallow their tongues here in my house! Ekh *Bobke*, you have *Lithuanian* hands and a *Lithuanian* head on your shoulders!" - my emphasis)

Shire Gorshman was born in the shtetl Krakes (Krok) near Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania, in 1906. During the First World War, the Russians expelled large numbers of Lithuanian Jews, fearing that they would support the Germans. Shire's family landed up in Odessa. As a young girl, she went to live with her grandfather, who taught her the Hebrew of the *Tanach*. She became a Zionist and in 1924 immigrated to Palestine. There, she became part of *Gedud Ha'avodah*, one of the Socialist Labour groupings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Aliyah. Members of this group established Ein Harod and Kfar Giladi. The group was plagued by ideological splits and, in 1929, she returned to the Soviet Union to participate in the establishment of Jewish agricultural communes in the Crimea. By the early 1930s, these communes had been closed down by the Soviet authorities and Shire had moved to Moscow, where she engaged in literary work<sup>5</sup>. Very little of her considerable writing has been translated into English. She returned to Israel in 1990 and lived in Ashkelon until her death in 2001.

The opening section of *Di Bobbe Malke* describes *shtetl*-life before the Second World War – an uncomplicated village existence, affected by the changing seasons, bound up in community life and

its celebrations and sorrows. The opening sentence of the second section summarises this background:

*...azoy hot zikh getzoygen a lebn mit kimpetorns, brisn, khasenes, levayes...shoyndos gantze shtetl pust...* (And so her life played itself out with women in childbirth, *brises*, *w e d d i n g s*, funerals... now the whole town is empty...)

The *Bobbe Malke* lives a little out of town next to the old cemetery, and has seemingly been forgotten by those who were responsible for 'emptying' the town. The inference of the statement "the town is empty" is that it is empty of Jews. Thus, the author hints at what has happened in the *shtetl* – never explicitly informing the reader.

The *Bobbe Malke* alone carries the memory of the townspeople in her mind and her chattels. She, as the *shtetl* midwife, has all their details written in an exercise-book. As she reads through the list of names, the horror of their murder haunts her, overwhelms her. She relives the nightmare in her waking moments, until she can bear it no longer. At that point she puts on her coat, and walks out of her hovel, leaving the lamp on and the door open. We do not know how far she walks, but along the way she barter her coat for a sheepskin and a loaf of bread. She thus transforms herself outwardly into a peasant woman. An old peasant couple rent her the shed next to their house – she shares this space with a pig. And so she lives for some time, with no-one even imagining that she is Jewish. She tells the old lady that she is an experienced midwife, but the village already has one. One day a crisis occurs. The headman of the village's wife is having a difficult childbirth which threatens her life and that of the baby. An old peasant woman rushes into the shed and calls on Malke to assist.

From this point the *Bobbe Malke*'s life changes. She comes into a spacious house and takes complete control, ordering the distraught husband: *...balebos! Shtelt tzu vaser! Gib a trunk, farbeydn oykh!* (...Sir, Prepare hot water! Give me a drink, a snack too!...)

She continues barking out orders to the husband and to the poor exhausted, struggling woman, forcing her to concentrate all her being on the delivery. In this way, she 'psyches' the woman into releasing her own almost superhuman effort in delivering the child – saving both the mother and baby's life. After the birth, Malke remains in the house to assist the mother Mikhasye<sup>6</sup>, with the new baby and takes meals with the family. Malke becomes Mikhasye's confidant and is shown by her hidden artefacts when her husband was not around:

*...zilberne lefl-gopl, vesh, un andere zachen. 'Vi meyns tu bobeshi, s'iz a zind? Mir voltn nit genumen, voltn dokh andere genumen. Nit azoy?'...* (...silver cutlery, linen and other things. 'What do you think, m'dear, was it a sin? If we wouldn't have taken, others would certainly have. Not so?'...)

No further details are provided in the narrative. To whom did these artefacts belong? Why were they left ownerless (*hefker*) for people to take? But the *Bobbe* Malke knows that these had belonged to the murdered Jews of the town – she can only respond by silently nodding her head.

The answer is alluded to in Malke's recurring nightmare, described in the next paragraph. She dreams she was the *kvater* (godfather) who brings the baby to the *Mohel* (the man who performs the circumcision on the eight-day old baby boy). But in the dream, the *Mohel* has the face of Vlades, Mikhasye's husband and the village headman. It is he who is the person of authority in the town and who reports to the German occupiers. In the nightmare, Vlades casts a bundle wrapped in diapers back at her – and from this bundle pour out many bloodied little hands and feet.

Vlades may not have been personally responsible for the murder of the Jews of the town, but he certainly looted their possessions. As the figure of authority in the village, Malke sees him as synonymous with the murderers. Since the birth of the baby, she has become like a member of the family. She takes her meals with them and is Mikhasye's constant companion and confidant, in addition to caring for the baby. As time goes by, she learns more about Vlades' importance and standing in the town. This makes her feel ever more uneasy about living there, in the house of a man who is a collaborator with the Germans. The artefacts looted from murdered Jews are familiar to her – she knew people from her shtetl who owned just such a mirror as now hangs on Vlades' wall. She becomes increasingly edgy and uncomfortable in his company and realises that while Mikhasye and the baby are in the house, she can do nothing to alleviate her anxiety. She has no formalised plan in mind, but her hatred, loathing and mistrust of Vlades is becoming unbearable. In an ever-fluid emerging process, the *Bobbe* Malke manipulates Vlades into agreeing to take his wife to her parents ahead of the impending visit of the Germans. Being alone in the house with Vlades became more difficult than ever for Malke. She is terrified of him, and despises his self-seeking cruel behaviour. He has betrayed to the Germans those who were engaged with the forces opposing them:

*...Vlades hot gefirt dem molekhhamoves tzu di vos hobn gehat zin, brider, tates in der royter army oder bay di partizaner... (Vlades lead the angel of death to those who had sons, brothers, fathers in the Red Army and with the Partisans...)*

And, as if this betrayal of his fellow countrymen were not enough, Vlades shares the possessions of those condemned to death with the Germans. She curses him silently and all the while her suppressed rage is accumulating within her. In this way, Gorshman masterfully builds up the tension as the story advances towards its climax.

The Germans are due to visit the village on a Sunday. Vlades arranges to have roasted duck with apples ready to serve them. *Bobbe* Malke cooks the dish – a veritable banquet, particularly during the war years when food was so scarce. She has the meal set out for Vlades and his 'guests'. For her, it is a fast day – no food passes her lips, the smell of the roasted duck was actually repulsive to her – in light of whom the "dinner guests" were to be.

Vlades leaves the house in the morning and when he has not returned by late afternoon, she lies down behind the oven and falls asleep. He arrives home after dark, bitterly disappointed that the Germans have not come to his house. They have come to the village, arrested whomever they wished, and left. He sits down at the laden table and begins to drink glass after glass of the delicious liquor Malke had taught him to make. She watches him with smouldering hatred and rage in her heart as he becomes more and more inebriated. She still does not know what she is going to do. She has been standing at the hearth (*pripetchik*) watching him. In the hearth, is a cast iron pot of boiling lye – it becomes clear that now is the moment when she has to act, otherwise the opportunity will be lost. Malke grabs the boiling pot and with the same immense force "she used to save a woman in childbirth", she pours it over him. She grabs the sheepskin, wraps it round herself and leaves the house. Her intention was not to kill him, but rather to blind him – ..."*keyn vigl vet er shoyt mer nit onkuken*" ("He will no longer be able to look into a cradle"). Those eyes, which had overseen the destruction of her people, the looting of their possessions, the betrayal of his own people to the German occupiers – would no longer be able to enjoy the simple pleasure of regarding his baby in its crib.

This is a remarkable story, written in the Soviet Union at a time when Stalin's regime was about to launch an unprecedented purge that would last for over four years. It is highly critical of the behaviour of Vlades, a Soviet citizen. That criticism is couched in terms of collaboration with the enemy and the amassing of possessions. It also 'censures' the betrayal by him of other Soviet citizens, who had attempted to fight against the enemy. The reproof is directed against the Soviet citizen who acted in a reprehensible way towards other Soviet citizens<sup>7</sup> and the Soviet State. At the same time, almost imperceptibly and by a mere hint, there is comment on the disappearance of Jews and the appearance of artefacts hidden in the headman's home. There is further suggestion that the artefacts were looted from forcibly abandoned Jewish homes. The sensitivity to the Jewish dimension would probably be picked up by a Jewish reader, who would identify with the *Bobbe* Malke, as an elderly Jewish woman as well as a midwife. The mention of *brises*, the Jewish cemetery (*besoylem*) weddings (*khasenes*) and the old Rabbi (*der alter rov*) as being part of the life of the people of the town, seem to reinforce this idea. It appears to me that the inclusion of these 'parochial', ethnic aspects of the Jewish life-cycle by their Yiddish names present a Jewish flavour to a story that



otherwise is told in general terms. It would not have been permissible in terms of contemporary Soviet 'culture', to promote a 'separatist' cultural or religious message. The story was obviously passed by the Soviet political censor; otherwise it would not have been included in the anthology.

Although the story is set in the Holocaust period, it is not essentially a tale of the Holocaust. The narrative progresses against the backdrop of the War – but the War is clearly in the background. It comes to the fore only to offset the *Bobbe* Malke's suffering as a result of the war. The reader is aware that the *Bobbe* Malke is Jewish, but none of the other characters are. The senior position *Vlades* holds in the town and his collaboration with the occupying German forces are the source of terrible suppressed pain and anger. She does not seek revenge – she only wants to prevent him from enjoying the pleasure of *seeing* his offspring grow and develop. This may perhaps be seen as some small recompense for his involvement in the murder of the children and townspeople and the looting of their possessions.

The translation of this story was quite challenging. The language is rich, drawing on Russian, Ukrainian and possibly Lithuanian and Hebrew words. There were several words I could not find in any of the three major Yiddish dictionaries at my disposal. I sent a list of these to *Mendele*, an internet forum for Yiddish literature and Yiddish language<sup>8</sup>. The response was overwhelming – no fewer than eight in-depth assessments and suggestions. Particularly interesting

was a response from Faith (Nomi) Jones. She drew my attention to a translation of this story by Jennifer Kronovet, which had appeared in a wonderful anthology of stories concentrating on women.

As is to be expected in translation work, there are many opinions and few strict rules. As was pointed out by one of the respondents, when a minority language is used in everyday communication, it frequently borrows from the dominant language within which it operates. This 'borrowing' enriches the language, but when the reader is not familiar with the former 'dominant' language, it sometimes makes understanding difficult. A look into South African Yiddish literature reveals a similar phenomenon. We find words like *smous* (peddler) and *shmoyzn* (to peddle).

Both Yiddish and Afrikaans have a language structure similar to that of German, for example, the double negative and the frequent addition of 'ge-' to the verb to indicate the past tense. In the course of reading South African Yiddish texts, I have frequently come across words which are familiar from Afrikaans. For example in a story called *Oysgeleshene funkn* (Extinguished Sparks) by Hyman Polski, we came across the following: *farkér* (traffic - *verkeer*), *neygung* (inclination - *neiging*), *bagrifn* (comprehend, understand *begrip*). It would be fascinating to embark, in depth, on such a study. It is known that in the early days of Jewish settlement in the *platteland* (particularly the Free State) immigrant Jews learnt Afrikaans before they learnt English.

## THE *BOBBE* MALKE

Shire Gorshman

(translated by Cedric Ginsberg)

Her little cottage with the low windows stood along-side the old cemetery. In winter the heavy snow-covered roof would sink down to the window-frame, like a large sheepskin hat over the eyes on a child's head. In summer the earth-covered roof would become overgrown with mint and camomile; the longish tendrils with the white splashes among the creeper's leaves wound around the chimney as if adorning the smoke. The nasturtiums with their red velvet hearts, which the *Bobbe* Malke loved so much, would almost block the narrow footpath to the low pine door. The cemetery-trees reached the cottage, and besides that they pushed green reminders into the *Bobbe*'s little window, they served a purpose as well: she collected linden blossoms for a really good body-sweat. She gathered mushrooms from under the aspens, she would make little holes in the birches with a gimlet, and tie on a little earthenware dish to catch the drops.

How often did the townsfolk savor Malke's *tsholnt*

with the tartness of her birch-brew! She would bury [lit. hide] empty uncorked bottles in ant heaps, the 'clever' ants would crawl in like fools. The *Bobbe* Malke would pour liquor over them. Old-folk with rheumatism would praise the remedy: "If the bones still squeak, its thanks first to it, and then you..." She would also drink a little glass and add: "Whether it is from it or from me, from me or from the ants, may the bones continue to creak!"

It is told that the old Rabbi called on Malke to chide her:

- You collect mushrooms right there, you tie up bundles of hyssop for the bath-house, isn't this enough for you? You planted carrots and broad-beans among the graves, is this still too little for you? You boast, so I'm told, that one can hardly pull the carrots out of the ground and each bean-pod has as many beans, as a woman's tongue, words.

From then on, turnips began to grow between the graves. The *Bobbe* Malke would relate that it was as though her turnip *tzimmes* had honey poured over it, she had no need for carrots.

She always came to woman in childbirth, both through the wintery snow and the autumn mud, and when the towns-folk urged her to move house:

- A person alone, long nights, it's lonely...

The *Bobbe* would reply:

- Firstly, I have never been lonely, as long as I have lived. Secondly, my occupation requires a calm disposition. How often have I not suffered terribly, in empathy with the woman giving birth? But as soon as I tie that cord, I forget everything!

Once, at a wealthy *bris*, the *Bobbe* Malke drank cherry brandy from a tea glass, she polished off a little platter of chopped liver, from edge to edge. As she moved a deep bowl of *ingberlekh* closer to her, she noticed that Mendl the waiter was looking at her disapprovingly. She tipped the bowl over onto the table slid the *ingberlekh* towards herself and cried:

- Don't look at me like that! I have earned this properly, the child was, you shouldn't know about it, in breach!  
And so her life played itself out with women in childbirth, *brises*, weddings, funerals...

The *Bobbe* Malke would consider the pieces of home-woven linen, as she aired her things and would then hide them again at the very bottom of the chest as she sadly thought: "It's not a wedding veil, it can wait a bit longer".

It was a life filled with reminders of the past, with hopes for the next two years and the next five years. Then suddenly everything was erased and emptied out...

The whole town was empty, but about her, apparently, they had forgotten. At night she sat at the draped little windows, passing her finger over the crooked lines in a yellowed exercise book, counting: "Avrom, Reize and their family. Hirshel, Feifke, Dinke, Frumke, Shaye, Khiyene, their Bentzele, Nekhemke, Shloyemele, Menukhke and Yoynele". She pointed for so long, that she remained sitting, swaying, with closed eyes... yellow flames began dancing in a circle in which infants were burning. Her cottage was filled the screams of children... and she sat fully clothed for long nights, opening her eyes every now and then, in order to dispel the horror... for months on end she sat like this, waiting for the angel of death, until one night she put on her navy-blue coat with the Bordeaux-velvet lapels and without extinguishing the lamp or closing the door, she left the cottage.

In some village, she exchanged the coat for a sheep-skin and a loaf of bread. Her face with its

sunken and wrinkled cheeks, looked out over the collar like a little piece of dried-out yellow skin, in which her slightly faded blue eyes sat deep-set like two corn pancakes. She looked for all the world like a peasant woman, who had worked all her life in the fields. In another village she removed her amber beads from around her neck, in lieu of rent. The old couple allowed her to stay in the shed with the pig. The old man would pull a woolen sock over its snout at night, so that it should not disturb the *Bobbe* Malke's sleep. Even so she hardly slept. At dawn she would tear nettle leaves and other greens for the pig. She told the old lady that she was a skilled midwife, but the village had its own midwife. No-one was willing to approach the stranger and no one even imagined that she was Jewish. The *Bobbe* Malke no longer believed that her occupation would be of any further use.

One evening she was chopping nettles for the pig as she did every day. An old peasant woman barged into the shed, pulled her by the sleeve and exclaimed:

- Come quickly! Vlades' wife is in labour. Already two measures [second stage] – she is dying!

The old woman led the *Bobbe* Malke to a spacious house with clean floors, the unpainted walls were made of coarse beams. The moss between them was still greenish. On piles of bedclothes, with a holy icon at the head of the bed, lay the woman in labour, with her legs spread apart. Her belly obscured her face. Her husband paced back and forth from the mirror to the oven.

- Sir, Prepare water! Give me a drink, a snack too!

She drank up, snacked on a few cooked eggs, tied two hand towels to the headboard, and, bending down to the woman in labour, began earnestly:

- If you want to live, then help yourself! You don't have as many hairs on your head as young women I have seen lying like this. Nu, move yourself!.. Grab the hand towels, more tightly, with all your strength pull them towards yourself!.. Stronger still!! Bend your knees, clever girl, no one can exit through a closed door!.. Again, darling, stronger... Sir, a glass of tea – half honey, half water, faster! Nu, drink. A sip! Swallow! Once again the hand towels – pull towards you! Help yourself! Harder!

In this way the *Bobbe* Malke barked out orders, until the woman in labour began to shout in a voice not her own. Then the *Bobbe* Malke rolled up her sleeves and shouted to the husband: "Pour over!" And holding her washed hands out in front of her, she ran towards the bed and called out in a soft quiet voice, as if she were afraid to frighten someone:

- Nu, come, quicker, fool, anyway there is no room for you up there...

She called softly and more softly still. The woman in labour shouted more and more loudly, until some little smacks were heard and a thin brand-new 'Wah!' Vlades stood and looked on, as the *Bobbe* Malke held in her left palm a quivering blue-brown creature tummy facing up. With the other hand she poured lukewarm water over it as she joked:

- You have a peasant, weighs surely twelve pounds!

She wrapped him up and asked:

- Nu, now give something to eat.

Vlades once again brought out the liquor. He poured out two glasses.

- No, no more of that. Enough! I am not a drunk! I needed a shot of courage, you drink, and give me something to eat.

Vlades brought butter and honey, a round loaf of wheat-bread, and the *Bobbe* Malke spread one slice<sup>9</sup> after another.

- Ay, *Babke*, splendid job. If one fed you up for a bit, you could yourself have children!
- For sure! You think your wife has had this baby? I had for her! And anyway now its time for you to go to sleep, since you have started talking nonsense. Go lie down, and I'll sit with the young-mother.

Days went by. The *Bobbe* Malke knew already that Vlades was the [German appointed] headman of the village. The young-mother walked about, the new-born went from red to pink, the broad squashed little nose narrowed. The *Bobbe* Malke healed the thrush which spread in his mouth: she would roll a soft linen cloth around her little finger, dip it in salt-water and wipe his little tongue and palate. She would take meals together with the headman and his wife, quickly scraping aside the shortening with a spoon. She became one of the family.

When Vlades was not at home, Mikhasye would open the green chest and, displaying silver cutlery, linen and other things, ask:

- What do you think, *Bobeshi*, is it a sin? Had we not taken, others surely would have. Not so? The *Bobbe* Malke silently nodded her head.

At night she would dream the same dream: she was the godmother, handing over the child, the *mohel* had Vlades' appearance, he threw it back wrapped in swaddling, and there poured out many, many bloodied little hands and feet... she cried out in her sleep, and the headman shouted at her:

- Make your bed in the summer part of the house, you don't let me sleep, *Bobke*, the devil knows what crawls around in your head!

The *Bobbe* Malke would not merely have gone to the summer part of the house, she would have gone away, wherever her eyes would have taken her. From the first days onwards, she didn't only feel hatred towards Vlades. It was a feeling of combined disgust, hatred and curiosity.

It happened that a peasant woman came in, and babbled in confusion: "Five *viyorst* from here the partisans have burnt down a military command post together with the Germans". Mikhasye buried herself in the soft bedclothes and whimpered. Vlades came in from the street and boomed:

- How many times have I said, allow no one into the house. Their eyes are on stalks! They are filled with malice. Was I the only one who took? They, are all honest folk! Get out of bed, you slovenly creature! If not... – he made a movement towards Mikhasye with raised fists.
- Vladinke, I'm afraid, I have no strength left... burn everything, throw it away, I don't need anything! – Mikhasye sobbed.
- Throw it out?! You stinking slob! You didn't bring it in and you won't throw it out!

And the *Bobbe* Malke thought as she rocked the hanging crib: "Dear Lord, may he never more hear the cry of a new-born child!"

The house was packed full of goods and chattels. Silver cutlery – but they ate with wooden forks and spoons. Dozens of Dutch sheets – but they slept on home-woven coarse cloth. Large copper bowls turning green, with the lids placed above the oven, only the cushions patiently held their heads up. The clock struck hour after hour, and the mirror showed a corner of the oven and the four cords of the hanging crib instead of everything which it had reflected not a long time previously...

Early in the morning when Vlades combed his hair, the *Bobbe* Malke was always reminded of Isaac's Tzivke: She stood with uplifted hands before the mirror, as she wove her plaits around her head – in Isaac's house there was a mirror exactly like this one. And in the town they would speculate about who would marry Tzivke, the way she stood and preened... and now... she lies with her parents and many, many others in a large pit...

From the mirror Vlades' face looks out, with his flaxen forelock falling over his indifferent brow.

- Vlades, cover the mirror, it is made of the kind of glass which abhors warmth, and the house is like a bath-house. Take good care of the mirror, after all, its yours now! – the *Bobbe* Malke could not resist.

As he covered the mirror, Vlades muttered to himself:

- For sure, why should one pry open people's eyes? Next year I'll build a new house with a high ceiling, built to fit the mirror.



And the *Bobbe* Malke, tightly squeezing the handle of the hatchet and the raw potatoes for the chicken dish, grumbled into the cast-iron pot:

- May you not live to see your son grow up, and may he be your last!

Her hatred towards Vlades robbed the *Bobbe* Malke of her sleep. At night she looked down from the oven, and however dark it was in the house, she saw his face and the teeth in his open snoring mouth.

It would sometimes happen that he was delayed for several days in a nearby village.

Had Vlades been able to read her glance, when he returned, he would have detected that the *Bobbe* Malke strongly anticipated his arrival. Concerning Mikhasye, she had already long since decided: bland cooked food – without salt and without pepper. As regards Vlades, however, she thought differently, and for this very reason, she schemed for days, how to send Mikhasye away with the child. In addition to this, for the last few days Mikhasye had wandered around sighing and moaning. The *Bobbe* Malke understood that he was concealing something from her. She said nothing, until Mikhasye confided in her when Vlades was not at home.

- Next week Sunday – she told her – the Germans are coming to the village. Vlades says he will invite them to us, and he has asked me to make roast geese with apples. I know how to cook geese with cabbage, but with apples, I hear this for the first time... and you know him of course? If he says something, it *must* be carried out!
- Nu, until next week Sunday, there is still time! And anyway, why should he care who does the roasting, as long as there is a roast – the *Bobbe* Malke comforted her.

Mikhasye discussed the matter with her so often in secret, until she burst into tears in front of Vlades:

- I want to go and visit my parents, Vladinke, I miss them so!
- If you had any sense, you would have said yourself: Go, my wife, take the child and go! – the *Bobbe* Malke interjected – is it really necessary that she should hang around the house? Your guests are Germans, don't forget! And they deny themselves nothing. Refreshments are refreshments, roasted geese are certainly tasty, and after a few glasses of liquor, a young woman is also not bad!... And further I wanted to tell you for some time, Vlades... I have been thinking: I have eaten your bread for long enough! It is time to move on. I have relatives some fifty *viyorst* from here. Spring is approaching, and I'll help them on their land...
- What have you suddenly latched onto *Bobke*, as if I had put some gunpowder under your tail? Have I said anything? Let her go! And you stay! When she returns, we'll see. – Vlades interrupted the *Bobbe* Malke in mid-sentence.

The next day he actually took Mikhasye himself. When he returned he couldn't help but wonder, the oven was painted white, the walls scrubbed and the floors – you could eat *kashe* off them.

Now that the *Bobbe* Malke remained alone in the house with Vlades, she became more disquieted and strained than ever. It took a long time until she got used to the fact that the villagers and the people in the household did not think of her as being Jewish. And now she feared every step, each squeak of the door, each turn and movement of Vlades made her jump. All her strength and all the stubbornness upon which she had drawn throughout her life, she now tapped into in an instant, in order to appear outwardly calm, but only outwardly. Her old mind and true heart did not rest. Sometimes it appeared to her, that it would have been better and more sensible, had she remained in her own village. "Empty cradles are left, that only the wind can rock" – she thought, as she watched Vlades running the village.

Since Mikhasye and the child had left, he had more work then he could handle. Vlades was the son of a rich miller and it was not for nothing that the Germans made him a headman. Vlades lead the angel of death to those who had sons, brothers or fathers in the Red Army and with the Partisans. He shared the possessions of those executed, with the Germans. He knew no limits. He helped himself indiscriminately: an iron bar stripped from a neighbor's house, to fruit-trees dug out roots and all from a stranger's orchard.

May he be cursed, may a crib never more stand in his home, and may he never again hear the cry of a new-born child" – the *Bobbe* Malke whispered as she also cursed her own very being: "You old dodderer, vile creature! You remain in Vlades' house, yet you do not choke with every bite you take". She was distracted and cleaved in two. One *Bobbe* Malke stumbling around the town among the ruins, the second – intently watching Vlades. "The man who plundered and assisted in the murder of my nearest ones, this same man loots and kills his own people as well!" – she thought with a shudder, hearing the voices crying out at night: "Save us!"

The anticipated Sunday arrived. The *Bobbe* Malke stuffed the geese with schmaltz wheat cereal. She placed them in a scoured copper dish, surrounding them with cooking apples and herbs<sup>10</sup>, and put them in the oven. When she took them out cooked, they were perfectly browned and they smelt so good that Vlades bolted the door.... She had taught him how to make a delicious drink from raw spirits. He placed dried cherries, plums in a samovar, poured over the liquor, a bit of honey and cooked it up. Tasting the drink, Vlades heaped praise on it:

- They will swallow their tongues here in my house! Ekh *Babke*, you have Lithuanian hands and a Lithuanian head on your shoulders!

He left to greet the guests. The *Bobbe* Malke combed her hair, washed, put a cast iron pot of lye on

to boil in the fire place, placed the roasted geese and the samovar on the table. The weather was already getting warmer. She could not understand why Vlades had not yet arrived with the guests. She herself had eaten nothing. That day was a fast-day for her. The smell of the roast was repugnant to her. She crawled up onto the oven and covered herself with the sheepskin. "May no crib stand in his house, Father in heaven!" – she thought as she drifted into sleep. She dreamt, they were knocking on the door shouting: "Wake up, we have been saved, the Red Army has arrived!" she crawled down from the oven and opened the door for Vlades.

- What's the matter with you, *Babke*, I thought they had killed you. I nearly knocked the door down, may a pox take it. What a waste of three wonderful geese! They arrived, took away whomever they wanted, but they did not come to me!
- No matter, its cold, you won't have to throw it away – the *Bobbe* Malke comforted him.

But Vlades did not hear what she said. He was already consoling himself. He sat down at the table, carved some goose flesh for himself and drank a toast alone.

And she stood at the hearth with her hands under her apron.

- *Babke!* Don't you like me! Sit down at the table!
- No, such a roast is not for my teeth, I have already eaten mashed potato – she responded.
- Mashed potato? – Vlades repeated drunkenly.

The *Bobbe* Malke stood all the while at the hearth. She watched as he downed glass after glass. Her eyes were half closed, but she saw this was the right time.

- You have drunk enough! – she screamed.
- As much as I want, so much will I drink, you knobby old hag! You had better guard your thorny roots! – he shouted at her as he tried to stand up.

The *Bobbe* Malke sensed that her scheming and planning could disappear like smoke.

- "You trampled the fresh green shoots and the flowers under-foot, and the oak-trees you have chopped down – so I have no need to guard my dry roots! – she thought, keeping her gaze fixed on him. As soon as she noticed that he had cut off a drum-stick and had begun chewing at it, she grabbed the cast-iron pot with the same force, she used to save a woman in labour from the last most acute pain, and running towards him, upturned the boiling contents on his head.

A thick vapor enveloped the house. She pulled the sheepskin down from the oven, threw it round her shoulders and left. She imagined that the street

should have been full of people. She looked around in amazement: a clear starry night, a light frost. She stuck her hands in the sleeves, buttoned up and thought: "Thankfully the hands were not washed<sup>11</sup>!... He will no longer look into a cradle". She lifted her eyes to the stars and prayed: "If possible, Father in heaven, let me still live, just a little longer, not more..."

## NOTES

- 1 [http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=5&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=625&PID=868&IID=1525&TTL=Spiritual\\_Potential\\_of\\_the\\_Communal\\_Revival:\\_Yiddish\\_Culture\\_and\\_Post-Soviet\\_Jewry](http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=5&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=625&PID=868&IID=1525&TTL=Spiritual_Potential_of_the_Communal_Revival:_Yiddish_Culture_and_Post-Soviet_Jewry) Velvl Chernin.
- 2 Dovid Bergelson. 1961. *Oysgevaylte verk. Melukhe Farlag fun Kinstlerishe Literatur*: Moscow.
- 3 Towards the end of his life, Stalin became increasingly paranoid. He believed the doctors of the Moscow State Hospital (many of whom were Jewish), were plotting to poison him. These were arrested and, following a "show trial" in which they were falsely charged with treason, executed.
- 4 *Dertzeylungen fun yidishe sovetishe shrayber*. 1969. *Farlag Sovetski Pisatel*: Moscow.
- 5 JBooks.com, Faith Jones, *Shira Gorshman: A life in three acts*.
- 6 In the translation by Jennifer Kronovet, of this story, the name Mikhasye (as it appears in the Yiddish text) is rendered as Marina. I could find no reason for the change, except that 'Marina' is a less Jewish sounding name. The story is included in an anthology called: *Beautiful as the moon, radiant as the stars: Jewish women in Yiddish stories*. 2003. New York: Warner Books (Ed. Sandra Bark), pp. 279-290. It is a highly competent translation and sometimes tends to be more interpretative. My translation tends to be more literal, attempting to remain more faithful to the original text.
- 7 In this context, 'Soviet citizens' includes the Jews. In the former Soviet Union, the authorities set up memorial plaques at major killing sites of Jews in Lithuania. The plaques referred only to 'Soviet Citizens' murdered – even though only Jews were buried in the mass graves.
- 8 Mendele: Yiddish literature and language Vol. 20.012, a whole issue was devoted to the discussion of these difficulties.
- 9 The word used in the Yiddish text is "*moytze*" – "*geshmirt a moytze nokh a moytze*" from the blessing said over bread, "*hamoytze lekhem min ho'oretz*".
- 10 The Yiddish word used is "*plostn*". I could not find an appropriate English word for this. It could be 'goose fat' or herbs and spices.
- 11 The Yiddish reads: "a dank di hent nit gevashn!" I could not make sense of the phrase. Jennifer Kronovet translated this phrase "Thank the One whose Name cannot be uttered...". Maybe the text she consulted differed from mine. This translation differs too greatly from the text I had in front of me.

# RICHARD FELDMAN: YIDDISH AND ENGLISH WRITING

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Mona Berman

The convoluted route through which I discovered the merit and quality of the Yiddish writings of my father, Richard Feldman, was through an article published by Yiddish scholar Astrid Starck in the *Jewish Affairs* 1995 Winter issue. Entitled 'South African Yiddish Literature and the Problem of Apartheid', it was originally written in French and presented in Accra, Ghana at the 1994 World Conference organized by the African Literature Association. It was translated for publication by Karen Durbach, wife of then *Jewish Affairs* editor Joseph Sherman and a fluent French speaker and teacher.

On seeing the article, I immediately phoned Joseph to find out who had analysed my father's stories in such an academic way, likening him to Kafka and Y.L. Peretz. I learned that Starck was a Yiddish lecturer at the University of Alsace in Mulhouse (she has since received a full professorship in Yiddish Literature at Basle University) and wrote to her expressing my surprise at her praise of my father's writing. It is almost 15 years since we began our correspondence and friendship, and during that time she has visited Johannesburg many times to do research and give lectures. Through her, I have learnt more about my father's writing than I ever did whilst he was alive.

Feldman's anthology was first published in Warsaw in 1935, under the title *Shwarts un Vays* (Black and White). Twenty-two years later, in 1957, it was republished in New York by the Central Yiddish Cultural Organisation (CYCO) and issued in a dust cover designed by the famous artist Irma Stern. It was the only South African Yiddish book to achieve a second edition. Starck regarded the anthology as a "benchmark of Yiddish writing as world literature" which formed part of "the multilingual literary impulse of South Africa". Thus, it took a French scholar for me start appreciating my father's literary output in Yiddish and it has motivated my learning Yiddish in order to read his stories in the original.

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When Sherman was compiling and editing from *A Land Far Off*,<sup>1</sup> a selection of twenty-seven stories by fourteen different South African Yiddish writers, he asked me to help him choose three of my father's stories. Two of these he re-translated himself, *Gold and Diamonds* and *She is Different*, while *The Banjo* he retained in its original translation. The anthology had a foreword by Dan Jacobson explaining the variety of views and subjects chosen by the Jews of Eastern Europe after they migrated to South Africa.

*From a Land Far Off* is an important addition to Yiddish writing as world literature because of its thematic and geographical framework. In her 1995 article, Starck points out that the texts reflect either the history of immigrant Jews, mostly from Lithuania, who came to South Africa towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, or the history and society of their new country as refuge. As a result, a lively Yiddish cultural life and literature developed which, while linked to Eastern Europe, found its own South African voice. She believes that Feldman's stories express the message of the Enlightenment, and are thus at one with the Yiddish writers of Eastern Europe.

This is important: Feldman's stories built on the framework of the historical, racial, and social situation in South Africa, expressing the idea of the right to education and equal opportunity for all individuals. Starck maintains that the writers wished to alert their Yiddish readers to the injustice and inequality in South African society and show the plight of "the poor whites" and the inhumane treatment of the blacks. She says that the weight of the South African political situations is depicted in a Kafkaesque manner, including not only the absurd and the tragic, but even the grotesque: "Whatever the protagonists do or do not do, they cannot protect themselves from a fate over which they have no control and which has determined to crush them." This theme links these stories to the work of, for example, Y.L. Peretz, who describes "the pathetic and miserable lives of small, poor people, subjected to a merciless destiny that leaves them no hope."

In Sherman's Introduction to Feldman's stories, he points out that when, as a boy of thirteen, he arrived in 1910 (from Skoposhik, Lithuania) with his family in Johannesburg, he was unique among Yiddish writers in South Africa in that he received both a secular and a Jewish education. In Lithuania, he studied at a *maskilik* Yiddish school; in Johannesburg he attended the Jewish Government School under the inspired headmastership of A.M.



Abrahams. However, after three years at school he felt “so much in the wrong sphere of life” that he preferred to spend his interval time in the lavatory reading, “rather than in the playgrounds among the kids.” He recalls that his school life that year “was really a miserable time, but it was, at the same time, the most important in my life.”

In the evenings, Feldman started attending Business College and in 6½ months, through hard work and sheer determination, managed to pass both the Junior and Senior exams in Bookkeeping. He then was able to start his working life. He became an ardent Zionist, inter alia becoming one of the pioneers of the Young Zionist Society and a prime-mover behind the Jewish War Victims Fund (particularly the Doornfontein branch). After serving as secretary of the SA Labour Party, he became a prominent member and was elected to the Transvaal Provincial Council in 1943. His writings expressed what he passionately felt about social justice.

Like most children growing up in a middle-class Jewish community in Johannesburg in the 1940s and ‘50s, the war in Hitlerite Europe seemed far away to me and hardly affected our daily lives. In those days, we took most things for granted. We lived comfortably in nice houses, went to good schools and were never without food, warm clothing or things that we wanted to make our lives more pleasant. Certainly, though, we were aware of our parent’s involvement in the war effort - their constant fund raising and meetings held in our house to assist survivors of the Holocaust here and abroad. My father and uncle Leibl’s wholesale tobacconist business provided sheltered employment for hundreds of people who could not find employment anywhere else. It became a standard joke in our household when new people were employed because everyone knew that Richard and Leibl, while not the most pragmatic of businessmen, were overly generous and could never say ‘no’ to anyone in need.

My father and mother, Freda’s, beautiful home, Ny-Hame in Houghton, became a haven for Yiddish poets, writers, actors and avant-garde artists living here and abroad. It was the gathering place of Yiddishists determined to keep Yiddish alive and vibrant in their adopted country. There were ongoing arguments, fierce debates and raucous laughter from the Klabejas School. As a child, it seemed to me that the Yiddish speakers and intellectuals were the predominant force in our society. Many of my father’s friends were Bundists, Socialists or Communists, or had their own brand of political convictions. The exchanges between his friends was always heated, with each one being determined to get his voice heard, but invariably they were spiked with Jewish humor.

My parents were actively involved in Jewish community organizations and fund-raising for local programmes to alleviate the plight of the poor. They encouraged a large group of their friends and acquaintances to assist with their efforts to collect money, clothes and food to donate to the needy. Much of their social life was taken up in fund raising

functions, premiere film and theatre productions, art exhibitions and musical events. It was during this time that they acquired a love of art, becoming keen collectors and enthusiastic patrons. In the early 1930s, they met Irma Stern, who visited their home in Johannesburg. They admired her painting style and loved the subjects she chose to paint in rural and exotic places. They became ardent collectors of her work at a time when the public was largely indifferent to it. She in turn became dependent on them for their friendship and unwavering loyalty as they helped to sell her paintings to private individuals, galleries and institutions.

I mention this background as examples of the remarkable adaptation of both my father, who came to South Africa as a youth with no knowledge of English, practically no money and no previous access to Western culture, and of my mother, who was raised in the small rural town of Amersfoort somewhere in the backwoods of the Transvaal. Though born in Johannesburg, Freda grew up 300 miles from her birthplace and, as the eldest child, helped her mother bring up her seven sisters and two brothers on the meager earnings of her father’s small grocery store. At the age of 16, she came back to Johannesburg to live with her grandfather and found work as a cashier in a departmental store. Although they were distant cousins, I have no idea what attracted Richard to Freda, an unsophisticated country girl who did not wear lipstick until she was 25. Nevertheless, they married when she turned twenty and, with Richard’s faith in her potential and his unwavering support, she became an extraordinary personality in the community.

Richard and Freda were determined to make Johannesburg the cultural hub of South Africa. They encouraged actors to come from South America to introduce Yiddish theatre to Johannesburg audiences, organized Jewish art exhibitions, held charity musical evenings and arranged venues where Yiddish poets and writers could talk about their work, recite their poetry, or read extracts from stories they had written. The community was hungry for the Yiddish language and Yiddish theatre and popular musicals became integral to the social life of Johannesburg. The infusion of Yiddish during the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s gave comfort to the life of the immigrants, who were once again able to remember, write or sing about their *shtetls*.

Being a prolific reader in English and Yiddish, Richard became a fluent writer in both languages, writing English articles about Yiddish for periodicals, journals, magazines and newspapers. In the daily English and Yiddish press, he reviewed art exhibitions, gave his views on the work of various Jewish writer, commented on Yiddish theatre and musicals and covered events and issues that were of interest to the community. Written with force and clarity, these pieces gained acceptance and respect for his views, particularly with the *Rand Daily Mail*, where his editorials were regularly published. The latter mostly expressed his outspoken left-wing political opinions about the inequality and injustice

of the Apartheid regime. Feldman further contributed to the "Letters to the Editor" columns, expressing his outrage at the state of black hospitals, lack of adequate housing for communities in the townships and the conscious neglect of a proper education system for the black community. I recently came across his article entitled 'Partnership is the Only Answer'. Written in the 1950s, it argued that: "For the White man to survive and for the Black man to advance in the shortest possible time, partnership in its full application is the only way." Many of the articles he wrote sixty years ago could have appropriately been included in today's newspapers.

My father realized that in order to actively change the plight of the oppressed and fight for equality and justice for the disenfranchised, he could only do so through legitimate political channels. He chose to join the Labour Party and in time became the representative for Johannesburg City in the Provincial Council. For much of his eleven-year tenure there, he was the party's only member and representative for Johannesburg City, but his voice was heard regularly through his writings and speeches advocating change on government policy. His passion for education never wavered. In his latter years, he persuaded a friend, Morris Isaacson, to contribute to an educational trust fund which provided bursaries for black students. This subsequently led to the building of the first High School in Soweto, the Morris Isaacson School, still regarded as one of the top academic schools in Soweto.

I now wish that I could have been a more active participant in my father's life, even while remembering how, much against my will, I would have to sit in the Selbourne Hall (a small hall adjacent to the City Hall) through all those interminable political meetings. My parents also schlepped me to concerts and the Yiddish theatre, which I always thoroughly enjoyed but never fully understood. How I wish he would have insisted that I learn to speak, write and read Yiddish and that he would have spoken to me in Yiddish as my uncle Leibl did with his children! My parents at that time felt that their children, growing up in South Africa, did not need to speak the language of a vanished world, and they further chose not to participate in traditional religious observances. However, we imbibed our Jewish culture and love of Judaism in our minds, bodies and spirit and it still flows fiercely through our veins.

I recently found my father's book of compositions, neatly written in an exercise book. The first one begins:

I am eighteen today! No more a boy nor a youth, but quite a man, and thoughts of those eighteen years "sweep over the brain", and also of the future. I will take the past, present and future respectively. How were those days – happy? Yes happy in many major ways and unhappy in quite a few minor. My greatest happiness always lay in having my mother with me and my brothers and sister and knowing that far beyond the seas I had a father who was expecting and longing for

us. Even at my birth my father was far away, and when my mother tells the story of my first meeting with my father it makes me sad. I thought that the word *tate* meant a letter and when preparations were made for my father's reception I was astonished and asked "What is this day different from other days? We receive *tate* every week." And when I knew father, it was to part with him again.

A composition in his diary on his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday is particularly relevant now in light of the uncomfortable question posed by David Saks [in his 'Barbaric Yawp' column] in the 2010 Rosh Hashanah *SA Jewish Report* as to is whether South African Jewish activists were 'informed by their Jewish inheritance' or 'whether their move to radical leftist activism was a way of escaping from it.' Richard's innocent ideology in his late teens would suggest that it came from his moral fervor:

I have no ambition and desire to possess anything which I have not got at present – except knowledge. For money I cannot and yet I dream sometime of being wealthy, and thus enabled to do work of benevolence – in other words I dream of being the treasurer of some poor people – distributing amongst themselves that which has cruelly been stolen from them – the fruit of their labour. I am content with my lot and would not for the world be anything that I am not today. I am the proudest of men to believe in the goodness which mankind is capable, and to believe in universal brotherhood. My pride of my race – my Jewish birth is unlimited ...

And yet, I must agree with Saks' view that when it came to showing concern for basic human rights, there was a pronounced lack of concern in the Jewish community, and the small minority of Jewish anti-apartheid activists was hardly embraced at the time for their actions by their fellow Jews.

Feldman submitted his first story in 1917, when he was twenty, and it was published in a magazine called *Judaca*. He called it 'A holiday from *Cheder*', and marked it as the beginning of his literary career. Guilelessly, he commented, "It is my masterpiece - I wrote it for myself, and I am greatly pleased with it. I very much doubt if ever again I shall write anything as good".

Thirty years later, on his fiftieth birthday, he reminisces about his first day in *cheder*:

When I was first shown "*dem aleph beth*" and angels dropped '*kopeker*' (pennies). It was the usual initiation. I remember the long winter nights when we each had our lanterns to light our way home. In addition, he recalls his lessons in Chumash when he hears about the death of Moses in Exodus: "I cried, as if we had just been bereaved of this great leader. Moses remained my favorite historical character and influenced my outlook on life to this day.

Feldman's Yiddishkeit was unquestionable, although as an adult he seldom attended a synagogue service. Traditional orthodoxy was part of his growing-up life and he admits that when he was a small child, "I would not, in the middle of the night, drink any water before putting my hat on. But, he says, that must have been when I was about six or seven as I cannot remember having been so *froom* - except religious observance was a routine - we could not imagine any other kind of behavior."

When the two younger Feldman brothers graduated from *cheder*, their mother agreed to let them attend the first modern school in Rakishek.

There was no more translating the Hebrew into Yiddish. It was just explained in Hebrew and what happened was that we somehow skipped several thousand years and were transplanted from the life of the Ancient Hebrews of the Bible to the present day life of the Jews who speak and write Hebrew. I think I could fairly well converse in Hebrew and understand the Hebrew books I read. The teacher's great passion was Hebrew.

But the teacher's fanaticism drove them away from Hebrew scholarship and they continued with their Yiddish schooling. After his mother's death in 1919, he wrote a memoir in Yiddish in a black leather bound book which still holds a prominent place in my bookshelf. It is about his mother, her life and upbringing, the hardships she endured and her struggle to bring up her four children in her husband's family home while he was in South Africa. It became unbearable for her living with a family with whom she had little in common and she finally plucked up courage and moved with her four children to Rakishek where she had relatives. They lived there for several years until the tickets arrived for them to embark on the long sea journey to the *goldene medina*.

In the Rakishek Yiskor Book, which now refers to the shtetl by its modern name Rakiskis, Feldman writes of his "Childhood Joys":

There are people who remember well their youthful years, remember their childhood and their experiences ... my memories of childhood are few in number and foggy. Perhaps, because the new life in Johannesburg eclipsed the experiences in Rokiskis, and because the new homeland accepted me so maternally and warmly ... When a tree is transplanted, its success depends on how young the tree is, how deep its roots have grown, and the quality of the soil into which it is transplanted. My roots in Lithuanian soil were not deep.

When I was ten years old, the conflict arose between the *cheder*, the Jewish school, and the Russian school, it was a mixture of languages - Yiddish at home and in the street, Hebrew in the Jewish school and on the printed page, Russian among the intelligentsia, and Lithuanian at the marketplace and in the village. As a boy, I saw no

farther than the shtetl and practical matters. One did not yet think about what one would want to do. And yet, sparks flicker in my memory and light up my childhood years in Rokiskis.

For a long time I have yearned for the joy of the four seasons in Lithuania with the pleasures of summer and winter, spring and fall. And in general, I have longed for the cornfields that were near our *cheder* - Moshe of Meshtzansk's *cheder* - and for the forests that surrounded Rokiskis.

My first written works in English were stimulated by yearning for the Lithuanian fields and forests and for the snow-white winters. Until this day, when I see large green apples, I recall the early mornings in the late summer in the courtyard of Zalman Nahman, where they would pack apples into crates for export. The smell of apples woke us up before sunrise, and Zalman Nahman would joke with us about getting out of bed so early...

A small selection of flowers and plants grew in and around Rokiskis. In Johannesburg the number of different flowers is vast; and yet to this day I feel closer to the daisy, the nasturtium, and the blue cornflowers than to the beautiful rose, the splendid gladiola, and the exotic strelitzia.

The joy of the holidays in Rokiskis is unforgettable. The New Year would start with Passover, not on Rosh Hashana, because then the world would be filled with brightness and warmth. By Passover the mud had almost dried, and the trees would clothe themselves again in green.

Who can measure the excitement of the day when our matzah was baked in '*Pardiad*' - cutting the dough, making punctures in the matzahs, and then the procession home from "Pardiad" with the matzahs. And that's how it was every holiday, each with its special joy. My holiday would be a bit disturbed because I was the third of three boys in the family, and I always received an older brother's handed down suit of clothes instead of a new one. The only gloomy and difficult days I remember are the most tragic - the days when we expected a pogrom in Rokiskis. Many times we came through with just a scare. But years later, under Hitler's rule, the Germans - with the help of Lithuanian hooligans - carried out the pogrom that annihilated the Jews of Rokiskis and of all Lithuania.

Today I see a Roskiskis where every stone and bit of earth in the street is wet with Jewish blood, and one wants to curse the fields that soaked up the blood of our murdered brothers and sisters.

And yet, and yet, one remembers the childhood joys because it is part of us and of our past.

As an adolescent, I read most of the Yiddish stories my father translated himself into English from *Shvartz un Vays* and, while I enjoyed them, I did not think they were of great literary merit. He had photocopied the translations, stapled them together and put them into soft blue folders, dedicating them to his children and grandchildren. The stories we



read had little context for us. They were not particularly good translations and their modest presentation on inferior typing paper did not invite serious consideration.

Most of the Yiddish writers on arrival in South Africa wrote longingly of their lives in their shtetls in Lithuania, yet when my father arrived in South Africa his thoughts and ideas were focused on his adopted land. He immersed himself in the culture of the indigenous people and tried to learn as much as he could about their traditions and culture. In *Shvartz un Vays*, he tells stories of rural Africans coming to seek work in Johannesburg, the hardships suffered by the immigrant Jews from Lithuania, the relationship between black and white and the inevitable exploitation of the poverty-stricken black people who were forced to work for little pay in the most menial jobs.

The first story in the collection - *Dos Gekestlite Rekl* (The Checked Jacket) - is about a rural African man Jackson, who comes to Johannesburg to take the place of his deceased father as a "kitchen boy." On his last day in the city after he has decided to go home and "live as a man among men, as his father did and his father's father" he is arrested for a "pass offence". It is a Monday morning, after a weekend, when he is led handcuffed in a procession to jail with other pass offenders. A large crowd gathers to watch and whisper that there are "so many criminals" and that "it is good that the law is so vigilant: that gives the citizens a feeling of security." In an identity parade, he is picked out by a white woman as her would-be rapist and because he is wearing a checked jacket, he looks different from the other offenders. He is locked up in jail for three years. When he is finally released and his clothes returned to him, he refuses to take the jacket back from the warders because it has caused him such grief and humiliation. The narrator comments: "They do not know that in each check is hidden an evil spirit and these spirits had played a terrible game with him."

This short story illustrates the dramatic intensity of the author's technique, which is both graphic and poignant. The jacket is a metaphor that invites different readings of the text. While it situates Jackson directly with his new surroundings, it soon becomes a hindrance for him both in the white world and the world of his own. It illustrates the alienation and loss of identity of the protagonist. The jacket becomes a metaphor of otherness, but instead of allowing for invisibility it achieves the opposite.

In many of the stories, the omniscient narrator slides into the skin of his characters to show the dehumanizing effect of work on farms or in the mines. They illustrate the hostile world of the whites and their ignorance of the traditional world of the tribal village. The workers come from the villages to earn money for their families and work in the fields, in the mines or as servants. In the story *Ja Baas* ('Yes, master'), the narrator first introduces the reader to the Afrikaans farmer Hendrik Lasthuizen, who employs black workers on his farm although he dislikes them intensely and treats them with contempt.

At the slightest provocation, he hits them with his 'schambock' (whip) to further humiliate them. When it is time for the laborers to be paid so that they can go home to their families, they discover that their employer has deducted rainy days from their wages as well as money for the few meager necessities they are forced to buy, with the result that they are in debt to the farmer. They are forced to repay him before returning home. The author introduces the reader to Piet N'dali, a hard-working young Swazi, obedient and seemingly docile, as he always answers the farmer's harsh words with "*Ja Baas*". A fight ensues when the farmer, realizing that Piet is involved in the Workers Union. He takes out his revolver and shoots him in cold blood. Needless to say, the police are in cahoots with the farmers in the district, so that when Hendrik reports the incident to them and asserts it was a case of self defense, no charge is laid against him.

In *Masike der nachvechter* ('Masika the Night Watchman'), the narrative examines the question of identity when the protagonist's place of origin is made the antithesis of the hostile world of the whites. The narrator explains, "The world of the whites was for Masika an upside down world" because the white world is the world of the night, whereas the black world is the world of the day. Masika's life in his village is one of harmony, discussion and meaningful relationships, the opposite of his working life on the gold mine. These evocations are brief, forming a background that serves as a memory of the past or a vision of the future, but is the reverse of the real situation of the present.

*Gold un Diamantn*, one of the stories Joseph Sherman chose for *From a Land Far Off*, is one of the most powerful short stories in the section dealing with the hardships of immigrant Jews arriving in South Africa. The narrator is the brother of a sister waiting impatiently at home for the riches he is going to earn on the Diamond fields and on the Gold Reef. She imagines that the diamonds are easily accessible and that her brother, being a bright young lad, will have little trouble accumulating wealth. She is thus surprised when she does not hear good news from him and receives only a few pounds a month from the *Goldene Medina*. He then tells her of the hardships of the new immigrants, who have no money, skills and no one to help them.

On arrival, the narrator describes visiting his cousin, the son of his father's brother, to help him find work and advise him how to make a living. The cousin, who has become a wealthy man, is arrogant, mean, selfish and a braggart. He tells the young man that he hates *grines* (greenhorns), who he regards as lazy, uncouth and a burden on society, and sends him away empty-handed. The young man, desperate for work, does not mind doing any kind of menial work but is told that those jobs are reserved for the blacks. He would have to employ a black worker if he wants to dig. Obviously, with no money he is unable to consider prospecting for diamonds. He is fortunate to find work in a shop on the minefields, albeit with very little pay and hardly any chance of advancement. He tells his sister that this is the plight of the immigrant

Jew without family or funds.

Many of the stories in the anthology offer a window into the lives of people who have been alienated, exploited and displaced by circumstances beyond their control. There are narratives about poor whites, rural and urban blacks, immigrant Jews and prospectors seeking their fortunes in the gold mines. Some of the narratives are concerned with the hopeless plight of the poor, while others describe the joyful atmosphere of a Zulu wedding or the haunting sounds of a banjo being played in the hills of Swaziland. One story tells of the *Kafferitniks*. A purely South African Yiddish coinage, this refers to concession stores mostly run by immigrant Jews without any other way of earning a living, which sold basic supplies and poor quality food to black workers.

Another purely South African Yiddish coinage is the word '*tryers*'. Feldman includes in the anthology a three-act play called "*The Tryers*". It is about Jewish immigrants coming to the "*goldene medina*" trying to earn their living "by trying this and trying that."

'Carbide Ash' is another tragic story, describing the helplessness and decay of a once healthy and virile young Zulu man returning to his village in The Valley of a Thousand Hills. There, "the sun shone bright and warm" but digging for gold underground for many years has destroyed his lungs and his life, and he no longer has any connection with his family.

The longest and most developed story in the

anthology is *Der Vayse Kafir* ('The White Nigger'). It is a powerful account of an Englishman who, disillusioned with the greed of the prospectors on the Rand, leaves the country after making and losing a fortune and finally finds peace in the hills of Swaziland. Here, he marries and has children with a Swazi woman. People who once admired his success come to regard him with contempt and hate, calling him by the pejorative term *der vayse kafir*, and he too, having lost all self esteem, adopts and lives by that name. He is between worlds, despised by whites and not accepted by the Swazis. He finds, too, that he has little affection for his own children and the plans he once had to educate and free them from oppression never materialize. Alcohol becomes his only solace. However, the story ends with a glimmer of hope as he visualizes that his favorite son, Tommy, might one day become a leader in the African National Congress and help free his people from poverty, injustice and oppression.

I hope one day to have Richard Feldman's stories well translated into English and compiled in an anthology, called *Black and White*. It would be an important contribution to our historical archives and an invaluable incentive to further literary investigation.

#### NOTES

- 1 *From a Land Far Off*, Jewish Publications – South Africa, 1987

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# SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH NEWSPAPERS – THEIR HISTORY AND IMPACT

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Naomi Musiker

A newspaper, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is 'a daily or weekly publication containing news and articles on current affairs'. This is as opposed to a periodical, which is a 'magazine or newspaper published at regular intervals'. The history of the Jewish press in South Africa features both newspapers and magazines, but this essay focuses only on the former.

The earliest attempt to list serial publications, including newspapers, occurs in the *South African Jewish Year Book* of 1929 in an article by J S Judelowitz entitled 'The Jewish Press in South Africa'.<sup>1</sup> This list was updated by J A Poliva in his book *A Short History of the Jewish Press and Literature of South Africa*.<sup>2</sup>

## The Yiddish Press

Some of the earliest descriptions of Jewish immigrants in South Africa are found in two Hebrew journals published in Eastern Europe, namely *Hamelitz* (St Petersburg) and *Hatzefirah* (Warsaw). These articles take the form of letters published by recently arrived immigrants giving an account of life in South Africa for the benefit of those considering emigration.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest Jewish newspapers to be published in South Africa were produced in Yiddish by late 19<sup>th</sup> Century East European immigrants. For anyone wishing to capture the atmosphere of Jewish life in South Africa during the period when the East European immigration was at its height, the writings of a number of Jewish journalists are of particular significance.

The pioneer of local Yiddish journalism was **Nehemiah Dov Baer Hoffman** (c.1857-1928), who founded the short lived *Der Afrikaner Israelite* in 1890. Hoffman was born in Kovno and in Vilna came into contact with many of the leading Jewish intelligentsia of the period of enlightenment of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He trained as a journalist in

Koenigsberg under Michel Levi Radkinson, editor of the Hebrew journal *Hakol*, and himself wrote several books in Hebrew and Yiddish. In 1882, he was engaged to write for the Warsaw journal *Hatzefira* (which was published in Hebrew) and in 1885, spent nine months working for the US Yiddish weekly *Der Yiedishe Gazetn* before returning to Europe to edit the Hebrew weekly *Hamagid*.

In 1889, Hoffman was persuaded by his brother-in-law Barnett Millin to leave Czarist Russia for a freer life in South Africa. At first he took, unsuccessfully, to peddling. In 1890, he brought over the first Hebrew Yiddish type to South Africa and printed various short-lived Yiddish newspapers, including *Der Afrikaner Israelit*, *Ha-or*, *Der Yiedisher Herold*, *Der Afrikaner Telegraph* and *Yiedishe Folkszeitung*. His final venture was the monthly *Der Afrikaner*, which he edited from 1909 to April 1914. In his articles and book of memoirs *Sefer Hazikhronos*, Hoffman gives a colorful and interesting picture of the pioneering Lithuanian Jews of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

Co-editor and co-owner with Hoffman of *Der Afrikaner Telegraph* was **David Goldblatt** (1886-1945), another pioneer of Yiddish journalism and ardent champion of Yiddish language and literature. Hoffman had grown up in Radom, Poland, and lived in Warsaw, Berlin and London before moving to South Africa. In London, he had come under Russian socialistic influences and trained as a journalist by writing for the Yiddish publication *Der Arbeiter-Friend*. In 1898, he arrived in Cape Town and was invited by Hoffman to write for *Ha-Or*, the only existing Yiddish weekly. In 1899, Goldblatt founded the first Yiddish daily *Der Kriegstaphet*, which consisted of a single page, published daily, giving an account of the Anglo-Boer War, an editorial and news of interest to Jews. This publication lasted from 16 October to 13 December 1899.

Goldblatt's most successful venture was *Der Yiedisher Advokat*, which appeared from 1904 until 1914. The following year, he left for the United States. He is best remembered for his struggle to gain recognition for Yiddish as a European language. His pamphlet *Yiddish, is it a European Language?* was instrumental in persuading legislators at the Cape House of Assembly to accord Yiddish equal status with other European languages in the admission of immigrants to South Africa.<sup>4</sup>

**Hyman Polsky** (1871-1944) grew up in a shtetl near Grodno and in 1891 left for London, where he

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became a successful photographer. In 1911, he immigrated to South Africa and travelled through many towns and villages recording Jewish life. These experiences appeared in various sketches for Jewish periodicals. Polsky contributed regularly to *Der Afrikaner* and was its editor from 1920 until 1933, when it merged with the *Afrikaner Yiddishe Zeitung*. He wrote with great compassion of the struggles of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants, but was less tolerant of the more prosperous, assimilated Jews who flaunted their newly acquired wealth.<sup>5</sup>

### DER AFRIKANER

This weekly Yiddish publication first appeared on 10 November 1911. It was founded, edited and published by Samuel Vogelsson, who came to South Africa from Dvinsk before the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). He was honorary inspector of the Hebrew Schools (Talmud Torahs) and honorary secretary of the *Gmilat Chasidim*. To finance *Der Afrikaner*, he sold his house and attempted to produce an illustrated literary newspaper of a high standard. The paper concentrated on politics, literature and science. In July 1916, an attempt was made to produce an English supplement, called *The African Jewish World* under the editorship of Percy Cowan. When Vogelsson died in July 1920, the afore-mentioned Polsky became editor. The last edition of *Der Afrikaner* was published in December 1933, after which it merged with the *Afrikaner Yiddishe Zeitung* (or *African Jewish Newspaper*). This was edited and published by Dr Benzion Almoni, who founded his own shareholding company, Jewish Daily Press. The paper was subsequently taken over by Boris Gersman.

In 1937, the *African Jewish Newspaper* incorporated *Der Yiddisher Express*, which ceased publication in 1942. From 1942, it was published as a weekly. From 1939-1949, the editor was J. Batnitzky, followed by Gersman until his death in 1953. From that date on, it was edited by Levy Shalit who, along with Shmaryau Levin, was also its publisher from 1955. Levin also wrote extensively for the paper.

Four to five thousand copies were printed. The paper had its own printing press with linotype setters from Israel to do the Yiddish setting. It was established at 100 Market Street and distributed through the CNA. Four big supplements were issued at Rosh Hashanah, Pesach, Israel's Day of Independence and Chanukah. In 1971, the paper celebrated its Golden Anniversary. It finally ceased publication in 1985.<sup>6</sup>

### THE JEWISH ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prior to 1902, the *Jewish Chronicle* (London) was a valuable source of information on events in South Africa as it contained regular news items supplied by local correspondents from the various British colonies. In Johannesburg the *Standard and*

*Diggers' News*, edited by Emanuel Mendelssohn, contained many articles of Jewish interest and descriptions of important events from 1887 to 1900.

The *South African Jewish Chronicle* was the first Anglo-Jewish newspaper to be published in South Africa. It made its first appearance on 7 February 1902 and continued until 12 August 1904 as a fortnightly. The founder and editor was Birmingham-born Lionel Goldsmid (son of Michael Goldsmid, president of the Birmingham Jewish Congregation). He studied at the University of Sydney before coming to South Africa in 1895, at which point he took up journalism and became Reuter's agent in South Africa. At the time of the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, he was assistant-editor of the *Transvaal Critic*. After the war, he started the *South African Jewish Chronicle*. Originally published Cape Town, this was subsequently published, now as a weekly, in Johannesburg after his move there in May 1905. Two years later, a company was formed under the name of the SA Jewish Chronicle Publishing Syndicate, with Goldsmid as managing director. Percy Cowan edited the paper from October 1909 to May 1912.

In 1913, The SA Jewish Chronicle was linked up with *Die Yiddishe Fohn* (Jewish Standard), founded by Benzion Hersch. A new company, called the SA Amalgamated Jewish Press, was now formed, with Goldsmid and Hersch as managing directors. From 1924, the paper was published in three editions in all four South African provinces, as well as in Rhodesia and the Portuguese colony of Mozambique.

In January 1928, the SA Jewish Chronicle was purchased by the SA Jewish Press Pty Ltd and the journal was moved to Cape Town. It was edited for the next few years by Jack Carasov and was then taken over by the Dorshei Zion Association. It served as the official organ of the Western Cape Zionist Federation, but also covered all aspects of Jewish life in the Western Cape. The first editor of the renewed company was Marcia Gitlin, afterwards succeeded by Rebecca Gitlin. In August 1959, the SA Jewish Chronicle was merged with the *Zionist Record* to form the *Zionist Record and SA Jewish Chronicle*.

The origin of the *Zionist Record* dates back to 1898, when the Transvaal Zionist Association announced its intention to publish, in English and Yiddish, a Jewish newspaper to be called the *African Jewish Chronicle and Zionist News*. It was not until the end of 1908 that the Federation carried out its decision to publish a printed monthly report containing the minutes of the Federation and all affiliated societies together with other matters of Zionist interest.

Although this publication was only a circular, it was entitled *The Zionist Record, issued by the South African Zionist Federation*. A press committee was appointed in charge of production and the editor was also the secretary of the Federation, at that time Isaac Abrahams (1908-1911).<sup>7</sup> The first issue, consisting of five pages, appeared on 15 November 1908. In August 1911, it became a monthly magazine with news of general Jewish and Zionist interest and

occasional contributions from overseas Zionists, including Otto Warburg, Norman Bentwich and Leonard Stein. The first original article published, entitled 'The true spirit of Zionism', was by Manfred Nathan. A Children's Page was also added that year. In 1914 a Yiddish supplement was included, edited by Jacob Solomon Judelowitz.

The production of the paper imposed considerable financial strain on the Federation. An attempt was made to secure advertisers, but it was not until 1919 that a profit was shown. Jack Alexander, who took charge of the head office of the SA Zionist Federation in 1919, was largely responsible for the development of the *Zionist Record* into a robust monthly journal. The bulletin was growing too large to be handled by the secretary of the Federation, and a decision was taken to appoint a separate editor. Alexander continued to contribute editorials, however.

An Editorial Board was set up in 1923, with Ben Zion Hersch at its head. Hersch was given a separate office in the same building and personally supervised all aspects of production, editing, advertising and circulation. A gifted writer, he translated articles and stories from Yiddish newspapers and wrote original stories of his own. Under his guidance, the *Zionist Record* developed into a widely distributed and respected newspaper. His death in 1935 was a great loss to the Jewish community and the Zionist cause.

From 1923 to 1943, the editorial and business management of the *Zionist Record* was in the hands of David Dainow, who developed the newspaper into a fortnightly and subsequently a weekly publication. Dainow encouraged writers such as Chaim Gershater to write in English (he did so under the pen name of 'Mr Spodik'). Edgar Bernstein served his apprenticeship in Jewish journalism under Dainow. Other prominent writers included Rabbi Dr Arthur Saul Super, the poet Chaim Lewis, Henry Katzew and Amos Ben Vered. Sarah Gertrude Liebson (later Millin) wrote about 'The Jew in English literature' while Bertha Goudvis published her translations from Y.L. Peretz and others.

Dainow was succeeded as editor by Gershater.<sup>8</sup> After the 1959 merger with the *SA Jewish Chronicle* and the subsequent death of Gershater in November of that year, Azariah Mureinik served as acting editor. From 1960, the editor was A S Super.

During the 1950s, the *Zionist Record* also had a monthly supplement, including a Hebrew page, called the *SA Menorah*. This was the official organ of the SA Zionist Youth Council.<sup>9</sup>

By the late 1980s, the paper's circulation had dropped to about 10 000 and the SAZF management committee sought some means of enhancing its financial situation. In 1989, an attempt was made under the chairmanship of Abe Abrahamson to bring about improvements by means of more advertising and patronage and increased subscriptions. A new editor, Leslie Winnett, was appointed in 1987. In 1992, as a result of a ground breaking agreement between the management board of the *Zionist Record* and the publishers of the *Jerusalem Post*, a number

of pages from the weekly international edition of the latter appeared in every issue of the *Zionist Record*.

Despite this, the *Zionist Record's* fortunes continued to dwindle. In part, this was due to the launch in March 1990 of the monthly *Jewish Voice*, which created additional competition for the existing Jewish papers. The final blow was the termination, at the end of 1993, of the subsidy which had hitherto been granted to the *Zionist Record* by the SA Zionist Federation.<sup>10</sup> The last issue of the *Zionist Record* appeared in December of that year.

The *SA Jewish Times* and *Jewish Herald* were two publications with interlinked destinies. They were both founded at approximately the same time, i.e. the period 1936-7, when German fascism and antisemitism was peaking and impacting on world events. There were various organizations in South Africa, the so-called 'Shirt Movements', sympathetic to Nazi German propaganda, and there was a definite need for the Jewish community to have its own mouthpiece to counteract this.

The founder of the *SA Jewish Times* was Leon Feldberg, a Yeshiva trained Lithuanian immigrant who had written for the Yiddish press in Europe. In 1933, he went into business in Johannesburg, and saw the need for a vigorous, independent Jewish newspaper to uphold South African Jewry's rights and hit back against antisemitism. He obtained the support of Dr B Almoni and also brought in as a third partner, Alexander Ovedoff, editor of a small monthly publication, *Ivri*.

The first issue of the *SA Jewish Times* appeared on 17 July 1936. The paper was under-capitalized at first, but Feldberg's persistence won over financial support from Dr Bernard Friedman and Sam Kruger. After the departure of Almoni and Ovedoff, Feldman undertook complete editorial and management supervision of the paper. He was greatly assisted by the appointment of Hans Guggenheimer as Advertising Manager. In 1939, the *SA Jewish Times* acquired its own printing plant at the corner of Pritchard and Nugget Streets. During this time, Edgar Bernstein joined the paper as journalist. The war years resulted in economic difficulties, forcing the owners to sell the printing plant and moved to smaller offices in His Majesty's Building.

By 1948, the situation improved with the arrival of Izzy Sacks and Harold Blumberg to carry out administration and join the board of directors. A new company, Eagle Press Ltd, was formed, with printing and publishing house in Doornfontein. This subsequently became Caxton Ltd. Harold Blumberg also served on the editorial board and contributed the paper's popular 'Talk of the Town' column. Others who joined the *Jewish Times* included Bernard Sachs (until 1968), Arthur Markowitz and Benjamin Bennett as the Cape Town correspondent.<sup>11</sup> During the 1940s, one of the paper's employees was the renowned short story writer Herman Charles Bosman, who also wrote a number of opinion articles for it.

On Feldberg's retirement in December 1968, his controlling interest was acquired by Felix Stark, who merged his own company, Felstar Publications, with

Caxton. Edgar Bernstein succeeded to the post of editor and Arthur Markowitz became assistant editor. In 1971, Bernstein left to join the SA Jewish Board of Deputies. He was succeeded by Markowitz, with Azariah Mureinik as assistant editor.

In 1983, the *SA Jewish Times* became the first Jewish newspaper to introduce its own in-house computerized typesetting, photographic and processing facilities, based at Van Der Stel Place, Corner Melle and De Korte Streets, Braamfontein. The publisher was Reuben Shapiro<sup>12</sup>. In 1985 Suzanne Belling, former Associate Editor and Cape Regional Editor of the *SA Jewish Times*, succeeded Markowitz as editor. A year later, the paper announced its merger with the *Jewish Herald* to become the *Herald Times*.

The *Jewish Herald*, the official organ of the Zionist Revisionist Organization of South Africa, was first issued under the title *The Eleventh Hour* on 12 March 1937. The instruction for launching the publication was conveyed by Ze'ev Jabotinsky through his representative Nahum Levy, who came to South Africa to make preparations for Jabotinsky's visit. It was so named in order to warn the Jewish community of the critical state of European Jewry threatened by the advance of Nazism.

The first editor of *The Eleventh Hour* was Jedidiah Blumenthal, a pioneer of the Revisionist Movement. The first full-time Editor, and also General Secretary of the New Zionist Organisation, was A A Menkin. It was he who was responsible for changing the name of the publication to *The Jewish Herald*, which undertook to report Jewish affairs in 'a true and unvarnished manner'. The paper upheld the political views of Jabotinsky, who wrote the first editorial columns. It supported the efforts of the *Irgun Zvai Leumi* resistance movement and later, the party of Menachem Begin.<sup>13</sup>

Successive *Jewish Herald* editors were Reg Rudolph, Ronnie Misheiker, Joe Kuttner and Harry Hurwitz, while deputy editors included David Abel. The editorial board was chaired by Jedidiah Blumenthal, then President of the Zionist Revisionist Organisation of South Africa. Contributors included Abraham Abrahams, editor of the *London Jewish Standard* as guest editor in 1955, Ivan Greenberg, former editor of the *London Jewish Chronicle* and Joseph Leiserowitz, one-time intelligence officer in the Hebrew Underground. The last editor of the paper prior to its merger with the *SA Jewish Times* in 1986 was Maurice Dorfman.<sup>14</sup>

The *Jewish Herald* was initially printed by Excelsior Printers, directed by the Picker family.<sup>15</sup> After the 1986 merger, publication was entrusted to Publico, under the control of Reuben and Jack Shapiro. The Publico Board also comprised Bertie Lubner and Joseph Rabinowitz.<sup>16</sup>

The merger of the *Jewish Herald* and *SA Jewish Times* to form *The Herald Times* was welcomed by the Jewish community. Maurice Dorfman was appointed editor, with Suzanne Belling as consultant editor. Reuben Shapiro became managing director, Dr Jack Shapiro served as chairman and the chairman

of the editorial board was Jedidiah Blumenthal. This arrangement lasted until 1994, when most of the existing Jewish newspapers ceased publication.

The final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century led to the emergence of a new type of Jewish newspaper, less concerned with party affiliations and directed more to serving the interest and needs of every section of the Jewish community. The first attempt at this communal paper was the *Jewish Voice*, a monthly publication launched by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and the Israel United Appeal-United Communal Fund (IUA/UCF) and published by the Shapiro brothers of Publico Ltd. Gerald Leissner served as chairman of the editorial board while Suzanne Belling was the editor. The stated aim of the newspaper was 'to cry out against injustice, strive to counteract misconception and highlight what the ethics and tenets of Judaism stand for in terms of truth and respect for human life and dignity'.<sup>17</sup> The *Jewish Voice* was intended to be a free publication distributed to every Jewish household. By 1993, the cost of the newspaper was about R20 000 per month, of which one third was paid by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and the balance by the IUA/UCF. The final issue appeared in February/March 1994. The editorial comment of this issue gave as reasons for termination, financial pressure and the need for the rationalization of existing newspapers.

In 1993, discussions were started with the object of publishing one major newspaper consisting of a merger of *The Herald Times*, *Zionist Record* and *Jewish Voice*. This led to the re-launch of a 'new' *SA Jewish Times*, published by Publico. The editorial board consisted of six community members, of whom three represented the Zionist Federation and one each the IUA/UCF, SAJBD and Revisionist Zionist Organisation. This paper was published once every two weeks and expressed the views of all three sponsoring organizations. It did not prove to be a successful newspaper and was discontinued after Publico were bought out by Kagiso Press in 1997.

In 1998, the *SA Jewish Report* came into existence, facilitated by the SAJBD. A company, The SA Jewish Report (Proprietary) Ltd, was formed to carry out this undertaking. The original Board of Directors included Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, Abe Abrahamson, Sam Abrahams, Denis Maister, Marlene Bethlehem, Issie Kirsh, Seymour Kopelowitz, Bertie Lubner, Herbie Rosenberg and Ivan Levy. The first editor was Janine Lazarus, followed by Suzanne Belling and then by Geoff Sifrin.

## ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH NEWSPAPERS

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century South African Jewry, though relatively small in numbers, were blessed with a succession of talented and dedicated journalists who strove against all odds to serve the needs of the Jewish community.

The early Yiddish newspapers voiced the concerns and aspirations of the East European immigrants,



struggling in a foreign country to establish themselves, often against great odds. At the same time, the Yiddish journalists were also authors of renown and the papers contain many original stories which have become pearls of Yiddish literature giving successive generations a window into the lives of their forbears.

The English newspapers had to rely on the sponsorship of organizations such as the Zionist Federation for existence. However, the *Zionist Record* and *Jewish Times* also served as a record for SA Jewry, covering every aspect of communal events and history and commemorating Jewish leadership in all spheres of political, social and economic life. For this reason the newspapers, although now defunct, continue to provide a valuable source of information for historians and researchers. In many cases, no other source of information is available.

Perhaps it is fitting to close with the words of Abe Abrahamson mourning the closure of the *Zionist Record* in December 1993:

When the righteous dies 'tis the earth that weeps with loss. The jewel will forever be a jewel but it has passed from the possession of its former owner. Well may the loser weep.<sup>18</sup>

#### NOTES

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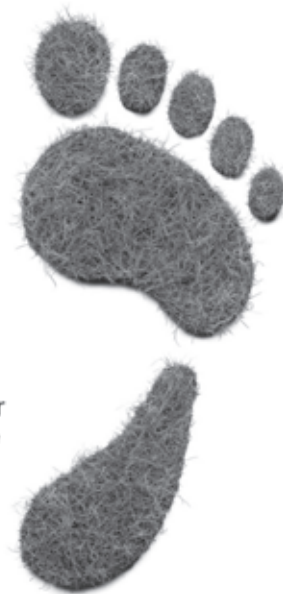
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- 8 The publishers were Kadimah Press, under the chairmanship of B. Rheinhold
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- 10 Abrahamson, Abe, 'Well may the loser weep', Message from Hon Abe Abrahamson, chairman, South African Zionist Federation and Chairman, Zionist Record Management Board. *Zionist Record*, 17 December 1993.
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- 18 *Zionist Record* 17 December 1993, p.3

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# LIFE AND DEATH IN RAVENSBRUCK

\*

Don Krausz

Recently, I lost a close relative, an event that brought back memories of watching the demise of a woman in the Ravensbruck concentration camp (KZ).

Ravensbruck, located some 80 km north of Berlin, was established as a KZ for women in 1939. 132 000 women were incarcerated there during its existence. Of these, an estimated 50 000 to 92 000 perished, the latter figure giving a death rate of three out of every four women. There was no gas chamber until early 1945, which means that these women died of starvation, disease, exposure, brutality and despair. Anyone too weak or sick to work was sent to another camp that had a gas chamber. Executions of captured Allied agents also took place in that camp.

I was part of a group of eighty Hungarian Jews captured in Holland. Being thirteen years old, I was sent with my mother and younger sister to this camp, while the men and older boys were sent to the Buchenwald KZ.

There was a medical condition in those camps called camp fever, which involved getting a high fever and dysentery together with a complete loss of appetite. Delirium was not uncommon. In two of the camps where I was held, treatment consisted of being put into a hospital with bed rest and nothing else. I contracted this disease in several camps.

In Ravensbruck, I was hospitalised for about three weeks, spending most of that time in the top bunk of a two-story bed. This was a welcome change from the three-story variety which one had to share with five other people in two beds, each of which was about 70 cm. wide. That hospital bed I had to myself. My lack of food and accompanying dysentery had made me very weak and resulted in exits and re-entries to that top bunk being very difficult.

Toilets were another matter. When I tell you that most patients in my ward suffered from dysentery, there is no need for me to elaborate on the condition of the toilets. One preferred not to sit on them and I made a loop out of a strip of material which I fixed to the handle of the toilet door, wound my hands through it and thus was able to suspend myself above the toilet seat. I don't remember there being any toilet paper or what we substituted for it.

From my top bunk I was able to watch the SS doctors in their black leather boots and the nurses going about their duties. I was never examined or attended to, except for receiving food that I could not eat.

Then one day my mother came to visit me and brought me chocolate, which I was also unable to eat. I remember wondering how my mother had been able to acquire this delicacy, something that I had not seen in years. She must have gone to great trouble in obtaining it and I clearly remember how she was almost reduced to tears when I would not eat it.

After the war, I discussed this episode with her. She denied the whole story and I had to conclude that in my fever and possible delirium I may well have imagined it.

At a later stage I was removed from my general ward and placed in a tiny room with just one double-decker bed. A woman of about thirty years lay dying in the bottom bunk, breathing stertorously. I was told that as soon as she had died, I could have her bed. There were a number of young women sitting in that room, all talking or shouting loudly and joking with each other. The dying person was completely naked and I assumed that the other women had stripped her of all her clothing while she lay there unconscious.

I sat there watching this young, dying woman and feeling terribly sorry for her. Then suddenly her tortured breathing stopped and the room became very quiet. After a moment the other women jumped up and ran screaming out of the room, leaving me, a thirteen year old, with the body.

I was not upset by corpses and had no desire to follow the others. My overwhelming reaction was one of sorrow and pity.

I may well have been that young woman's only mourner.

About one week later a woman came into my room to scrub the floor. She told me that she had also had camp fever with my symptoms. She, however, had succeeded in obtaining medication, called Tanalbin, and that cured her. I asked her to get me some, which she did. My dysentery stopped and I was soon discharged in order to return to my old barrack.

The first person from my Hungarian group that saw me covered her mouth and screamed.

I had become emaciated.

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*Don Krausz is chairman of the Association of Holocaust Survivors in Johannesburg. He has lectured extensively on his experiences during the Holocaust to a wide variety of audiences over many years.*

# AREN'T YOU A YIDDISHER? - REFLECTIONS ON A JEWISH CHILDHOOD.

\*

Annette Dubovsky

The magic casement of childhood unfolds itself for me in moments of solitude. The venue, a peaceful beach last visited many a long year since, served to initiate a leap back in time. With the rise and fall of the sea, a great wave of reminiscence broke up into wavelets and ripples, the tiniest of which led suddenly to my earliest awareness of Jewish identity. Why my train of thought should have taken this particular line I do not know, unless it was the awareness that I was certainly the only Jew on the sands in this off-season period.

It cannot be gainsaid that throughout a Jewish lifetime there are many occasions when one feels 'different'. At my convent school, because of the Jewish Holidays, one was "better off" (?) than Maureen Mckenzie, my bosom-pal, who often prayed that she could be Jewish. Ah! Sweet innocence of untroubled childhood – I wonder how long that sentiment lasted, Maureen!

This recollection brought to mind the occasion of the Annual Prize-giving, when the presiding Mayor happened to be Jewish. So aware was he of *his* Jewish identity that, in his enthusiasm, he "thanked the dear Sisters for all they were doing to make our children good Jews and useful citizens..."! Was his face red, I wonder?

Those were halcyon days, when mothers had time to bring their children's lunch to school. Possibly our little school was unique. Big Break occasioned a get-together for those mothers who lived near enough to walk (no cars of course,) with the sandwiches and flask. I mentioned this because my young cousin, aged three at the time, used to accompany his mother – and became a talking-point in our Jewish community. Always precocious, he volunteered to "Sing for the Sister" – and produced "*Rozinkes Mit Mandlen*" in the vernacular. The children sniggered, but I adored Sister Sienna to eternity when she interposed, "what a lovely song! Do sing it again, will you".

It was my grandmother who taught us those songs. I don't have to tell you that the atmosphere of our home was very Jewish: to this very day, when I think of the Almighty, He is my grandfather, and Jewish, of course. Certainly, there was as much Yiddish as English spoken, and this was taken for granted – at home, that is. But I admit, to my shame, that I wasn't happy to go shopping with my grandmother – there was that awful time she told me to ask "how many *eyes*" to cast on for a shawl.


...But what I really set out to tell you happened when I was just four years old. A dearly loved,

English-bred aunt lived next-door (do you remember when entire families lived "next door", and "across the road", and "around the corner"?). One of the reasons why I worshipped her was that she actually *invited* me to come and watch her in the kitchen, never implying that I'd be in the way. On one of these blissful occasions, I decided to take the plunge.

"May I have some *taig*?" I asked.


My aunt must have been somewhat taken aback, and amused by the casual use of the word in a four-year old vocabulary. "What was that you said?" she queried, with a studied, puzzled frown. I gazed at her, long and incredulously – dismayed, almost. And then I asked: "Aren't you a Yiddisher?"

I wondered why there were tears in her eyes when she hugged me and assured me that she was indeed – and my gingerbread man was really beautiful, with all the extra currants she gave me for buttons.



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# GERIATRIC CONDITIONAL STASIS DESCRIBED: A HUMOROUS DELVE INTO IMAGINED OLD-AGE ILLNESS/ES

\*

Maurice Skikne

As Man advances in age, so do a number of maladies beset him. As we approach our octogenarian state, so these, it would appear, multiply exponentially. Although not a medically qualified person, I am a biologist by training who, for some two decades, worked in the Human Pathology field and can now therefore pretend to be a maven in human diseases. Not only that, but because I have now begun to be a participant in this age category, I feel authoritative enough to describe, nay propose, a group of mild-ish conditions which do at times plague one of my advancing years.

There is a further factor, which has come about through advances in medical treatment, and must be seriously taken into account. This is the ability of mankind to live longer than was previously the case. Today, our average survival rate has shot up from what used to be the earlier 50s to the 70s and even 80s to 90s. For this, we can thank the fathers of discovery and description, like Fleming, Salk and others. To these, we owe a debt of gratitude for describing and developing antibiotics, antiviral vaccines, and other medication principally circulatory measures. Of course, there are also modern surgical procedures, pioneered by amongst others our own late Chris Barnard.

With those introductory observations, let me now proceed to describe these new octogenarian conditions. Far be it for me, however, to dare describe them as diseases! Diseases connote invasion and damage to an organism, in this case Man. Here, we are discussing not invasion and infection, but the affliction which besets humanity as we age.

I have long considered this type of affliction and have decided to give it the generic name of: "Geriatric Conditional Stasis", i.e. a condition which develops conditionally in geriatrics by stasis - G.C.S. This malady can be divided into three phases, namely:

- \*Geriatrititis
- \*Alteritis
- \*Alterkakeritis

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*Maurice (Mo) Skikne, a regular contributor to Jewish Affairs, is a biologist who worked in the field of Human Pathology, wherein he published a number of scientific papers on various aspects of lung pathology and molecular biology. He currently lectures in Computer Skills and Languages and is deeply involved in Jewish genealogy and history.*

## Symptomology of each condition

*Geriatrititis* has an onset of the condition at around the age of 60-65, dependent on the individual and mainly manifesting in men. In women, the condition can be delayed as a result of weekly visits to the local hairdresser, end-of-season clothing sales, generally going shopping and regular attendances at tea-and-gossip parties. Thus women, being the stronger sex, as well as being automatic members of the most powerful trade union in the world (W.O.M.E.N.), take longer to develop the onset of *Geriatrititis*. This period is generally delayed in women by five to six years. Instead, they may succumb to a minor condition known as '*Bobbanitis*' (not a subject for this article).

The symptoms of *Geriatrititis* include:

- \* A tendency to be a little deaf, especially when being assailed by one's spouse.
- \* A need to fall asleep when watching television, especially during romantic movies.
- \* Forgetting to give one's spouse her weekly allowance
- \* Forgetting anniversary and birthday dates (a very bad and potentially dangerous habit!)
- \* Having bouts of forgetfulness when told to do things at critical times.
- \* Suddenly remembering that one has a poker school, klaberjas game or golf date with the 'boys', when *She* wishes to go to a soppy movie.

*Alteritis*: This condition can occur anytime from about 65 in men and about 70 onwards in women. The condition is an exponential follow-on of the previous sub condition and is marked by the following:

- \* The deafness becomes more pronounced, the patient is more prone to being unable to hear spousal instructions, especially in the matters of decreasing food intake and '*I'chaims*'. A further item could be in not putting on sweaters because the spouse rules on ambient temperature!
- \* Also a condition of forgetfulness, and which can become extremely dangerous, is when one forgets the spouses name, and tries to make do with such

terms of endearments as ‘sweetie’, ‘dear’, ‘darling’, etc. In fact, in men this can lead to being slowly poisoned with slow acting poisons, masked to simulate heart attacks (shades of Mata Hari!)

\* Skeletal pains develop, as well as toothache, all symptomatic of osteoporosis.

\* As a result of the increased consumption of alcohol, the victim develops what is commonly called “Rhodesian Chest”. This happens when the stomach muscles can no longer hold back the pressure of fluids (especially beer), and the chest appears to have slipped down to form what is commonly called a paunch. This would require surgery to rectify – also known as tummy tucks. In women, sufferers have to endure what are known as face lifts, whereby “crow’s feet” around the eyes are smoothed out.

\* The loss of hair, either partial or entirely, is regularly endured by this time. (In some females, so much hair is lost as to give the sufferer a semi-bald look).

\* Even when retained, hair loses its vigor and color.

*Altekakeritis* constitutes the effective final stage of GCS. In men, this comes on at about ages 73-5.

\*One walks bent over or is confined to a wheelchair.

\*All joints are permanently stiff and getting up each day is heavy work

\*One falls asleep at the drop of a hat and sonorous snoring ensues.

\*The bowels do not operate adequately

\* The bladder is equally inefficient and incontinence can be expected.

\*One is extremely forgetful and cannot remember doing even small tasks a few minutes previously

\* Spectacles are needed to counteract progressively more acute long-sightedness.

Finally, in men, *Altekakeritis* brings on an insatiable need for many *l’chaims*, preferably taken with friends.

Which is understandable.....

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## DUMPLINGS WITH LITTLE SOULS

\*

Annette Dubovsky

A VERY odd Title indeed! – but literal translations usually are. However, in the Mother-tongue – here the Grandmother-tongue – your long-term memory will be miraculously revived: “*kneidlach mit nashomalach....*”

Well ....? If not, don’t be concerned: it could be that not everybody had that particular type of grandmother of the T/L/C– *bobbas*, all no less memorable for different reasons – perhaps Potato-Kugel, and certainly *Ingberlach* and *Tzimmes* – to mention a minuscule few of their provender. But to allay the curiosity of younger readers, let me explain the Title and get on with the Business.

Dumplings With Souls?....YES, particularly when Passover draws nigh and when the Supermarket shelves have on display, Matzo-meal. (A note of warning here: carefully scan the date to avoid stocking-up with last-years’ or earlier) There we go: that’s exactly what they are, dumplings born of the Meal, oil, eggs ETC. That enigmatic ‘etc’ tells you that *there* lurks an infallible family-secret...BUT as it’s no longer fashionable to do HOMEMADE and there’s a Kosher supermarket round every corner – of Glenhazel, at least - I’m prepared to disclose the Magic to the select few.

To 7 Tablespoons Matzo-meal, add 2 Tablespoons Oil, 4 large eggs, level teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon each of pepper, cinnamon and ginger, mix well with a large fork – (Why? Because MY Grandma used a fork, that’s why) leave in fridge for an hour so that it will be manageable to roll into “dumps” Meanwhile make *nishomelach* – that’s right, you’ve remembered! To ½ cup matzo-meal add 1 full teaspoon oil, salt, pepper, ginger and cinnamon – small pinches. Mix well, roll into marble-sized balls. When you’ve shaped the “dumps” press one of the “marbles” into the center of each. Your clear Chicken-soup now being ready and simmering – be sure to have the right quantity, for the Dumps will absorb a lot- and Bob’s Your Uncle, the Balls (that’s why I prefer to say Dumps) will have risen to the top after about ten minutes.....Dumplings with Souls!

The whole *megillah* actually has nothing to do with *Kneidlach* OR *Nishomelach*. It has to do with LOVE.....



## ISRAEL GOLDBLATT – BUILDING BRIDGES

\*

David Saks

Currently nearing completion is a comprehensive new history of the Jewish community of South West Africa/Namibia. When it appears, hopefully later this year, one of those featuring in it will be the distinguished lawyer, historian and human rights activist Israel Goldblatt. Given the broader nature of the project, of course, no more than a brief outline of his life and career can be expected. Fortunately, the recent publication of *Israel Goldblatt – Building Bridges* has made possible a more in-depth appreciation of this noteworthy individual.

Combining a fuller biographical essay alongside an anthology of his writings on a wide range of subjects, this book should be of particular interest to students of Namibian history and culture for the light it sheds on the formative decades leading up to the country's becoming independent. It was prepared for publication by Dag Henrichsen and two of Goldblatt's children, Naomi Jacobson and Karen Blum-Marshall, following the discovery after his death of the extensive notes he made on legal and political issues he was involved in. A number of these notes, which are explained and contextualised by the main narrative, appear in the book, as do examples of Goldblatt's correspondence with leading Namibian nationalists of the day.

The book's main title alludes to Goldblatt's lifelong commitment to establishing bridges of friendship and understanding across the colour line, and indeed across all ethnic, religious or political divides. In a quiet, unassuming way, he was able to play an effective role in his country's emergence from racially oppressive foreign rule to sovereign, non-racial democracy. The main title is followed by a lengthy list of subtitles referring to people Goldblatt interacted with, viz. "Namibian Nationalists/Clemens Kapuuo/Hosea Kutako/Brendan Simbwaye/Samuel Witbooi". This comes across as clumsy and confusing, unfortunately. It would have been far better for the editors to have entitled the book *Israel Goldblatt – Building Bridges* and left it at that.

*Building Bridges* is essentially a study of Israel

Goldblatt's career as a lawyer and scholar, as illustrated by his own private writings and correspondence. It deals with such subjects as his involvement with the South West Africa Mandate question, his legal defence of various black Namibian nationalist activists such as Chief Hosea Kutako, Captain, Rev. Samuel Witbooi and Brendan Kangongolo Simbwaye and his studies of local black history, culture and ethnography. His writings testify to his insatiable intellectual curiosity, broad-mindedness and scrupulous sense of fairness that unfailingly characterised his professional conduct in the legal field. An example of the latter was how he campaigned on behalf of German families whose menfolk had been interned or expelled on suspicion of being pro-Nazi. Inter alia, he lobbied the SWA Administration to grant tax relief to German wives struggling to keep their husbands' businesses and farms going in their husbands' absence and wrote to the South African Prime Minister motivating for the repatriation to Namibia those German men who in his view were innocent.

Some of Goldblatt's writings refer to the activities of a study group he established around 1960, which met regularly at his home to debate recent events at the United Nations, with particular reference to Namibia. These activities, as well as his interaction with such anti-apartheid campaigners as Ruth First, made him the object of suspicion to the security police and resulted in his coming under close surveillance for many years.

Yiddish scholars will also be particularly interested to learn that Goldblatt was the second son of David Goldblatt, a pioneer of the Yiddish press in South Africa who went on to achieve international fame for his two-volume *Yiddish Encyclopaedia*. Despite never seeing his father again after he relocated (*sans* his family) to the United States in 1915, Israel kept up a regular correspondence with him, and also sent him money, until his death in 1945. David Goldblatt's oldest daughter, Sarah, has her own place in South African history as the personal secretary (in reality, a great deal more than that) and later literary executrix of the famed poet and pioneer of the Afrikaans language C.J. Langenhoven. Jacobson

*David Saks is Associate Director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and Editor of Jewish Affairs.*



and Blum-Marshall have themselves enjoyed distinguished careers, the first as an internationally renowned sculptress and the second as a Senior Council who became the first woman judge to be appointed in South West Africa/Namibia.

Dag Henrichsen, Naomi Jacobson, Karen Blum-Marshall (eds), *Israel Goldblatt – Building Bridges*, Namibian Nationalists, Clemens Kapuuo, Hosea Kutako, Brendan Simbwaye, Samuel Witbooi”, Basler Afrika Bibliographien - Basel, 2010, pp140

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## L'AFRIQUE: A TRIBUTE TO MARIA STEIN-LESSING AND LEOPOLD SPIEGEL

\*

Arlene Segal

*L'Afrique* is a gem of a book that resonates with the mood of the 1960s. It captures the excitement of intuitive art explorations taking place in Johannesburg, at Wits, in studios and schools and in private Galleries like Lawrence Adler and Egon Guenther.

It is significant that the vast undervalued reservoirs of cultural and religious art objects found in Africa demonstrated design principles sought after by emerging artists in Europe, many of whom, like Picasso and Braque, would become the innovative giants of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel, who arrived as refugees from Germany in the 1930s, were prescient in understanding the relevance of the art objects they discovered locally and in extending their interest and research by collecting artworks from many different and often obscure sources in South African and beyond. Maria acquired a deep knowledge of art, architecture and anthropology through her rigorous academic studies, which culminating in a doctorate from Bonn University in 1934. This gave her the creative confidence to be her own person, an unusual attribute for a woman in the 1940s. As a teacher, her extraordinary talents were shared unstintingly with her students and her passion for her subject left no student unmoved.

My personal memories of Maria have been nostalgically recalled by the affectionate, accurate, amusing and serious references in this book made by my class mates, Judith Mason and Eric Fernie. Her eccentricity was legendary, as was her integrity. I believe she gave me the ability to 'see', an invaluable gift that has always guided my own work.

I only met Leopold once and found him very personable. From the tributes and anecdotes in the book, he emerges as an appreciative, enthusiastic partner and a fair match for the incomparable Maria. It is most fitting that their contribution to African Art is being recognised in this excellent publication.

*L'Afrique* is designed as a square, hard cover book that sits comfortably in the hand; the checkerboard cover illustrated with artworks hint at the delights of the content.

The book is filled with exquisite photographs of

art and artefacts formatted with uncompromising visual attention to detail and produced with daring. The artworks are displayed on sheer white paper and the text on a beige background that also serves the evocative intimate family photographs.

An interesting collation of objects, artefacts, paintings and photographs find their synergy in the accompanying text, which is written by friends, artists, historians and critics who knew the couple. With subtlety, warmth and wit, the articles and tributes reveal Maria and Leopold in their context: the sadness of displacement partially compensated through love of family and friends, imaginative work, living in Africa and the joy of adventure and discovery of beautiful artworks that fulfilled their creative aspirations.

*L'Afrique: A Tribute to Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel*, edited by Natalie Knight,

David Krut Publishing, in collaboration with Natalie Knight, Johannesburg – 2010, 128pp

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Pesach Issue

# NAZI PALESTINE: THE PLANS FOR THE EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWS IN PALESTINE

\*

Gary Selikow

In 1941-1942 Nazi Germany appeared poised for an overwhelming military victory over the British in North Africa. A German victory in Egypt would mean that German forces would be able to invade and occupy Palestine. Very definite plans were being drawn up by the Nazi regime in Berlin to exterminate the territory's Jewish population. From the 1930s, there was strong Arab support for Nazi Germany, and the Middle East and North Africa were flooded with antisemitic propaganda and incitement to violence against Jews.

Until recently there have been few thorough academic analyses of the relationship between Nazi Germany and the Arabs, the ideological affinity between the Nazis and Arab and Islamic nationalists and their joint plans. Generally, studies have ended with the outbreak of war in 1939, or sometimes with the pro-Nazi coup in Iraq in March 1941. Neglected has been the vital phase of 1941-1942, the period of impending German occupation of the Middle East.

Furthermore, many authors have downplayed the relationship between Nazi Germany and the Arab nationalists and dismissed the Islamic and Arab anti-Jewish agitation of this time as an expression of cultural differences. The tendency has been to accuse those who wish to explore the details of the Nazi-Arab nationalist relationship and the ideological relationships between the two as 'Eurocentric'. This amounts to an ideologically based cover up and apologia for Arab antisemitism and violence against Jews. *Nazi Palestine*, by Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers of the University of Ludwigsburg, is a book that gets to grips with the closeness of the Nazi-Arab relationship and the ideological affinities that led to it.

Chapter I, entitled 'Jihad in Palestine: The Arab Rejection of the Jews', documents Arab aggression against the Jews in the Holy Land following World War I up to 1939, and the beginning of co-operation between the Palestinian Arabs and the Axis powers. The Arab-Israeli conflict essentially began in late 1919 when Arab Bedouins carried out attacks against Jewish pioneers in the Galilee. The following year occurred anti-Jewish pogroms in Jerusalem, in which five Jews died and 216 were injured. In 1921, 47 Jews died when Arab mobs attacked Jewish shops, business and houses in Jaffa. Later that year, further deadly attacks took place in Jerusalem's Old City.

Larger pogroms took place in Jerusalem in August 1929, provoked by the rumour spread by the Arab

radical leader Mufti Haj Amin el Husseini that the Jews aimed to take over the Haram mosque. The violence later spread to Hebron, where 67 Jews were killed and then spread across the country. Six Kibbutzim were completely destroyed and Arab terrorists even attempted to attack Tel Aviv.

During the 1930s, the Great Arab Revolt was launched, consisting of attacks on Jews throughout Palestine and against the British authorities. Hundreds of Jews were murdered. The British yielded with the 1937 White Paper effectively closing the country to further Jewish immigration. During the decade, militantly antisemitic Arab organizations were set up, including el Husseini's Palestinian Arab Party which denied all Jewish rights in the Holy Land.

Those who refer to these and other attacks as Arab 'resistance' and part of campaign for national liberation are glorifying terrorism and ignoring antisemitic aggression.

Chapter II details the extent of Arab support for the Third Reich in the period leading up to the World War II. Hitler was held in great esteem in the Arab world and in the Islamic world as a whole. Articles in the Arab press placed him on a level with the Prophet Mohammed himself, and a widely held belief identified him as the promised Twelfth Imman sent to deliver Islam from its enemies. As the authors point out, through all this Nazi antisemitism was "stretched back into history, religiously legitimised and actively used in the present". They further comment that it was the "Third Reich's dictatorial orientation, aggressiveness, Fuhrer cult and especially hatred of the Jews that brought it popularity in parts of the Arab world and in the broader Islamic world".

In Chapter III, 'Shifting Principles', the Nazi funds made available to Arab extremists is examined. Chapters IV and V document the war in North Africa and Mesopotamia and Hitler's Mediterranean strategy while VI discusses Haj Amin el Husseini. At their famous meeting in Berlin on 28 November, 1941, Hitler promised the Mufti that after the victory by the Axis in North Africa and the Caucasus, liberation would come for the Arab world and then Nazi Germany's only goal would be the "destruction of the Jews living in the Arab territory under the protection of the British".

Chapter VII covers Rommel's war in North Africa and the thousands of propaganda pamphlets dropped by the Nazis urging support for the Axis and inciting anti-Jewish hatred. In Chapter VIII, the special *Einsatzattkommando* of SS and SD assembled by Walter Rauff (the originator of the gassing vans in Poland and the Soviet Union) are examined. Plans were in the advanced stages plans for the enthusiastic

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support in this planned extension of the Holocaust by the Arabs of Palestine - a much overlooked aspect of World War II in North Africa and the Middle East. After the Axis defeat at El Alamein and the end of the Caucasus operation (Chapter XI), the Nazis turned their plans into the persecution and deportation of the Jews in Tunisia, described in Chapter XII. Chapter XIII covers the various Waffen SS, SD and Wehrmacht units made up of Muslim Arabs and the last chapter looks at the Nazi-backed attempts to infiltrate into Palestine and other parts of the Middle East.

An Epilogue relates how in April 1961, before the start of Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, Jordan's *Jerusalem Times* published an open letter to

the accused stating that the extermination of Europe's Jewry had proved to be "a real blessing to humanity" and that his trial would "one day find its conclusion with the liquidation of the remaining six million".

In the context of another potential Holocaust against the Jews of Israel, with threats by Iran's dictator Ahmadinejad, Hamas and Hezbollah and the demonization of Israel ever growing in scope and fury, this book is a relevant look at the Nazi-Islamic relationship, whose effects are as prevalent today as they were at the time.

*Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews in Palestine* by Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers, Enigma Books, 2010, 272pp

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## ADVENTURE OF LIFE- REMINISCENCES OF PAULINE PODLASHUK

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David Saks

A controversy currently raging over apparent suggestions in a new biography of Gandhi that he and the German-Jewish architect Herman Kallenbach may have had a homosexual relationship lends an added dimension of interest to these recently published memoirs of Pauline Podlashuk, who was associated with both men around that time. Podlashuk briefly came into contact with Gandhi, and in due course with Kallenbach as well, when she was engaged to translate from the Russian the last of three famous letters written to Gandhi by Leo Tolstoy. Her account of these interactions, as well as the text of her translation, is amongst the many items of interest in her posthumously published autobiography *Adventure of Life – Reminiscences of Pauline Podlashuk*. Written shortly before her death in the early 1960s, these have been prepared for publication by her two grand-nieces Judy Nasatyr and Effie Schultz, with input from other members of her family.

This is not to say that Podlashuk has anything specific to say regarding the supposed gay love tryst. Rather, her account is valuable for providing insightful glimpses into an extraordinary friendship, one that impacted significantly on Gandhi's own life and therefore on the course of 20<sup>th</sup> Century history itself.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the alleged love-that-dare-not-speak its-name aspect of the Gandhi-Kallenbach relationship, it is probably sufficient here simply to note that Gandhi's adoption of a life of strict celibacy in middle age is well known, and that Kallenbach, who completely changed his lifestyle through Gandhi's influence, evidently followed his example. (The last would seem to be confirmed by a letter he wrote to his brother, Simon, saying that through

Gandhi, he had given up his sex life eighteen months before).

Pauline Podlashuk herself was an interesting personality who, like Herman Kallenbach, lived her life very much on her own terms. Exceptionally intelligent with a strong personality, she overcame considerable obstacles to become a medical doctor at a time when both her sex and personal circumstances made this extremely difficult. She qualified at the University of Glasgow and lived and worked abroad for a time, travelling extensively throughout Europe before returning to South Africa in 1926.

The Gandhi-Kallenbach sections of the book inter alia describe Podlashuk's visit to Tolstoy Farm, the commune established by Gandhi, with Kallenbach's financial support, to house and sustain Indian civil rights activists. On that occasion, she also met Dr Pixley Seme, co-founder and Treasurer-General of the newly established African National Native Congress (as the ANC was originally called). Seme had been invited by Gandhi to hear about the Indian Passive Resistance movement against unjust laws that he was heading up.

The memoir ends with Podlashuk about to embark on her return journey to South Africa. Of interest in this latter section is her description of her return visit to her birthplace of Shavli, Lithuania, where she was born in 1881. Here, she describes how much the country had changed and was changing from when she had left it some two decades before. The newly independent Lithuanian state at that time was asserting its own national identity, which entailed very deliberately effacing evidence of the previous centuries-long period of Russian imperialist



domination. To the end of her life, Podlashuk maintained a strong connection to the Russian cultural heritage that had nurtured her.

Most of *Adventure of Life* comprises Podlashuk's account of her work and studies in Europe, while a substantial part of the remainder describes her youth in Lithuania and visit to turn-of-the-century Palestine en route to South Africa. The South African section, apart from the above-noted Gandhi association, is of interest as a record of the challenges and opportunities facing young Jewish women immigrants like herself in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It further shows how someone sufficiently bold and resourceful could

rise above the constrictions of language, sex, religious minority status and comparative penury to embark on a distinguished professional career.

*Adventure of Life – Reminiscences of Pauline Podlashuk*, edited by Judy Nasatyr and Effie Schultz, Johannesburg – 2010, 283pp.

#### NOTES

- 1 See this reviewer's 'Right-hand Man of the Mahatma – Herman Kallenbach, Gandhi and Satyagraha' in *Jewish Affairs*, Autumn, 1998.

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# JEWISH AFFAIRS

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**WHY NOT TAKE  
OUT A GIFT  
SUBSCRIPTION?**

Chag  
Pesach

Kasher v  
Sameach

### Why we cry

We cry for the lost moment  
The excruciating and the endless torment  
We hold the world in our hand  
But conventions we cannot bend  
We yield and bear and conform  
Dreading the coming frightening storm  
We cannot say goodbye  
Because for sure something deep in us will  
forever die

*Israel Silberhaft*

### Eva's Diary

One is famous, one forgotten;  
Both, however, had to sup  
Hegemony's sauerbraten  
And to drain its bitter cup.

Every unconnected layman  
Knows that 'Anne' belongs with 'Frank';  
Should you mention Eva Heyman,  
Though, he'll only draw a blank.

If it's framed as an enquiry,  
You can answer that, like Anne,  
She confided in a diary  
When her holocaust began,

Though she didn't find an attic  
In Varad (near Budapest),  
Making rather less dramatic,  
Though it hastened, her arrest.

Her opinions – so observant,  
Of a world so inhumane –  
She'd entrusted to a servant,  
Ere they thrust her on the train.

They had been a living treasure,  
Not a bundle in a drawer,  
If she'd only had the leisure  
To record a hundred more.

[Eva Heyman began her diary in February,  
1944. Less than four months later, she was  
deported to Auschwitz and put to death]

*Peter Austin*



### Ibises

White Ibises of Benoni  
Fly from Lakeside  
Forever eastward.  
Their patrols  
Skirt the heights  
Weaving swerving  
out of sight  
Wings beating in straight lines  
To vleis, ponds & streams.

Raucous, wading deep  
Waters squirming  
with grubs & worms.  
Splashing, catching  
Food to eat  
Bodies long & sleek  
Bobbing bent beaks.

They return in flight  
Before the night  
Settle down in trees  
Keeping one another company  
The branches rustle  
With caws & peeps  
Before they settle down to sleep.

*Ben Krengel*

### The aftermath of Yom Tov

The aftermath of Yom Tov  
Is filled with good intention  
Lose a kilo, maybe more, enough to make a  
mention  
Get in shape for summer or the *simcha* soon  
to follow  
Until all we do again is pack it in and  
swallow!  
Why do we feel victimised with cardiac  
arrests  
When we tend to earn the likes of them  
Yet what we love to do is *fress*

*Bev Moss-Riley*

## READERS' LETTERS

\*

In their response to my article, Gluckman and Cowan ('Daniel Mackintosh's 'Speaking Out Against Injustice: Two Readers Respond', Chanukah 2010) raise a number of points.

First, they state that I was not sufficiently clear in the distinction I drew between the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the community. Cowan and Gluckman's criticism is a contentious topic. While they are distinct, they reflect and interact with one another. To suggest that the Board was outside of the community is not accurate, nor is it correct to say that the Board did not attempt to speak on behalf of the community on many occasions. However, one of the reasons argued in the literature that the Board did not condemn Apartheid until the late 1980s was that there were many within the community who would not have supported such a statement.

Second, they argue that I suggested that Jews became wealthy not due to hard work, but rather due to Apartheid. Racial segregation in South Africa ensured the wealth of all white people. Jews did not create this racist system, nor were they as heavily involved in its implementation as other white groups. Nonetheless, it is time that all white people in South Africa reflect on our collective privilege, secured through a system over hundreds of years. My article was a contribution towards encouraging my community to engage further in this necessary process by pointing out the extent to which we were beneficiaries of the system and the responsibility that this places on us to redress Apartheid's inequalities.

Third, they point to "those many Jews who - *in their own way* - fought against Apartheid" and demand that I apologise to them. Cowan and Gluckman's record of individual Jews is a small fraction of the vast contribution that Jews made towards the struggle. There are countless names that were not represented amongst the list that they compiled including Baruch Hirson, Pauline Podbrey and Ray Alexander. But, this fundamentally misses the point. There were many brave individuals. But, there were very few organisations that dared to raise their head over the precipice. In many cases, those who decided to be critical of Apartheid were denounced or made to feel unwelcome amongst community structures. As an example, Giddy Shimoni refers to Ann Marie Wolpe's story about enrolling her children in King David and the "offensive, sanctimonious response" that she received as a result of her husband, Harold Wolpe's, political activity (*Community and Conscience*, 2003, p106).

The Rabbinate and the Board are two institutions whose mission it is to politically and spiritually lead the community, but yet during Apartheid, both failed to provide leadership when it counted. Let us hope that this pattern will not repeat itself.

*Daniel Mackintosh*  
*Cape Town*

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In light of Benjie Shulman's article on Denis Goldberg's [autobiographical documentary] 'Comrade Goldberg' (Chanukah, 2010), it is worth exploring some of the callous comments made by Goldberg in the 1980s on Arab terrorism against Israeli men, women and children. The source of my information is *The Jewish Idea and Its Enemies: Personalities, Issues, Events* by Edward Alexander (1988).

There is no logic in the intensity of the hate of the new antisemites, as Israel is condemned for every action taken to defend her, by the same ones who are so silent in the face of massacres of Israeli women and children, by Palestinian killers. The latter are seen as the victims and the former as the aggressors in this macabre Orwellian theater.

Indeed, as we saw with the rise of Hitler, when the world loses its moral compass, there is no limit to what they will stoop to, and no amount of politically correct jargon, and Marxist obfuscation can hide this from us all.

Denis Goldberg was released as a result of Israeli pressure on the South African government, and brought to Israel before moving to the United Kingdom.

However, Goldberg very soon took up the venomous and vicious refrain of Communist against Israel and Zionism. In the typical fashion of Jewish-born radicals, he condoned and advocated PLO murder of the men, women, children and babies of Israel. Thus, he declared that every Israeli killed by a PLO bomb in a supermarket, street, school or nursery deserves his or her fate. He claimed that "terror is not a moral issue" and that "most of the bus passengers and those wounded by explosive devices are not innocent, since they support the oppression of the Palestinians".



The saga of Denis Goldberg begs the question as to the tragic mistake of Israel having taken up the cause of Jewish radicals imprisoned by conservative regimes.

Is someone with such a cold-blooded attitude to his own fellow Jews (including women and children) somebody we wish to engage with and even hold up as a paragon of community conscience? If you believe in human rights and are lauded for struggling for human rights, you cannot deny human rights to the Levantine Jews regardless or not whether you were born into the Jewish people or not.

The most fundamental human right is the right to life, regardless of whether you falsely charge the Jewish people with having 'stolen Palestinian land'. That there are anti-Zionist Jews who advocate measures against other Jews that could plausibly be described as genocidal is diabolical.

Leftwing diaspora Jews who hate Israel, are a major source of anger and disgust for me.

As Denis Prager points out, "Among no group in the world are there so many individuals who so single-mindedly attempt to damage the group into which they were born". He gives as examples the loathsome Noam Chomsky, who has dedicated much of his life to defending those who wish to destroy Israel, and to demonizing Israel and her people, frequently comparing Israelis to the Nazis; and Norman Finkelstein, who lectures throughout the world calling Israel a Nazi State and demanding its destruction.

Indeed, many Jewish ultra-Leftists lead the "burn Israel" movement, sponsoring pro-Palestinian hate rallies, leading campaigns for divestment from Israel, and demonizing Israel and her people in the media and universities.

Israel cannot disappear and it's six million Jews be exposed to mass murder simply to make life easier in their social circles for leftwing diaspora Jews and to enable faculty lunches and cocktail parties in the *Galut* to go more smoothly..

*Gary Selikow  
Johannesburg.*

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