

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.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought.

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

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How true a reflection of the Afrikaner-Jewish relationship was the pre-1948 antisemitism of the Afrikaner Press and Politicians? (Part 1)

Ivan P Kapelus

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Introduction

I crave your indulgence! I would like to start this discussion in the middle, as it were, by quoting from a four thousand-word article by Dr H F Verwoerd (later National Party Prime Minister and hard right wing supporter of “Apartheid”) in the Afrikaans newspaper *Die Transvaler* of which he had become editor. The article appeared on 1 October 1937 under the title ‘The Jewish Question as seen from a NP [National Party] Viewpoint’. Having done so, I would like us to look backwards, and then forwards to 1948 and beyond, to follow the socio-economic journey of the Afrikaners as well as the Jews of South Africa.

The reader may ask why I am interested in the Afrikaner/Jewish relationship? Well, I am known to my Afrikaans friends, many of whom I have known for most of my life, as a “Boere Jood” (“Farmer Jew”) – one of us/them! My grandparents lived in the ‘country’ – North Western Cape – Calvinia. There my father was born and went to school.

My paternal grandfather, who came from Lithuania to the Cape Colony in 1897, was a peddler who plied his trade in the farming area between Ceres, his first home, and Calvinia, where he settled in 1911. He died in 1946, still owning and farming his farm, “Rooiputs”. My maternal grandparents (also Lithuanian) arrived with my mother from Scotland in 1937 and owned a hotel in Calvinia. In 1941, my newly-wed parents moved some 85 miles south to the village of van Rhynsdorp, where they lived until my father died, aged 80, in 1995. My sister and I were brought up in the village, where we started our schooling in Afrikaans before being sent to English boarding schools in Cape Town; me at the age of 9 and my sister, five years my junior, at the age of 10. In van Rhynsdorp, we spoke English at home and Afrikaans to all but our parents. After school, I studied law at an Afrikaans university, Stellenbosch. We were a

traditional Jewish family, proud of our heritage and maintained our culture, even in a village that by the 1950s had only two Jewish families.



The former Calvinia synagogue, now a museum (Courtesy: SA Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth)

The Jewish Question – The view of Verwoerd

So, what did Verwoerd write? He set out his premise that there was “A conflict of interests between the disadvantaged Afrikaner majority and a privileged Jewish minority (*vreemdelinge* -strangers/outsideers)” which had entered the towns and cities long before the Afrikaners, and now dominated commerce and industry along with people of British descent. Jewish owners and employers filled the most important positions in these businesses with fellow Jews, he claimed.

Verwoerd saw two further elements that exacerbating the “*botsing van belange*” (clash of interests) between the Afrikaner and the Jew. The Afrikaner, he wrote, was “compelled to become a *handlanger* or *ondergeskikte* [subordinate] often earning a meagre wage. Jewish dominance of the economy enabled the younger generation of Jews to crowd out Afrikaners in the professions. For example, the increase in the number of Jewish attorneys and advocates is largely the result of their compatriots’ controlling the business concerns that pass on most of a lawyer’s day to day work.” He then asserts that the Jews were backed by the “English press and political parties” to exert disproportionate influence on government. For Verwoerd, “No Afrikaner

dare underestimate their political activities, which are aimed at hindering the cause of nationalism". He mused "Is it any wonder that Afrikaners are beginning to feel that Jews have a choke-hold on their continued existence?"

Verwoerd declared that the basic aim and solution for the Afrikaner was to ensure that their own population group would, "share, proportionally, in all the opportunities and privileges the country has to offer. It does not begrudge any other population group its fair share, proportionate to its size". He went on to write that Afrikaner nationalists admired the way in which Jews stood by their own and that the NP did not take their religion or race into account in developing a policy. The problem was of an economic kind, namely over-representation in key economic sectors.

As Hermann Giliomee comments in his book *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (2003, p417), Verwoerd had "failed to identify a reason why Jewish dominance was more dangerous than that of any other ethnic group. Neither did he attempt to make a case that there was a common Jewish agenda in South Africa".

As we shall see, Verwoerd was not a lone purveyor of this kind of antisemitic rhetoric. This had started even before the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and persisted intermittently until at least 1948.

The Socio-Economic plight of the Afrikaners

The rapid industrialisation of South Africa after the discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) found the Afrikaners left behind, stranded in the rural areas to which they clung, poorly educated, their plight exacerbated by their unfamiliarity with English, the lingua franca of the cities and business, and an unwillingness to do manual labour, that they saw as the work of servants. Subsistence farming was no longer viable. Afrikaner anger at their socio-economic misery was driven and grew ever stronger because of their treatment by the British in the Anglo-Boer War and its aftermath.

During the war, the British adopted a "scorched earth" policy, destroying farmland and homesteads and deporting Boer women, children, and their black labourers to concentration camps. All of this to prevent the Boer commandos from having shelter and supplies. There was no question of the British carrying out genocide, but the conditions in the camps were unhygienic, with poor sanitary conditions, inadequate food rations and little, if any, medical care. In all, 154 000 Boer and Black civilians were held in the camps. It was not long before there were outbreaks of typhoid and measles, resulting in a high mortality rate. Lord Milner wrote to Chamberlain, then Colonial Secretary, that the high mortality rate was "a very dark spot", but politicians and the public in Britain had no idea of the atrocity occurring in South Africa.

Emily Hobhouse, who had campaigned against the war, received permission to visit South Africa in her personal capacity to inspect the camps. She was appalled at what she found! On her return to Britain in May 1901, she put the matter before the British public. In the meantime, the death rate soared, resulting in an all women commission,

led by Millicent Fawcett, to visit the camps in 1901/1902, that not only confirmed the findings of Hobhouse, but indeed, went further in calling for urgent measures to be taken to ameliorate the situation by increasing and improving rations, including vegetables in the diet; providing facilities to boil drinking water and most importantly, to urgently send nurses from Britain to the camps to minister to the inmates. This resulted in the death rate falling sharply but nonetheless 4177 Boer women and 22 074 children ultimately died in the camps. General Jan Smuts estimated that about 10% of the Boer population of the Republics died in the camps. Almost every Afrikaans family lost a mother, child, brother, sister or relative.



Boer graves and monument, Krugersdorp concentration camp

The urbanisation of the Afrikaner was inevitable and rapid. In 1910 only 29% of Afrikaners lived in the urban areas, but by 1936, it was 50%, making up a quarter of the White population of Cape Town and Johannesburg respectively, and half of that in Pretoria and Bloemfontein. Twenty-four years later, in 1960, fully 75% of Afrikaners lived in the urban areas of South Africa.

The industrialisation of South Africa and the resultant urbanisation of the Afrikaners brought about a serious national issue – poverty amongst Whites. By the late 1920s, white poverty became a national issue in SA as the world after 1929 confronted a global economic crisis. To compound matters, South Africa suffered a crippling drought destroying crops and livestock in the early 1930s. The non-agricultural sector of the South African economy was virtually monopolised by English speakers (of British descent) and Jews while at that stage the entrepreneurial contribution of the Afrikaners was extremely modest.

In 1929, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) requested the Carnegie Corporation to fund an investigation into the problem. Its report, published in 1932, found there were some 300 000 poor whites, of whom more than 80% were Afrikaners. The government, DRC and other Afrikaans cultural organisations were doing all they could to ameliorate the immediate situation and to improve the education of their people. However, there was much anger within the Afrikaans community, as reflected

in the political arena and the press, and it was aimed at those who were perceived to be prospering – the Jews and those of British descent.

Competition for manual jobs came from the black workforce, who could be paid substantially less than a white worker. And, as we have seen, English was the commercial language of the cities and many Afrikaners from the rural areas, at that time, spoke no English.

To make matters worse, the population had increased by some 400 000 white immigrants between 1870 and 1900. Most of these immigrants, like the 1820 Settlers, came from the UK, and, unlike such previous arrivals as the French Huguenots, Dutch and Germans, did not acculturate and assimilate into the Dutch/Afrikaans community. They were culturally, linguistically and religiously far removed from them, which perpetuated, and extended the Anglo-Afrikaner schism.

What did the government do to alleviate the dire straits of the poor whites and to solve the problem of lack of education?

The most pressing issue was to find properly remunerated employment for the poor white unemployed. To this end government used the railways, forestry settlements, the building of irrigation schemes and road and rail construction. In 1928 Prime Minister JBM Hertzog stated that the railways had employed 13 000 whites!

Education became a priority even before the Carnegie Commission. In the years 1912-1926 the spending on education for white children as a proportion of the budget and the percentage of White pupils of post primary age increased from 6% of white pupils (179 000) to 13% (384 000).

To help solve the paucity of Afrikaners entering the trades, the Apprenticeship Act of 1922 was passed. It made the passing of Eighth Grade (Standard 6, +/- 13 years old) a minimum qualification for entry into forty-one trades. This helped, but in 1933 it was found that out of one-hundred Afrikaans children who started school together, 44 left without passing Eighth Grade, 17 passed Tenth Grade (Standard eight – 15/16 years-old) and only eight completed Matric! Less than three went on to university.

In 1939, the Afrikaners comprised 56% of the White population, yet less than a third of all white students at universities were Afrikaners. The main reason for this was the continued popularity of farming as a career for Afrikaans boys, even though the commercialisation of farming was pushing many farmers off the land.

The table below shows the percentage of Afrikaners, compared to other ethnic groups, in the wider economy at that time.

Profession Percentage

Owners of companies, Directors, self - employed manufacturers 3%
Engineers 3%

Accountants 4%
Lawyers 11%
Medical Doctors 15%
Journalists 21%
Civil Service 25%

About 40% of adult male Afrikaners were, unskilled laborers, mine workers, railway workers and bricklayers, whereas only 10% of non-Afrikaans males were in these occupations. As late as 1939, Afrikaners did not control a single large industrial undertaking or finance house, commercial bank or building society and not a single company quoted on the Johannesburg stock exchange!

Afrikaner politicians, cultural societies and intellectuals were resolutely intent on changing the situation, but made it clear that they would do so themselves, hence the motto: “*’n Volk help homself*” propagated by the Broederbond (the Brotherhood) and its cultural organisations, FAK (Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniging) and their financial vehicle, FVB (Federale Volksbeleggings). They articulated that their intention was to do so fairly and not boycott English firms or businesses.

The first step was the creation of the parastatal ISCOR (Iron and Steel Corporation) that was almost entirely run by Afrikaans speakers. Then followed the life insurance company SANLAM, SANTAM, a Trust and Assurance Company, the bank Volkskas and a building society, Saambou. The growing Afrikaans press included *Die Burger* in Cape Town and *Die Vaderland* and *Die Transvaler* in Johannesburg and Pretoria. By employing their own, matters changed dramatically for the Afrikaans youth.

With the introduction of mother tongue education in the schools, after the recognition of Afrikaans as an official language in 1925, (the second official language was taught as a separate subject), as well as the Afrikaans youth being increasingly urbanised, and staying in education longer, tertiary education became increasingly important.

As a result of the creation of Afrikaans language universities, of which Stellenbosch, Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein were the forerunners, together with generous bursary/loans from the government, the percentage of Afrikaners at university steadily increased, albeit remaining low as a percentage to its share of the white population. By the late 1950s, with the increased number of Afrikaners having a tertiary education and entering the professions, particularly teaching but also medicine, law and accountancy, together with being employed in financial and commercial institutions, the view of themselves changed. No longer did they feel inferior or less worthy than their English-speaking compatriots! Even so, by the end of the 1960s the percentage of English-speaking children who passed matric was double that of the Afrikaners, as were the number of English-speaking graduates.



East European Jews en route to South Africa, Rosh Hashanah 1903

The “Russian” Jews – Arrival and Acculturation

If one considers the pattern of Jewish immigration to South Africa during the period 1881 -1930, it is not surprising that the antisemitic rhetoric started as early as the early 1890s. This, however, did not exclude cordial and co-operative relationships between Jews and Afrikaners in the cities and towns of South Africa throughout this period. An example of this is illustrated by the following incident that occurred in Calvinia: In a letter to Reverend Joel Rabinowitz written in 1878, Louis Rosenblatt complained that it would be impossible for him to celebrate Rosh Hashanah ‘except to the ruin of my business’, as Professor Hofmeyer of the Stellenbosch Seminary was travelling to Calvinia to celebrate the September *Nachtmaal*

(Communion), which fell on the same day as Rosh Hashanah. *Nachtmaal* was celebrated at specific times of the year and local farmers would travel by horse and cart to the village for the weekend so that they could buy their provisions for the next few months. Very often the farm labourers would travel with the farmer and his family and would also make necessary purchases. This was an important time for the economic welfare of both the farmer and the general dealer. In a letter published in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 6 December 1889, Rabinowitz, reports that he wrote to Hofmeyer asking him kindly to postpone the *Nachtmaal* so that the Jews of Calvinia could celebrate Rosh Hashanah after Hofmeyer agreed and wrote to the DRC Council of Calvinia to make the appropriate arrangements. When a similar situation arose in 1932, the DRC community agreed once more to postpone the *Nachtmaal* so that the

Jews of Calvinia and the district could celebrate Rosh Hashanah without being concerned that either of their or the farmers' livelihoods were threatened.

How different the very south of Africa was to be from the north when it came to Jewish history and tradition! The first book of the Torah, Genesis, ends with Jacob and his family settling in Egypt. Exodus, the second book, describes the Jews departing circa 1275-1250 BCE after a stay of some 210 years. Alexander the Great conquered Egypt in 332 BCE and again Jews settled in the land. Their number swelled when Ptolemy I attacked Palestine in 301 BCE and sent large numbers of Jewish prisoners to Alexandria, where they practised their ancient faith and established a community that flourished, lasting until modern times.

From 1652, when the Cape was first settled by the Vereenigde Nederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company) to 1806 there were no professing Jews in the country, to take advantage of the freedom of worship granted by the Batavian Republic in the "Kerkenorde" of 1804. By 1875, the small, mainly Anglo-German Jewish population in the Cape numbered about 495 souls. These Anglo-German Jews were largely secularly well-educated and assimilated easily into the Victorian culture of the day. They felt at ease in their surroundings as Jews. In his speech at the laying of the foundation stone of the synagogue in Kimberley in 1875 Sir Henry Barkly, Governor of the Cape, praised the Jewish community for their 'wholehearted loyalty'. He went on to say, "I have had opportunities of becoming acquainted with them in many colonies, and I have ever found them as a body obedient to the law, ready to take their part on all occasions as good citizens and to co-operate in works

of benevolence and mercy." Jews and Gentiles seemed to have got along well, as is illustrated by a resident of Kimberley, who is reported to have said, "generally, Jews are much respected by the other inhabitants...."

All this was to change dramatically from 1881 onwards with the arrival of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, mainly Lithuania. The first wave, numbering some 40 000, arrived between 1880 and 1910, with another 30 000 arriving between 1911 and 1930, as can be seen in the table below.

Year Jews Whites Total Population

1880 circa. 4000

1904 38 101 1 116 805 5 175 463

1911 46 926 1 276 182 5 972 757

1936 90 645 2 013 650 9 587 863

1946 104 156 2 372 690 11 415 925

Unlike their Anglo-German coreligionists, the Eastern European Jews were not secularly well educated. They spoke Yiddish and later heavily accented English and Afrikaans, dressed differently and were altogether more orthodox in their religious practices. Most (around 90%) settled in the cities, but a fair number chose to start their new lives in the *dorpiers*, small villages in farming areas or towns along the transport routes, where they had family, kinsmen or *landsman*, people from the same village or town back home in Lithuania. Here they would feel comfortable, as the small villages were much like those back home. Some remained in the rural areas while others flocked to the cities, particularly after World War II.

The Lithuanian tradesmen – such as tailors, carpenters and glaziers - could immediately find work in the mining areas, but by far the majority had to learn new skills, often allied to their traditional role as traders back home. They often learnt their new business skills from their first employer, and many began life in South Africa as *smouse* (peddlers) before moving on to become traders, general dealers, shopkeepers and businessman. As in Eastern Europe, they became the intermediaries between the new markets of the towns and growing cities, and the producers, both black and white. In fact, they were instrumental in the significant economic change that took place in the rural areas of the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, providing producers with access to the markets on the one hand, and, offering a wide array of goods to the emerging country consumer on the other.



Smous Mr Hurwitz selling to farmers in Caledon, circa. 1890s

The rise of Antisemitism

Newspapers of the day reported that the Commission of Enquiry into Labour in the Cape Colony of 1893 (which had nothing to do with immigration) was: "... wholly unanimous against the introduction of Russian Jews ... a most undesirable people, as already found in the Uitenhage District, where these people have pushed out many poor shopkeepers and have obtained property intensively". This negative and stereotyped image of the Eastern European Jew was fast becoming pervasive in country and city newspapers and weeklies. The Cape

Town weekly *The Owl* was one of the more virulent antisemitic papers. All this resulted in the 'Russian Jew' being stigmatised as 'undesirable', 'unassimilable' and 'the scum of Europe'.

After the Anglo-Boer War ended in 1902, large numbers of Jews from Lithuania continued to arrive in the Cape, and it was not long before the anti-alien and antisemitic lobby was again vocal and challenging. Now it was not only *The Owl* that purveyed these sentiments but the *South African Review* and even the *Cape Times*.

On 11 November 1902, Colonial Secretary Sir Peter Faure introduced the Cape Immigration Restrictions Act in the Cape Parliament/ The measure was primarily aimed at controlling the influx of Asians, but most certainly also had the flow of 'Russian' immigration in mind. It duly passed into law the following day. The section of the Act that had a direct bearing on Jewish migration from Eastern Europe was the definition of '*prohibited immigrant*', which was as follows:

(a) Any person who, when asked to do so by any duly authorised officer, shall be unable, through deficient education, to himself write out and sign in the characters of any European language an application to the satisfaction of the Minister.

(b) Any person who is not in possession of visible means of support, or is likely to become a public charge.

The implication of clause (a) of the Act for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe was immediately obvious. These were Yiddish-speaking people, a language written using Hebrew characters. Would Yiddish be accepted as a European language?

The Act came into force on 30 January 1903, but due to representations from the shipping companies and after action by the Cape Town Jewish community in raising funds and providing employment for passengers who were initially refused permission to land, the government decided that the provisions of the Act would not be strictly applied or enforced

for the first three months (February to April 1903). The passing of the Act galvanised the Jewish communities, both in the Cape and in London to intervene and make representations to the government to have Yiddish recognised as a European language. In Cape Town,

Reverend AP Bender worked assiduously on two fronts: to obtain a liberal and tolerant interpretation of the Act and an acceptance of Yiddish as a European language. Others, such as *South African Jewish* owner/editor *Chronicle* Lionel Goldsmid, Morris Alexander KC, a prominent advocate at the Cape Bar and Yiddish journal David Goldblatt were not so ready to rely on the goodwill of an individual, even if he were the Attorney General. They wanted an amendment to the Act specifically stating that Yiddish would be accepted as a European language, necessitating a change in the law through Parliament. Alexander expressed the need for an amendment by asking: 'What happens when there comes a Pharaoh who does not know Joseph?'



Morris Alexander KC, MP (1877-1946)

So how did the deputation persuade the government to accept the amendment? They arranged for a non-Jewish German translator who did not know any Hebrew to translate an article in Yiddish (written in Hebrew characters) on the philosopher Agassiz, as it was read by David Goldblatt (so that its resemblance to German was clear). A full report on this demonstration was published the following day in the *Cape Times*.

In June 1906, the Cape Parliament considered a new Immigration Law. Alexander, now President of the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies, and a Mr Abrahamson, a Member of the Legislative Assembly, met with the Colonial Secretary to push for the amendment on the acceptance of Yiddish. The government agreed and introduced a proviso to Section 3(a) of the Act, 'provided that for the purposes of this subsection, Yiddish shall be accepted as a European language'. It was passed without any hitches.

As we have seen, the Jewish population nearly doubled between 1911 (46,926) and 1936 (90,645) fuelled by the massive influx of Lithuanian Jews, at the very time that

the Afrikaner nation was struggling socio-economically because of the industrialisation of South Africa and lack of education and training. This influx of Jews and their first locally born generation's success, to be discussed below, resulted in a return to the Antisemitism, so clearly illustrated in Verwoerd's article.

The “Russian Jews/Litvak” contribution to South Africa and their success

How did these ‘undesirable’, ‘unassimilable’ and ‘scum of Europe’ get on? People who arrived with “bundles on their back”, who spoke neither English nor Afrikaans and who constituted a tiny percentage of the White population (never exceeding 4.5% of it) were within a generation of their arrival considered “a privileged minority” who “dominated commerce, industry and the professions” and “crowded out the universities”. What contribution did they make to South Africa in the period 1881-1948?

In 1926, no less than 60% of Jewish South Africans were bilingual (total of Jews - 72,169) and even though by 1936 the number of Jews in South Africa had increased to 90, 645, this level of integration into both the English and Afrikaans communities was maintained, as some 60% of them were still bilingual.

By the 1930's, almost 40% of graduates and diplomates at Witwatersrand University (Wits) were Jews, as were over 20% of graduates in law, medicine, arts and commerce at the University of Cape Town (UCT). These were the very people who the Commission of Enquiry into Labour in the Cape Colony had said in 1893 were ‘a most undesirable people, ... [who] have pushed out many poor shopkeepers and have obtained property intensively’. The ‘Russian Jews’ were considered by them to be ‘not what the country needed economically’.

These ‘undesirable scum’ and their descendants, the first South African born generation, continued to contribute to their chosen fields out of all proportion to their numbers. This is particularly apparent in the professions of law, medicine, accountancy, dentistry, and academia. By 1960, 20% of the Jewish population economically active were in the professions compared to 9.7% in 1936.

An example of their dominance in the medical profession can be gauged from the fact that nearly 23% of practising doctors in 1960 were Jewish and the percentage among medical specialists was nearly one in three. (Those involved in the ‘sales’ category declined just as spectacularly, from 48% to 29.1% during the same period.) Jews were employers rather than employees – they created employment for others. Of the Jews economically active in 1970, some 28% were employers as compared to 12% of the white population. This was the reality rather than the rhetoric.

To fully understand and appreciate what a haven South Africa was for the “Russian Jews”, one must appreciate that, in contrast to their experiences in the “Pale of Settlement” The north-western provinces of the Russian Empire after the annexation of the Baltic States and Poland by Russia in 1795, they for the first time could be a

Jew without fear, have the same rights as every other white, own property, do any kind of work, and follow any profession for which they were qualified. The Romanovs and their governments were hostile to every minority within their territory and subjected all of them to intensive Russification. Minorities had to give up their language for Russian, change their religion to Russian Orthodoxy and amend their names to the Russian equivalent. No minority was as hated and despised as the Jews; so much so that, in 1727, Russia expelled all Jews from its territory.

Ironically, after the land grabs from Poland of 1772, 1793 and 1795, the Russian Empire found that along with the land, it had also acquired a substantial, unwanted Jewish population of between 800 000 and 1 000,000 souls. The Russian government recognised this as the 'Jewish Problem'.

During the reigns of Pavel Petrovich, known as Paul I (1796-1801), Alexander I (1801-25), and Nicholas I (1825-55), the Russian Senate began to consider how best to deal with the country's burgeoning Jewish population. The solution preferred by their administrations, central and local, was to be brutal, harsh and systematic, restricting where Jews could live, what work they could do, and conscripting all Jewish males between the ages of 12 and 25 into the army for 25 years.

With the accession of Tsar Alexander II to the throne in 1855 there was some respite for the Jews, as the decrees confining them 'The Pale', as well as what work they could do, was relaxed. In 1861, he freed the serfs. Sadly, his liberalism was not accepted by all and in 1881, he was assassinated by revolutionaries. His successor, Alexander III (1881-94), a reactionary, who vowed to stamp out liberalism, triggered a devastating series of pogroms throughout most of the Pale, except for Lithuania, that suffered appalling arson attacks. The pattern of the pogroms was such that it soon became clear that they were being planned and carried out to a specific model. The behavior of the police was evidence of government involvement. The world was shocked by the savagery of the pogroms. Accounts of murder, maiming and ferocious attacks on the Jews in Russia were published in the press in Britain, France, the USA, and South Africa.

The Russian government's callous attitude to the plight of the Jewish community was underlined by the response of the Tsar's principal minister, the former Procurator General of the Holy Synod, Pobiedonotzev, to a delegation from Paris in 1898. When asked what would happen to the Jews under a regime of constant persecution, he remarked, 'One third will die out, one third will leave the country, and one third will assimilate without trace!'

Antisemitism, pogroms, and savagely restrictive laws made it extremely difficult for the Jewish population of the Pale to earn a living and support their families. Fortunately, from 1881 Russia opened its borders, enabling them to leave the country. Many rushed to take advantage of this opportunity and poured out in their hundreds of thousands. As we have seen, a total of 70 000 made South Africa their home.

In an address to the Board of Deputies of UK dinner as reported in the Jewish Chronicle of 15 April 2016, Labour Party leader David Miliband said that British Jewry was a community that had always known what it stood for: “Out of ashes, hope; out of hatred understanding; and out of exclusion, integration” The very same can be said of the South African Jewish community!

It is also important to realise the central role that education plays in Jewish culture and religion. It has echoed throughout the ages in every Jewish home and community – EDUCATION, EDUCATION – TEACHING, TEACHING.

As related in the Book of Exodus (12), Moses and Aaron are told to summon the Israelites and instruct them on exactly what they must do to prepare for their flight to freedom. This is immediately before the tenth plague. Having instructed them in detail on what they had to do Moses addresses the assembled Israelites. What a momentous occasion! They are on the brink of achieving freedom from slavery and begin their journey to the “promised land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3.17). What would he speak about - the end of slavery, freedom, the journey ahead of them, or to quote Nelson Mandela “the long walk to freedom” In fact none of these! Moses says “And when you enter the land that the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children ask you, “What do you mean by this rite? You shall say “It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, because he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians but saved our houses”.

This theme is repeated in Exodus 13:14: “And in time to come when your son asks you “What does this mean?” you shall say to him “With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery”. Moses is looking way into the future, talking about generations to come, and telling the Israelites to be a nation of teachers and pupils – educators! Jews became a people who were passionate about education, so much so that by the time the Second Temple was destroyed, they had developed the first system of universal (boys only) education paid for by public funds. This tradition has been observed in most Jewish communities to the present. Even in Lithuania, where our forefathers lived in poor circumstances, the establishment of communal charitable institutions to fund education was a priority.

When one appreciates this passion for education, one can understand why Jewish youth by the 1930s, the first South African born generation of the “Russian Jews”, flocked to the universities to acquire tertiary education and enter the professions and academia

The Changing Dynamics of the Jewish-Afrikaner Relationship (1924-1948)

Having traced the socio-economic path travelled by the Afrikaners and the Jewish immigrants we see two trends emerging:

- The politics of envy – the success of the Jewish immigrants being blamed for the socio-economic misery being suffered by the Afrikaners,
- The emergence of and adoption of the motto “*n Volk help homself!*” (A Nation helps itself) – echoes of Verwoerd’s statement in his article when he went on to write that “Afrikaner nationalists admired the way in which Jews stood by their own and that the NP did not take their religion or race into account in developing a policy.”

After a relatively quiet period after the Great War, when Lithuania became an independent republic and the virulent antisemitic laws of the Russian Empire were no more, political conditions there changed in the mid-1920s and Jews were on the move again as rabid antisemitism once more came to the fore in Lithuania while in Ukraine and Belorussia (Belarus) the Soviets were imposing a regime that included the massacre of Jews.

However, the changes to the immigration laws of USA in 1924 and of Australia virtually closed their doors to aliens, resulting in South Africa again becoming a favored harbor of safety. This is illustrated in the table below showing the immigration figures for Jews from “Quota Countries” (Eastern Europe) for the period 1927-1930:

Year Jews Total Immigrants

1927 1,581 6,598

1928 2,066 7,050

1929 2,394 7,895

1930 1,698 5,904

This rise in Jewish immigration coincided with the serious national “poor white” problem that affected the Afrikaners in particular and gave the impetus for the Jewish immigration question to be in the forefront of SA politics once more.

It was not long after the Pact’s (a coalition of the Nationalist and Labour Parties) election success of 1924 that a rabid antisemitic attack was made by Afrikaans folk hero General Manie Maritz (a leader in the opposition to SA’s entry into WW I and supporter of Germany) in a speech delivered in the Northern Cape town of Mckwassie: “We have recently learned a great deal about the poverty of our people in the Northern Cape and Namaqualand. Who are responsible for this? Our arch-enemy, the Jews, who came to this country with a bundle on their backs and always manage to amass a large sum of money. The Afrikaners of these districts were virtually the servants of the Jews. It was similar in all other parts of South Africa, and a people who made their money here out of the suffering of the people usually left the country and spent it somewhere else”.

Although this crude form of antisemitism embarrassed the National Party and was repudiated by them, the issue of Jewish immigration was kept to the forefront of politics because of a remark by J.E. Holloway (Director of Census) that, for the period 1920-25, the figures showed an increase in poor migrants from Lithuania, the majority of whom were involved in commerce; exactly the type, that he stated, was not needed, or wanted at this stage.

The rhetoric against Jewish immigration was pervasive and supported by influential newspapers such as the *Cape Times*, *Rand Daily Mail* and *East London Daily Despatch*, as well as *Die Burger*. Impetus to anti-Jewish immigration was provided by the Johnson Act of 1924, under which the USA adopted a strict quota system for immigration. Politicians from both the mainly Afrikaner-supported National Party and the predominantly English-speaking South African Party railed against Jewish immigration to South Africa.

Like a chameleon changing color, so the reasons for the rhetoric against Jewish immigration changed and shifted. The Jews, particularly those from Eastern Europe, were variously accused of being unassimilable and stereotyped as devious, corrupt and always outsiders because they retained their Jewish identity. If they did integrate and contribute to the economy and society, then they were upwardly mobile and so threatened to dominate the country. When Jews did well and contributed to the country, it was always perceived as being at expense of others.

Yet despite all this agitation for a curb on Jewish immigration, the Pact Government (1924-29) did not change its immigration policy. On the contrary, Dr D.F. Malan, then Minister of Interior, undertook not to interfere with Jewish immigration and Oswald Pirow, Minister of Justice (1929-33), assured the Jewish voters of Bethal during a by-election campaign that the National Party would oppose immigration legislation.

In the 1929 General Election, the Pact was re-elected with an increased majority. Without any prior notice in the speech of the Governor General at the opening of Parliament, on 29 January 1930, Malan, despite his prior undertaking, proposed a bill to place certain restrictions on immigration. It was a bolt out of the blue, particularly for the Jewish community.

In introducing the second reading of the Quota Act, Malan emphasised the consensus across party lines for the need and terms of the Bill:

The party newspapers have, with very few exceptions, greeted this Bill as one which is long overdue, and not only in principle but also as far as particular provisions are concerned, they have, to a very large extent, given their support. I have, in the short time this Bill has become known to the country, had proof positive that it meets the desire of a very large majority of the people of this country and that in some quarters, in most, at least, it has been hailed with a sigh of relief.

The Immigration Quota Act (no. 8 of 1930) came into effect on 1 May 1930. Its main provisions were:

1. Creating a two-tier system for immigrants:

1.1 Unrestricted immigration for persons from countries listed in the Schedule, and

1.2 Restricted immigration for persons from countries not on the Schedule to 50 persons per year

2. Creating an Immigrants' Selection Board that had the right to permit immigration from Non-Scheduled countries subject to certain criteria set out in the Act and Regulations thereto and subject to the maximum of such immigrants in any one year to 1,000.

The countries specified in the Schedule to the Act were the territories within the British Commonwealth of Nations, USA, and countries of Western Europe. Malan called on the Opposition to leave party politics aside and consider the Bill as in the national interest, setting out three principles that he believed underpinned the legislation. These were merely a restating of the rhetoric against Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe: maintaining the character of the whites as 'Nordic', assimilability and maintaining Western civilisation, which was said to be different from Eastern European civilisation. The press, both Afrikaans and English, greeted the Quota Act with approval and continued to call for a halt to Jewish immigration. The Opposition in Parliament, in the main, supported the principle of the Act and the only real opposition to it came from four Jewish MPs (M. Kentridge, C.P. Robinson, E. Buirski and E. Nathan) and a handful of their colleagues.

Considering the statements made by both Malan and Pirow that there would be no change in immigration policy, the Jewish establishment and community at large were shocked and surprised by the introduction and passing of the Quota Act, the consequences of which, for the Jewish community were deep and considerable. The main source of Jewish immigration to South Africa was blocked. The overwhelmingly Lithuanian Jewish community was cut off from its source, from its family and people. As the Jewish MP C.P. Robinson presciently said in Parliament on 10 February 1930:

Do not tell me this is merely a Bill for the exclusion of Lithuanian Jews. It sounds the death knell of any more Jews coming to South Africa. At present it is the poor Lithuanian, tomorrow it may be the Jew from Germany or France that will not be allowed in.

Giliomee states, 'Anti-Semitic sentiments were fuelled by Afrikaner frustration over their lack of economic progress in the city.' In fact, the reason lay much deeper: in the Afrikaners' view of themselves as white Christians against the black heathen and slaves, which engendered an acute consciousness of race, religion and cultural difference. Hence, they needed always to ask '*Wat is jy*' (What are you)?

This anti-Jewish invective and rhetoric from politicians and the majority of the press occurred well before the advent of Hitler and the Nazi Party as a dominant force in Germany. Unfortunately, attitudes would only get worse through the 1930s and 40s.

- *Part 2 of Ivan Kapelus' paper will appear in the Spring 2021 issue of Jewish Affairs.*

Searching for Sarah: Extract from a new biography

Dominique Malherbe

The following extract is taken from 23-27 of Searching for Sarah: the Women Who Loved Langenhoven by Dominique Malherbe, Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021. JA thanks Tafelberg for permission to include here.

One of the first people I contacted in my search for Sarah was Elsa Joubert, the well-known, prolific and prizewinning writer of the legendary story, titled in English *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena*.

Sadly, Elsa passed away in June 2020 at the age of 97. She was one of several of Sarah's close friends, their lifelong friendship beginning when Elsa lodged in Sarah's home in 1945 when she began her studies at the University of Cape Town. I visited her at a retirement home in Gardens, Cape Town. My journal entry for this visit was dated 19 September 2017:3

Elsa Joubert: I was there at the end. I used to visit her from Summer School because it was an easy walk down the hill from the University of Cape Town, past the windmill [to her house].

By then she was in a deep depression. She wanted nothing and no one and felt as though she was in 'sinking sand'. She'd had a telegram from all the communities – the English, the Afrikaans, and the Jewish – wishing her well in her time of pain. And I had said, 'Well, there's at least that to hold on to.' But she wasn't interested.

On her deathbed, I visited her on my way back to Cape Town from Paarl. Stikland was an ordinary hospital and I brought her some grapes from my mother. My mother always gave me grapes to give to her, though usually the nurses would eat them. Oh well.

I came in and she was in a room with other people – about eight of them, all women without any inhibitions.

One had her nightdress over her head, and one was reciting the Bible, and I heard from one corner of the room a little voice, 'Mama, Mama.' Sarah's voice. Over and over again. It was the last time I saw her.

Have you got tears in your eyes?

I couldn't answer. I looked out the window of Joubert's little room in Berghof and thought how sad it was for Sarah to have died like that.

Sarah Eva Goldblatt died alone in a hospital in Stikland on 22 May 1975 from pneumonia and heart failure. She was 86 years old.

* * *

[Elsa Joubert:] She organised everyone. Oudtshoorn was hot as hell but she organised everyone. She had to go and give a talk in Beaufort West and then in Cape Town. She was scared of flying (like me), as she had motion sickness, but she could organise everything. She got into the administrator's car. She had sandwiches and a flask and tried to sleep. I said, 'Won't you need to take something to freshen up?'

'No,' she said. 'They're not coming to see me. They're coming to listen to Langenhoven.'

I knew nothing about an affair with him. One of our friends had once come back from holiday and told his wife that he had found someone else and was leaving his wife and Sarah went crazy. The thought of an extra-marital affair was too much [for her].

And another reason was that she would spend every Christmas with Vroutjie [Langenhoven's widow]. Oudtshoorn was so hot. She would have felt so uncomfortable. Once she told me her hair was greying and all that.

'I didn't always look like this,' she had said. 'I had flaming red hair and I was in love.'

But perhaps that's the writer [in me] embellishing the story. Maybe she didn't say that.

[I asked Elsa about an affair Sarah had with Langenhoven. I relayed the story that Guillaume Brümmer, Langenhoven's grandson, had told me about Engela having once caught the two lovers in the kitchen. Elsa looked surprised and was quiet for a while.]

Who would do that on a Saturday morning?

I admired her for the work she did in primary school education. She was a breakaway like me. We both had rebellious ideas on education.

* * *

The interview left me with conflicted images and thoughts on the life of my great-aunt. I thanked Elsa for her time and told her that I was reading Kannemeyer's book on Langenhoven because he had a lot to say about Sarah, but it seemed as though he wasn't very fond of her.

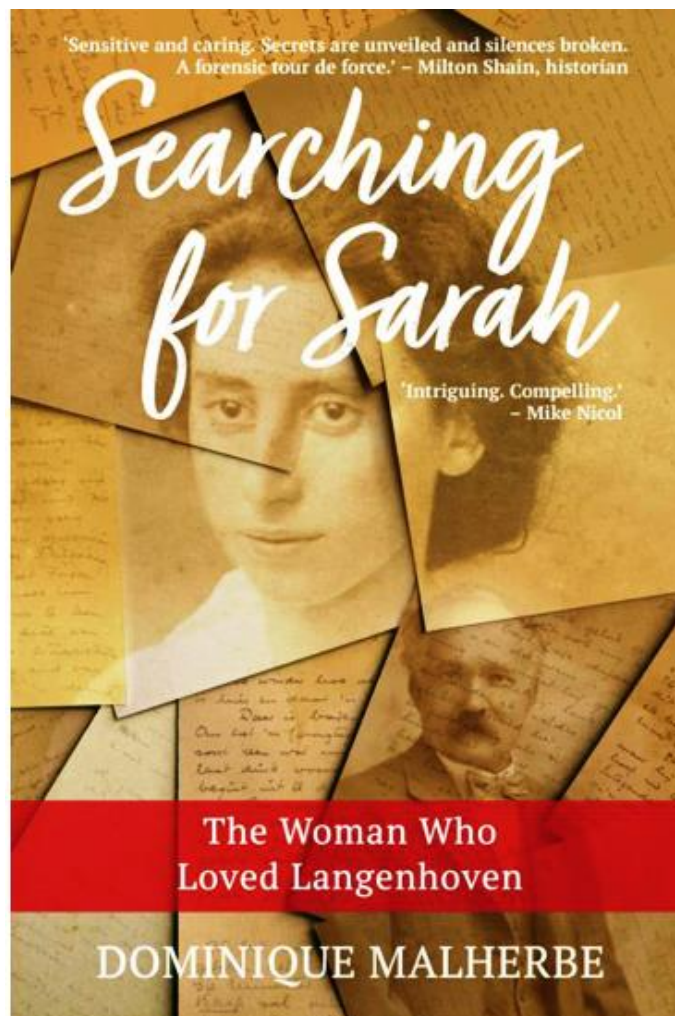
Back in the parking lot, I sat back heavily in my car and clutched the steering wheel. Tears welled up. I didn't try to stop them. She deserved my tears.

I drove away from Berghof and wondered about my next meeting, with Guillaume Brümmer. I seem to be predisposed to older people. The last time I had visited

Berghof was to meet with an old client from my days of private investment banking, many years back.

I had promised to meet him again soon as he had no surviving family, but had never managed to do so. When I phoned a year later, I was told that he had died some months before. I was saddened by this. As with Sarah, it made me tearful to consider someone dying alone with no one to hold their hand and reassure them of their path out of this life.

My association with Elsa Joubert, my elderly client and my impending visit with Guillaume Brümmer made me consider how strange it was that people were seldom known by many for the duration of their lives. So often, what we found out about people who died years back was how they were remembered in their old age but not frequently in their youth. It was far more difficult to conjure up a realistic image of anyone at twenty if you saw only a photograph of them as grey-haired and aged. Such were my first impressions of Sarah and I was determined to find out her story from the beginning. If I could.



‘A Boerejood on Steroids’ – Dominique Malherbe’s *Searching for Sarah*: A Review essay

Veronica Belling

Dr Veronica Belling is the author of Bibliography of South African Jewry (1997), Yiddish Theatre in South Africa (2008), and the translator of Leibl Feldman's The Jews of Johannesburg (2007) and Yakov Azriel Davidson: His Writings in the Yiddish Newspaper, Der Afrikaner, 1911-1913 (2009). She is a regular contributor to Jewish Affairs.

As literary executrix to the ‘father of Afrikaans literature’ and Senator in the Union Parliament, Cornelis Jakobus Langenhoven (1873-1932), the name of Sarah Goldblatt (1889-1975) has become synonymous with the fight for the recognition of the Afrikaans language. She was the first woman to be employed on the editorial board of the Afrikaans daily newspaper, *Die Burger* (1918-1919).^[i] Appointed Langenhoven’s literary executrix in his will^[ii], after his wife’s death in 1950, she enjoyed sole control of his literary legacy. After the death of his wife she had his house in Oudtshoorn, Arbeidsgenot, preserved as a National monument. She protected the rights of the family when his poem, *Die Stem*, was adopted as the national anthem of the Union of South Africa in 1957.^[iii] She was the inspiration behind the Jubilee celebration of his birth that was held in Oudtshoorn in 1973.^[iv]

Sarah taught Afrikaans at the Tokai Public School, the Cape Town Training College in Retreat as well as at the Central Girls’ School under Roza Van Gelderen. Until her retirement in 1944 she was connected to the Brooklyn Primary School, and also taught at Herschel Girls’ School, Christian Brothers’ College in Sea Point as well as at the Kindergarten Teachers’ Training College in Claremont.^[v] In addition she gave private lessons at her home to students as well as to members of the public and between 1961 and 1962 she gave lessons on the Afrikaans Programme of the radio that were very highly rated.^[vi] She also published three collections of Afrikaans poetry.^[vii]

Sarah Goldblatt’s great niece, Dominique Malherbe, has just published a long overdue book about her great aunt, that appeared simultaneously in English and Afrikaans. In the original English, it is entitled, “Searching for Sarah.” while in Afrikaans translation, it is entitled, “Op Soek Na Saartjie.” It attempts to answer many of the questions that surround her, and reads like a detective novel even ending with a cliffhanger! Malherbe is the granddaughter of Israel Goldblatt, the younger brother of Sarah Goldblatt, who studied law and became a Judge in South West Africa, present day Namibia. Malherbe only met Sarah once in her life as a small child, as she had

spent the first seven years of her life in South West Africa and by the time she was ten years old and living in Johannesburg, Sarah had passed away.

Malherbe's study of Sarah Goldblatt was not the first. In 2003, Goldblatt's was the subject of Masters dissertation at the University of Stellenbosch, entitled "Sarah Goldblatt: Letterkundige Administrasie van C. J. Langenhoven" by Leonie Van Zyl. Now I myself had also researched Sarah Goldblatt for a doctoral thesis entitled "Recovering the Lives of South African Jewish Women During the Migration Period, c1880-1939," (University of Cape Town, 2013). So I was acquainted with the main sources that Malherbe had examined: the Langenhoven and the Goldblatt archival collections at the University of Stellenbosch; J. C. Kannemeyer's seminal biography of Langenhoven, entitled, "Langenhoven: a lewe" (Tafelberg, 1995); and of course Van Zyl's Masters dissertation.

However whereas my focus was quite narrow honing in on Goldblatt's Jewish identity, Malherbe's aim was to reconstruct her life and particularly her relationship with Langenhoven, as evidenced by the sub-title of her book, "The Woman Who Loved Langenhoven," or in Afrikaans, "Langenhoven's se geheime liefde," Malherbe's aim was to give Goldblatt, the recognition that she had been denied in the past for her work of promoting Langenhoven's legacy. In addition she wished to rehabilitate the image of Goldblatt, presented by Kannemeyer, or in her words, to offset the "Kannemeyer context." In his seminal biography of Langenhoven, Kannemeyer presents Goldblatt in a disparaging light, at times almost as a figure of fun. He is at pains to deny or at best to downplay the fact that she meant anything to him other than being 'an emotional pillar of strength'.(20)

Sarah was born in London in 1889, the oldest of the four children of David Nathan Goldblatt and Fanny Esther Smith. Her father, David Goldblatt, who was born in Radom in Poland, was educated in a *yeshiva*, but also received some secular education in Warsaw and Berlin. Despite his *yeshiva* (rabbinical academy) education he was not religious and a contemporary described him "as a brilliant outspoken socialist Yiddishist, with little pretence of orthodoxy." [viii] At the age of twenty three he married and immigrated to London where Goldblatt was born. He opened a bookshop that his wife kept an eye on while he studied at the British Museum, where he became acquainted with socialist and anarchist philosophy, very popular at that time.[ix]

In 1897 the family immigrated to Cape Town. David Goldblatt opened a bookshop in Long Street and also started a small printing works, publishing a series of Yiddish newspapers. Initially unsuccessful, in 1904 he began publishing the weekly *Der Idisher Advokat* (*The Jewish Advocate*) that lasted until 1914.[x] David Goldblatt was a staunch Jewish nationalist, a Yiddishist, who believed that Jews should unite under the banner of the Yiddish language, much as Langenhoven believed that the Afrikaners should support Afrikaans. He was associated with the fight for the recognition of Yiddish as a language that would permit Jews to immigrate to South Africa, and was one of the earliest members of the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies.[xi] In 1915 he abandoned his

family and left first for London and then for the United States[xii] where he published the first two volumes of a Yiddish encyclopedia.[xiii]

As was the custom in those days education for girls was not given very high priority and Goldblatt was forced to leave school after Standard Four to help in her father's printing shop. However she continued to study privately,[xiv] and in 1911 she passed the Zuid-Afrikaanse Taalbond examination[xv] and also completed her T3 at the Teachers' Training college.[xvi] Many years later, in 1924,[xvii] she completed her matric examination. On the other hand, her younger brother, Israel, Malherbe's grandfather, continued his education to matric at Normal College and went on to obtain a B.A. degree at the University of the Cape of Good Hope, and an L.L.B. through the University of South Africa. In 1919 he was admitted to the Bar.[xviii]

When she arrived in Oudtshoorn in 1912, and began working as Langenhoven's assistant on the newspaper, *Het Zuid-Westen*, a twice weekly newspaper, to which he had just been appointed editor, they formed a very close relationship. He became 'Chief' and she was 'Sub'. In Cape Town she called her car, 'Herrie' and her home in Mowbray was, 'Loeloeraai,' named for a pet elephant and a visitor from outer space respectively, in Langenhoven's stories. Although she knew no Afrikaans at the time, with her background in Yiddish, German and High Dutch, Goldblatt mastered the language very quickly and soon made the struggle for the Afrikaans language her own. However the newspaper only lasted two and a half years, when due to the collapse of the ostrich feather industry it was forced to close down. Sarah continued to live in Oudtshoorn for another three years working for a Commercial evening school and later for a school near George (82). In 1917 she returned to Cape Town where she embarked on a career in journalism and teaching while still continuing working with Langenhoven's manuscripts until his death in 1932 (75).

Langenhoven was married to a woman ten years older than himself and who had three children of her own. Together they had a daughter, Engela. Nonetheless members of both Goldblatt's and Langenhoven's family[xix] assert that their relationship was not purely platonic, and attribute Goldblatt's agreement to remain in the background, to the strict code of social conduct in those days and in respect of Langenhoven's determination to gain acceptance for Afrikaans as an official language (162).[xx] Langenhoven's wife tolerated the affair particularly as Sarah helped her to cope with Langenhoven who often drank too much and went through periods of deep depression.

What is a complete revelation in this book is that, according to Malherbe, both families seem to be certain that Sarah and Langenhoven had a love child, a boy, who would have been born in 1925 and who was kept a secret. Rumour has it that he was adopted by a family by the name of Van der Merwe and that he became a medical doctor. He would be in his 90s today and probably no longer alive. An extensive correspondence between Langenhoven and Goldblatt exists, some of which they deliberately destroyed so that nothing is ever mentioned in this regard. However there are cryptic references in the letters to a 'story' about which they cannot speak (103),

which could well refer to this child. In another letter written in 1924, Sarah complains about tiredness that could be attributed to her pregnancy, although it could well have been the result of her having just completed her matric exams, and having to resume her work for Langenhoven immediately. There is also a letter in January 1926 referring to a baby which she is helping to look after at her mother's home (though there is nothing to indicate that it is hers) who is thereafter taken to a boat together with its carer (53). Also cited is Langenhoven's advice to a mythical son that is presented in point form. Points 11-13 advise him not to love where he cannot marry; not to marry when he can love; and finally not to marry! (208). What would also seem to confirm this rumour is the very close relationship that Goldblatt had with Langenhoven's daughter, Engela (evidenced in some 88 letters between them (41)) who made her the godmother of her son, Guillaume, who in turn made her the godmother of his four children, whom she regards as her own children (171). Her relationship with Langenhoven and particularly the search for the missing child is central to the book and creates the dramatic tension. It is referred to indirectly as early as the opening paragraph.

Malherbe has her readers accompany her on her voyage of discovery. She begins with a reference to Sarah's aforementioned father and her great grandfather, David Goldblatt, the Yiddish writer and publisher (23), who had inexplicably deserted the family for the United States in 1915. Later there is a full chapter expanding on her father.

She then jumps thirty years to the prizewinning Afrikaans writer, Elsa Joubert, one of Sarah's closest friends who had boarded in Sarah's home in 1945 when she came to study at the University of Cape Town. She had used Sarah as a sounding board for her early literary works. She tells us that Sarah organized everyone in Oudtshoorn, probably referring to the Centennial celebrations of Langenhoven's birth in 1973. But she knew nothing of an affair or of the early days. She also remembered how even after Langenhoven's death Sarah would regularly travel to Oudtshoorn to spend Christmas with his widow, Vrutjie. She had also visited Sarah in her final days in Stikland hospital before she died (24-26).

Next we encounter the Brummers, Langenhoven's only descendants, who are at the centre of her story. Guillaume Brummer is Langenhoven's grandson, the only son of Langenhoven's only daughter, Engela. It is Guillaume who provides Malherbe with confirmation of the love child. This despite the fact that Guillaume's daughter warns Malherbe in advance that her father's memory is impaired. During their meeting Guillaume categorically confirms the existence of a child and even recalls meeting him when he was in about Standard Four at school (107-109). Sarah had played a very significant role in Guillaume's life, looking after him when his mother, Engela, who like her father before her, was at times incapacitated with alcoholism and depression. It was Sarah who had encouraged him to pursue a career and who had motivated him to study overseas. It is Guillaume who also provides the only solid evidence of a physical relationship between Langenhoven and Sarah, on the basis of a conversation that he overheard between his mother and his grandmother as a young child.

Guillaume himself never met his grandfather as he was born two years after his death in 1932.

Malherbe continues her quest in the archives at the University of Stellenbosch. She also makes contact with the supervisor of Leonie Van Zyl's Masters thesis, Professor Albert Grundlingh (author of the foreword to the book), only to discover that his interest in Sarah had stemmed from the fact that he had grown up in Oudtshoorn in a house on the grounds of the Langenhoven home, Arbeidsgenot. Here he had encountered Sarah whom he characterizes as "*a Boerejood on steroids*" (45-46)

In a chapter dedicated to Sarah's father, David Goldblatt, whose life choices are in many ways as secretive and mysterious as those of his daughter, Malherbe provides some insights into the life of the family, and into David Goldblatt's afterlife in the United States. It would appear that they were not a very happy family. Goldblatt was known to be a difficult man, the family was poor as Yiddish publishing was hardly lucrative, the siblings were not close, and there was no religion in which to take comfort. However, Malherbe hints further that molestation by her father may have accounted for Sarah's sudden departure to Oudtshoorn in September 1912, and her attachment to Langenhoven as a substitute father figure. It would also explain why after his departure to the United States, David Goldblatt never made contact again with Sarah, with whom he had worked closely in his printing business, although he did retain contact with her younger brother, Israel, the only member of the family who went to see him off at the docks when he left (66-67).

Sarah's inner world

What is really frustrating is that one never really penetrates Sarah's inner world other than in relation to Langenhoven. What made her fall in love with Langenhoven and to devote her whole life to him? What was lacking in her own life? The few intimate glimpses we have of her all revolve around him. For example a story she wrote about herself following his death:

Forty years old, a woman, and alone to begin living her life from the start. All the interests that gave meaning to her life suddenly amount to nothing and just because she involuntarily and almost unknowingly did not live for herself but lived through him. And now the years stretch out ahead of her. Too old to be considered a sexual being? Such is the perception of people. A woman of forty has no more passion and should be satisfied with more modest interests. Her house, her people. Such was the case with her mother... (136)

Jewish identity

In an interview with Malherbe, by Tali Feinberg, published in the *S. A. Jewish Report* (May 2021) Malherbe says, "from a Jewish point of view, there was the least information about her."^[xxi] My conclusions with regard to Sarah's Jewish identity largely concurred with that of Malherbe, from a religious point of view, but not with regard to her Zionist identity (69). I had discovered more information pertaining to

her Zionist identity both in the Langenhoven archive, and in the local weekly, *Zionist Record*. I had also in the course of my research discovered more about her relationships with her Jewish friends.

Given her father's socialist views and lack of religious orthodoxy it is unlikely that Goldblatt ever held very strong Jewish religious convictions. Langenhoven tried to influence her to believe in the Christian concept of God, but he never had much success.^[xxii] She did not put much store upon either religion, neither Judaism nor Christianity.^[xxiii] Afrikaans friends who visited her in her final illness commented on her lack of an anchor in her faith but that at times she called on Jesus Christ while also being visited by a rabbi. In her will she requested to be cremated, forbidden in the Jewish religion, and her ashes to be spread on Langenhoven's grave. ^[xxiv]

As she also identified with Langenhoven's staunch Afrikaner Nationalist views, she was very critical of the Jewish community for acculturating exclusively to the English speaking group and of regarding the Afrikaners as inferior. She felt that Jewish exclusivity had contributed to the resentments towards the Jews that were expressed by the Afrikaners, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s. She was torn between the demands of her dual identities, Jewish and Afrikaner. In a letter (also cited by Malherbe) she writes that, "I am a Jewess born and know all there is to be known of Jewish attitudes and at the same time I am Afrikaans in every fibre of my body, and I have felt the pain and anger of the contempt of superiority." ^[xxv]

Although it is true that she distanced herself from the Jewish community and her closest friends were Afrikaners, Goldblatt was never regarded as an 'outcast' in the Jewish community as claimed by Kannemeyer.^[xxvi] She still identified with the Jewish community that never failed to celebrate her achievements which enhanced their status in South Africa.^[xxvii] On her arrival in Oudtshoorn she gave a lecture to the B'nai Zion,^[xxviii] and on 15 June 1914 she was acting in the capacity of Honorary Secretary of the Oudtshoorn Zionist society.^[xxix] On more than one occasion, she contributed articles to Jewish newspapers, such as *The Zionist Record* and *Hashalom*. She drew up a curriculum for Afrikaans language and literature for the Zionist Youth Movement Habonim.^[xxx]

Sarah had close Jewish friends as well and was part of the inner circle of Roza Van Gelderen (1890-1969) and Hilda Purwitsky (1901-1999) at whose Central Girls School (1926-1940) she taught for many years. When Purwitsky organized evening classes to teach English to the eastern European immigrant parents of her pupils, it was Goldblatt who assisted her in designing the syllabus.^[xxxi] Van Gelderen and Purwitsky, were a same sex couple, strong Jewish women, whose lives - like that of Sarah - shed light on gender studies in the 1920s. Here Sarah was remembered as "an interesting character with the temper of the devil".^[xxxii]

The character of "Tante Saartjie", her nickname, in Purwitsky and Van Gelderen's regular column in the *Cape Times* is based on her. They describe her in the following terms: "She was one of those women who pride themselves on being plain and outspoken. She invariably asserted that she would say what she had to say, even if the

King stood in front of her. Although at heart one of the kindest and best-intentioned women in the world, she always succeeded in making everyone around her uncomfortable and irritable.”[xxxiii]

Lack of acknowledgement and Kannemeyer’s disparagement of Sarah’s contribution

Malherbe devotes at least two chapters to Kannemeyer’s depiction of Sarah that she attributes to the fact that Sarah is a woman and a Jew, an outsider in the Afrikaans community. She sources his quotes to illustrate how he has either distorted them or taken them out of context. While he acknowledges the physical relationship he characterises it not so much as a ‘mariage a trois’ but as the case of two women helping to keep an unstable and depressive man on his feet and productive. The saddest aspect of Kannemeyer’s description of Sarah, in my opinion, is his depiction of her final illness that he presents baldly with little sympathy. Sarah was 83 years old at the time that she organized the Langenhoven centenary, an incredible achievement, and within two years she had passed away. Malherbe provides us with the details. Sarah began to deteriorate after an attack of angina (185) and an unsuccessful cataract operation that left her virtually blind. Her last letter to her brother Israel was written on 26 November 1974. In February 1975 Jan Scannel wrote to her brother saying that she is finding it difficult to remember names and was losing the will to live (189). By 22 May 1975 she had passed away, a period of only five months, a disturbing ending for someone as accomplished as Sarah.

These are some of the reasons that contribute to Malherbe’s feeling that Sarah’s contribution has not been properly acknowledged. As a literary agent her work has never been equaled. The sixteen volume set of Langenhoven’s collected works went into six editions, 1933-1974 (116). To quote the blurb at the back of the book: “By the time Goldblatt died in 1975, more than two million of Langenhoven’s books had been sold – one of the greatest literary successes in South Africa. Sarah had made an immense contribution to Afrikaans literature and culture, yet as an outsider, she had barely been acknowledged.” Malherbe like the Afrikaans writer, Audrey Blignault, feels strongly that she should have been awarded an Honorary doctorate.

While I totally concur with Malherbe as far as her criticism of Kannemeyer’s depiction of Goldblatt is concerned, I cannot entirely agree with her complaint regarding the lack of acknowledgement of her achievements for Afrikaans. An oil painting of Sarah, dated 1960, was found in the possession of the C. P. Nel Museum in Oudtshoorn (41). In 1964 Sarah was granted an award for her work on behalf of the Afrikaans language by the Cape Centenary Foundation, that included the sum of R500 that she used to have a bust of Langenhoven made for Parliament (150-151). In a review of Malherbe’s book on Litnet, Professor Wium Van Zyl points out that her organisation of the celebration of the Langenhoven centenary in 1973 was proof of the very high esteem in which she was held by the most prominent leaders in the world of Afrikaans culture. Van Zyl himself witnessed the honour awarded her when she

appeared on the stage in Stellenbosch in that same year.^[xxxiv] Neither do the images of Sarah in the middle of the book confirm her lack of recognition.

Moreover her memorial service at the Maitland crematorium – as described by Kannemeyer – also negate this claim of lack of acknowledgement. Goldblatt passed away on 22 May 1975. On 23 May the leader article in *Die Burger* was devoted to her. Her connection to Langenhoven was described as having grown “into a lifelong connection with a new language and a new people”. Her memorial service at the Maitland Crematorium was attended by Senator Johan van der Spuy, Minister of National Education, The Rev. Charles Hopkins described Goldblatt as “a gift to South Africa at a time when such people were needed.” The former Mayoress, Mrs Joyce Newton Thompson, paid tribute to Goldblatt on behalf of the English speaking community to whom she was well known as a teacher of Afrikaans. The Secretary of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Issie Pinshaw, spoke movingly in Afrikaans about “the unfathomability of the adventures of the East European Jews who emigrated to South Africa and as Boerejode identified with the striving of the Afrikaan people.” Goldblatt’s ashes were buried in the garden of Arbeidsgenot in front of the bust of Langenhoven by I. Mitford Barberton that Goldblatt herself had donated. ^[xxxv]

One only has to compare Sarah’s funeral to that of another South African Jewish icon - born in the same year as Sarah Goldblatt - the writer, Sarah Gertrude Millin (1889-1968), who in 1952 was declared, “par excellence the interpreter of South Africa to the English-speaking world.”^[xxxvi] A friend of Jan Christiaan Smuts and Jan Hofmeyr, who wrote biographies of Cecil John Rhodes (1933) and of Smuts (1936), her funeral was relatively small (under 100 people) and was not graced by a single member of parliament or other dignitary.^[xxxvii]

Conclusion

Malherbe’s book is fascinating, thoroughly researched and presents Sarah warts and all. It is a contribution to Afrikaner and to South African Jewish historiography. However, despite the author’s ‘searching,’ the book is not entirely able to fulfill its promise of ‘finding Sarah.’ If anything the narrative arouses more questions than answers with hints and suggestions such as the possible molestation by her father; the “story of the two holes,” was Sarah a victim of rape? (106-110). The search for the love child hinges on a sexual act, whereas what the reader, who is “Searching for Sarah” really wants to know is what is going on inside her head, besides Langenhoven. Except for the story describing her feeling of utter emptiness after his death this is not forthcoming. By Malherbe’s own admission Sarah’s story remains unfinished.

Malherbe, Dominique. *Searching for Sarah: the Women Who Loved Langenhoven*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021.

Notes

- [i] Leonie Van Zyl, Sarah Goldblatt: Letterkundige Administrasie van C. J. Langenhoven. (Thesis) M. A. - University of Stellenbosch, 2003, pp56-60.
- [ii] J.C. Kannemeyer, *Langenhoven: 'n Lewe*, Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1995, pp18-20.
- [iii] Van Zyl, 2003, pp81-87, 91.
- [iv] Kannemeyer, 1995, pp. 48-65; Van Zyl, 2003, pp93-98.
- [v] Kannemeyer, 1995, p22.
- [vi] Van Zyl, 2003, pp.72-73, 75-76.
- [vii] *Liefde's Kransie*, H. J. de Bussy, Pretoria; Amsterdam, 1920; *Wolf en Jakbals versies*, Nasionale Pers, Kaapstad, 1920-1921.
- [viii] Carmel Schrire & Gwynne Schrire *The Reb and the rebel: Jewish narratives in South Africa 1892-1913*. Claremont, South Africa: UCT Press, 2016.
- [ix] Gustav Saron, "Western Province Jewry, 1870-1902" in Saron & Hotz, eds, *The Jews in South Africa*, 1955, p. 43; Gustav Saron, "David Goldblatt: Champion of Yiddish, *Zionist Record and S. A. Jewish Chronicle*, *New Year Annual*, September 1978; M. De Saxe, *The South African Jewish Year Book 1929*, p. 253.
- [x] Joseph Abraham Poliva, *A Short History of the Jewish Press and Literature of South Africa From its Earliest Days Until the Present Time*, Johannesburg [1961], pp. 16-17.
- [xi] Milton Shain, *Jewry and Cape Society: the Origins and Activities of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Cape Colony*. Historical Publication Society, Cape Town, c1983, pp. 83, 91.
- [xii] Naomi Jacobson, Karen Blum-Marshall, "Who was Israel Goldblatt: an introduction", in Israel Goldblatt, *Building bridges: Namibian Nationalists, Clemens Capuuo, Hosea Kutako, Brendan Simbwaye, Samuel Witbooi*, edited by Dag Henrichson, Naomi Jacobson and Karen Marshall, Basler Afrika Biographien, Basel, 2010, pp. vii-viii.
- [xiii] *Di Algemeine Illustrirte Ensiklopedie*. Nyuyork: Advansd Ensiklopedie, 1920-1923 (3 vols).
- [xiv] Van Zyl, 2003, p. 9.
- [xv] G 202. Pe D. 1 (2), Sertifikaat aan Sarah Goldblatt van die Zuid-Afrikaanse Taalbond, 1911, cited in Van Zyl, 2003, p. 10.
- [xvi] G 202. Pe D. 3 (5), Aansoekform as skoolhoof by departement van opvoeding, g.d., cited in Van Zyl, 2003, p. 11.
- [xvii] Hilda Purwitsky, interviewed by Noreen Scher, Cape Town, 1981, Kaplan Centre Interviews, BC949, 0197, pp. 6-8..
- [xviii] Naomi Jacobson, Karen Blum-Marshall, 2010, pp. viii-ix.
- [xix] Kannemeyer, 1995, pp. 651-653.
- [xx] Phillips, cited in Kannemeyer, 1995, pp. 73-74.
- [xxi] *S. A. Jewish Report* (14-28 May 2021, p. 20.
- [xxii] Kannemeyer, 1995, p.
- [xxiii] G 22 L. 1. NB 10 Afskrifte van aantekeninge in ou dagboeke. Langenhoven collection, Gericke Bibliotheek.
- [xxiv] Kannemeyer, 1995, p. 662.

[xxv] Letter from Goldblatt to a Mr Hotz in Bloemfontein; Leonie Van Zyl, Sarah Goldblatt, 2003, pp. 56-60.

[xxvi] Kannemeyer, 1995, p. 5.

[xxvii] See George Aschman, "Langenhoven centenary this year: South Africa's debt to Sarah Goldblatt," *Jewish Affairs*, 28(1), 1973: 11-14.

[xxviii] *Zionist Record*, 26 February 1913, p. 25.

[xxix] *Zionist Record*, 15 June 1914, p. 6.

[xxx] Joodse aangeleentheid. Langenhoven collection, Gericke Biblioteek.

[xxxi] "In and Around the Peninsula: the End of the Evening Classes", SAJC, 5 September 1930, p. 580.

[xxxii] Dorothy Whitesman, interviewed by Milton Shain, Cape Town, 1981, Kaplan Centre Interviews, BC949, 0269, p. 64.

[xxxiii] Rozilda, "After the Examinations", *Cape Times*, 7 March, 1925, Rozilda, Newspaper articles, Hilda Purwitsky and Roza Van Gelderen papers, BC 1271.

[xxxiv] Wium Van Zyl, "Op soek na Saartjie deur Dominique Malherbe: 'n litnet akademies-resensie-essay" <https://www.litnet.co.za/op-so...>

[xxxv] Kannemeyer, 1995, pp. 666-668.

[xxxvi] Edgar Bernstein, "Jewish Contributions to the Union's Literature", *Jewish Affairs*, 15(5), 1960: 27-32.

[xxxvii] Martin, Rubin, *Sarah Gertrude Millen: a South African Life*. Ad Donker, Johannesburg, 1977, pp. 280-281.

Suzanne Belling (1947-2020) - A Tribute

David Saks

David Saks is Associate Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and editor of *Jewish Affairs*.

The untimely passing last November of veteran journalist, author and Jewish communal professional Suzanne Belling was yet another sad loss for South African Jewry in a year that had already seen – whether due to the Covid 19 pandemic or other causes - the death of so many of its distinguished members. Belling, who died in Pretoria at the age of 72, devoted most of her professional life to serving the Jewish community and few if any knew and understood it better than she did. She served the community with distinction in multiple capacities and it would be fair to say that she received insufficient recognition for her many achievements during her lifetime.

Among the senior positions of responsibility Belling held over the years was that of editor of the *South African Jewish Report* and of Executive Director of the Cape Council – SA Jewish Board of Deputies. She was also a former national director of the Union of Jewish Women and the South African Associates of Ben Gurion University.

Born in Manchester, England, Suzanne Belling came to South Africa as a baby and was raised and educated in Cape Town. While still at school, she wrote a weekly teenage column for the *Cape Times*, where she later began her full-time writing career as a reporter. After editing trade magazines for a period,, she became Cape Town correspondent and regional editor of the former *SA Jewish Times*, moving to Johannesburg in 1984 to become editor of that newspaper. She held senior posts in the same stable, including editor-in-chief of R & J Publications and managing editor of the *Herald Times*. She wrote a popular column on current Jewish affairs under the title *From the Belling Tower, which appeared over many years* in several Jewish newspapers. (As an example of her skilful wordplay, when the song using the lyrics from Psalm 137, By the Rivers of Babylon, was a hit around 1980, she attended a Zionist conference in Johannesburg, whose tedium she captured in verse under the heading, *By the Rivers of Babble On*).

At the time of Mandela's release from prison, she was approached by several communal leaders to edit the *Johannesburg Jewish Voice*. During that paper's short but feisty existence, she more than ensured that it live up to its mandate "to bring the South African Jewish community, albeit kicking and screaming, into the new South Africa". In 1999, she became managing editor of the recently established *SA Jewish Report*, resigning in 2001 to become director of the SAJBD Cape Council. She served

for six years in the latter capacity before returning to Johannesburg, where she resumed writing for the SA Jewish Report and other local Jewish publications and worked as public relations officer for Torah Academy School. She was also for many years the South African correspondent for the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (JTA) in New York and the London *Jewish Chronicle*. She was also a long-standing member of the editorial board of *Jewish Affairs*, as well as regularly contributing pieces to it.

Parallel to her journalistic and communal leadership career, Belling later became a prolific author on subjects of South African Jewish interest. Her books, several of which were co-authored with her husband Michael Belling, included *The Travelling Rabbi, My African Tribe*, Moshe Silberhaft (2012); *Blood Money, The Cyril Karabus Story* (2014); *A Man of His Word, the Eddy Magid story* (2017) (with Michael Belling) and *My Covenant, The Honorary Jew, Geoffrey Modise Menachem Ramokgadi* (2018). She was also the author/and photographer of *From Persecution to Redemption: Eyewitness to a Miracle (Auschwitz to Israel)*, published in 1986.



Suzanne Belling, with co-author Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft and others at the launch of *The Travelling Rabbi: My African Tribe*, August 2012.

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An observant Jewess, Suzanne was involved in congregational affairs and further served many organisations in a voluntary capacity. These included Jews for Social Justice and attending African Jewish Congress meetings in Mozambique and South Africa. She was made and honorary life member of ORT South Africa.

- *I thank Michael Belling for making available his notes on Suzanne's life and career, from which I have quoted freely. May her Memory be for a Blessing.*

Johannesburg's longest-practicing optometrist

Steven Katzew

Steven Mark Katzew is a Johannesburg-based advocate. He grew up in Virginia and attended High School in Welkom, Orange Free State, going on to study Law at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. His articles on South African Jewish sporting personalities have appeared in Soul Sport and Jewish Affairs.

But for the advent of the Covid 19 pandemic, my father-in-law Harold Levy would still have been practicing as an optometrist in his 91st year. The unexpected termination of a lifetime commitment to caring for arguably our most important faculty has left him desperately longing for a return to his weekly work regimen.

For an uninterrupted 65 years, Harold devoted his time, skill and effort to testing eyes and prescribing glasses to almost three generations of patients across a kaleidoscope of communities, for forty years in Mayfair and for the remaining 25 in Kensington, Johannesburg.

In view of the high work rate and ethic that prevails in the Jewish community this statistic, however commendable, is not unique. Indeed, I have personal experience of perhaps an even more remarkable story (statistically at least) – in 1982 I served law articles with Bertha Pencharz when she was 75. She was Bertha Cohen, the Springbok bridge player, but practised law under her maiden name Pencharz. When I phoned her eighteen years later, by which time she was 93, to tell her I was engaged to my wife-to-be Heidi, she promptly offered to draw up our ante nuptial contract as a wedding gift. Seven years later, I would read in *De Rebus*, the journal of the erstwhile Law Society of South Africa, that Ms Pencharz was only the second person in the history of the practice of Law in South Africa (the first being Col. Charles Stallard) to still be practicing as an attorney in their 100th year.

The story of Bertha Pencharz is obviously exceptional, but stories of people working into their nineties are not that rare today. What then makes Harold Levy's story unique and worth telling? Whatever reason I advance, is bound to be tainted with a lack of objectivity – Harold is, after all, my loving wife Heidi's father and doting grandfather to all of his grandchildren (and first great grandchild, born 2 February 2021), including our two children, Keren and Asher. Besides which, it is no secret that I happen to be a great admirer of Harold independently of our familial connection.

Perhaps Harold's career story is worth telling because of the selfless support he has always received from his beloved wife Cynette. However, spouse or partner support

in career success is not unique – many successful people attribute their career success to the patience, understanding and support of their spouse or partner.

Perhaps therein lies the clue to the uniqueness of Harold's story – Cynette's contribution to his career as an optometrist has never been confined to patience, understanding and support. Going back to the time of their marriage over sixty years ago, Cynette invested her sterling qualities of kindness and common sense and the highest degree of *Chesed* - charity, kindness and benevolence - into every aspect of her husband's practices, including managing the processing and submission of medical aid claims for eye tests performed by him, interviewing and appointing staff, managing the scheduling of patients' appointments, placing orders with suppliers for frames, managing the submission of prescriptions for lenses to laboratories, reading and checking all contracts for the business before giving them to Harold to sign, assisting customers and patients with the selection and fitting of frames – in short, but for the testing of eyes, every aspect of the running of the optometry practices was left to Cynette.



Harold and Cynette Levy

I will stick my neck out and assert that the synergy of a husband and wife team in a lifetime joint entrepreneurial enterprise, especially when the enterprise is the profession of the one embraced and mastered by the other, is itself a story worth telling.

The story necessarily begins with romance. It was February 1959, holiday time for those who wanted to avoid the school holiday rush. Harold and a friend had embarked on a “precipitous” journey from the Reef to the coast in Harold's “first love”, a DKW Auto Union that coughed and barked beneath the frock like contours of its iconic frame.

For that generation, and some to come, the beach at Muizenberg, and in particular its famous “Snake Pit” on the main beach, was a Mecca for young Jewish singles. Harold, in his late twenties, in private practice as an optometrist and a Transvaal provincial table tennis player to boot, cut an imposing figure as he strutted towards the Pit. Charming and witty, blessed with fine features and sporting a pencil moustache, it is no surprise that after a short time spent “surveying the scene”, his well trained eye locked onto the innocent beauty of 20 year-old Cynette Berkowitz, a shy “Klerksdorp girl”, who had descended to the coast by car with an uncle and aunt.

It did not take long for Cynette to be offered a drive in the DKW Auto Union. On a windswept pass overlooking the twinkling bay, the bliss evoked by mutual attraction was about to receive its sternest test as the pair motioned to exit the vehicle at a viewpoint. No sooner had Cynette opened her door (which opened unconventionally front to back) when a gust of wind ripped the door completely off its frame. The pair sat staring in mute disbelief as it was carried away to rest precariously on a bush, miraculously held from tumbling into the ravine below. Cupid had already intervened – the DKW Auto Union had dropped a notch in Harold’s ranking of priorities. His immediate concern was for Cynette’s sweet despair than for the gaping hole in the capsule of his marque.

And so began a new chapter! Two lives merged into one, a union destined to still be flourishing after sixty years, an indispensable commitment to the edifices of family, home and mutual trust and support. This included the natural blending of Cynette’s and Harold’s skills and efforts into Mayfair Optometrists, an institution that for over forty years became renowned for expertly rendered ocular care in an atmosphere of warmth and unpretentious smooth administration.



Marriage of Harold and Cynette Levy, 15 May 1960

Mayfair Optometrists had its origin in a warm and trusting friendship between Harold and Meyer Saben. They had met through Meyer's brother Joe, Harold's then brother-in-law (Joe was Harold's sister Gladys' first husband). Harold had left school (Athlone Boys High) after receiving the Junior Certificate for passing standard 8. His reason for the early exit was that something had led him to believe that the introduction of television into South Africa was imminent and that there was money to be made and prospects for a career in the radio electronics industry. Thus, as a wide eyed youth of 17, Harold entered the job market. It wasn't long before he found employment in the radio and electronics field, where he was consigned to the workshop of his employer. He was immediately discomfited by his observation of a co-worker in the workshop stirring his tea with a screwdriver. Anxious for confirmation that the use of the unconventional stirring instrument was an eccentricity peculiar to the workman whom he had observed Harold made inquiries, which exacerbated rather than relieved his unease. He was met with the firm reproof that servings of tea in the workshop were never accompanied by teaspoons, and that the use of a screwdriver as a stirring instrument was accepted custom.

Harold's venture into the radio and electronics industry was thus short-lived. It was merely a matter of time before he plucked up the courage to resign. Once freed of this misguided pursuit, he enrolled at the then nascent Damelin College finishing school, where he completed standards 9 and 10 in one year. Thereafter, devoid of any direction but keen to find a meaningful and rewarding occupation, he literally roamed the streets in search of something to do. However, unlike his abortive venture into the radio and electronics industry, this time round he was equipped with the Senior Certificate, which was a passport to tertiary professional education.

On one such day, he and Meyer Saben were walking along Eloff Street in downtown Johannesburg when a sign for an optometrist piqued their interest. They entered and met the optometrist, who introduced himself as Mr Kacev. It was their first encounter with the profession of optometry. Intrigued, they asked Mr Kacev what they needed to do to become optometrists and were informed about a course in optometry offered by the Johannesburg Technical College. They needed no further persuasion. Thanking Mr Kacev they left, satisfied that their destinies had been chartered and wasted no time in enrolling for the two year study and practical program in optometry at the Johannesburg Technical College.

The first year of the program was devoted to the theory of optometry. The second was an apprenticeship at the Technical College's optical clinic. Once qualified, Harold discovered that the fledgling profession was slow to yield vacancies for recently qualified graduates, especially in Johannesburg. He was compelled to look further afield, eventually finding employment with Stein's Jewellers in Port Elizabeth, which offered optometry services in an upstairs section of the jewellery business. There, he spent approximately eighteen months as the resident optometrist. During this time, he joined a table tennis club and spent much of his free time honing his skills in the local league. He quickly rose in its ranks, becoming the Port Elizabeth and district

Champion, and was chosen to represent Eastern Province in inter provincial competition.



Eastern Province table tennis team, Harold Levy seated, left.

This relatively brief interlude in Port Elizabeth was to prove invaluable for the opportunity it afforded Harold for consolidation of both professional and sporting skills, which was later to stand him in good stead when he returned to Johannesburg. With the work experience garnered, he found employment as an optometrist easier to come by after returning to Johannesburg. He landed a job with Basman & Woodward Optometrists on the corner of Smal and Jeppe Streets in the heart of Johannesburg's then medical district. At the time, the area was dominated by all shades of general and specialized practitioners in Medical Towers situated on the corner of Jeppe and Von Weilligh Streets diagonally opposite the premises occupied by Basman & Woodward

Harold worked for Basman & Woodward for approximately two years. His competence and confidence grew in the rarefied atmosphere of the distinguished Johannesburg medical fraternity, which fed his urge to branch out on his own, or in partnership with someone. He and Meyer had remained good and loyal friends, and together they decided to seek opportunities to practice in partnership. On finding premises in Harrison Street further to the west of the city centre, they resigned from their respective appointments to venture into the exciting world of independent private practice. Soon, however, they discovered that the location chosen was ill-

suited to an optometry practice. Within a matter of months, they thus found themselves looking for an alternative location.

There was a spin-off from the long periods of inactivity in the unsuccessful practice in Harrison Street. Harold and Meyer were able to devote much of their time to advancing their burgeoning table tennis skills, which they both exploited to the full in the local Transvaal league. Their pooling of efforts and resources knew no bounds – after work, and sometimes even during working hours, they would exchange their lab coats for tracksuits and takkies and head off to the Drill Hall, or one of the other sports halls in the inner city, for a quick social game of table tennis or a league encounter – mostly after hours - for their club at the time, Jewish Guild.

The Transvaal League was of an exceptionally high standard, and both Meyer and Harold were equal to the task of holding their own in that elite company. They proved their individual worth and mutual loyalty and commitment to one another by winning the Transvaal Closed Doubles title one year against the vaunted pairing of Solom Phitidis and Callie Morris.

Building on his experience gained in the Port Elizabeth and district league and in the colours of the Eastern Province provincial team, Harold was to become a formidable singles player at the highest national level, adding Transvaal provincial colours to his honours list. Included in his scalps in the local Transvaal league was a milestone victory over Rex Edwards, a one-time English international, who at the time of this encounter was the number one ranked table tennis player in South Africa.

In between table tennis exploits, Meyer and Harold learned that optometry services in the greater Mayfair/Brixton/Crosby area were confined to a handful of pharmacies. In those early years when the practice of optometry was in its infancy, pharmacists could add what was known as a FSA qualification to their pharmacy diploma or degree, which sanctioned the inclusion of prescription glasses in their range of professional services. These ocular services were not, however, as extensive as those sanctioned by what was known as the F.O.A. qualification conferred upon completion of the optometry course offered by the Johannesburg Technical College.

Investigations revealed a niche for at least two dedicated optometry practices in the greater Mayfair/Brixton/Crosby area. Harold and Meyer answered the call by opening Mayfair Optometrists in the African Theatre Building in Central Avenue in Mayfair and Saben & De Waal Optometrists in Brixton. By agreement, Harold assumed the role of resident optometrist in the Mayfair practice while Meyer assumed the same role in the Brixton practice.

There was no De Waal in the Brixton practice – the name was included for special appeal to members of the large Afrikaans speaking community in Brixton. I'm not sure whether Harold is joking when he imitates Meyer Saben answering the phone, and when asked by the caller if he/she could speak to Mr de Waal, Meyer, in a thick Yiddish accent so reminiscent of those times, responded "It's he *shpiking*".

For Harold, this was the beginning of an era spanning forty years of ocular services amidst the buzz of Mayfair's cross section of communities encompassing English, Afrikaans, African, Lebanese, Muslim and Jewish. Over time, and in particular after Harold and Cynette got married on 15 May 1960, Mayfair Optometrists became a household name among this colorful collection of people from diverse backgrounds. Lifelong friendships were formed with employees, patients, neighbors and fellow resident professionals and shopkeepers.

These were also core Family years for Harold and Cynette. Mayfair Optometrists was the lifeblood of their home, which produced and educated their three children, Lynn, Risa and Heidi, and maintained a comfortable, rewarding and joyful lifestyle for all. Over the years, the appointments of their home began to resemble more and more the lavish antiques pedaled by Johan Boschoff in the pawn shop next door. As truckloads of collectables from farms and rural settlements were offloaded and carried into the shop, Harold would gape in awe at what was often an irresistibly spectacular piece, and sometimes even reserve a piece or two for himself and Cynette even before they reached the floor. Their prize acquisitions, which still adorn their home, included a magnificent grandfather clock, two ornate dressers and numerous smaller artifacts of value.

The pawnbroker Johan Boschoff has the making of a story all of its own. Johan had arrived penniless with his wife and two children from what was then Southern Rhodesia. He took the premises next door to Mayfair Optometrists and started off with a small scale pawn shop. The family could not afford separate living quarters, and initially lived in the back of the shop. Over time, Johan acquired a reputation for being a stockist of quality antiques and collectables with a large and loyal following from all over Johannesburg. With this swell in custom, his financial position improved considerably, and he was able to acquire a farm, to which he moved with his family. Harold and Cynette recall Johan eventually leaving Mayfair a wealthy man.

Conveniently a dentist, Dr Melvin Lazarus, had rooms next door to the pawn shop. Mayfair Optometrists' other neighbour was Oxford Outfitters (a fictitious name to avoid possible offensiveness of forthcoming stories), a name unsuitably matched to its owner, Mr Gelb (also fictitious), a first generation Jewish immigrant shopkeeper who, like his counterparts in large Jewish immigrant communities all over the world, plied his trade with the public across an impassable cultural chasm. The result was often somewhat inappropriate, but sometimes side-splittingly humorous, conduct, of which the actors were blissfully unaware.

Harold and Cynette have two such stories about Mr Gelb. One is when Harold entered Oxford Outfitters to find Mr Gelb advising a customer trying on a pair of shoes to remove his socks for a better fit, and then commenting how well the shoes fitted. To Harold's surprise, this was met by agreement by the customer, who promptly paid for the shoes and walked out wearing them, sockless but apparently satisfied. Cynette was witness to an even stranger incident. Once, she popped in to Oxford Outfitters to say hullo to Mr. Gelb, only to find him hanging a vast amount of

cash notes on a makeshift line running across the shop. Asked by Cynette what he was doing, Mr. Gelb explained that a customer for a large sale had paid with notes that he removed from his shoes – the notes were damp and sticky, and he wanted to dry them out before putting them into the till.

A much loved pillar in Mayfair Optometrists was Derrick Twala, a larger than life character who hailed from Tugela Ferry in the then province of Natal. Derrick interpreted for African patients and also did repairs on glasses, which Harold says nobody can do today. Like Cynette, Derrick multi tasked in the practice, but he was more directly involved in actual eye testing than Cynette.

Derrick's role in eye testing was quite comical. Harold and Cynette retained a live-in three legged cat on the premises of Mayfair Optometrists, primarily to keep the rodent population in check. Harold figured out an additional role for the cat. When conducting eye tests, he introduced an exercise whereby Derrick would hold the three legged cat up high in the patient's line of vision, and Harold would ask the question "How many legs do you see on the cat?", to which even patients with 20/20 vision more often than not answered "Four" instead of "Three".

In musings around Levy family tables, Derrick Twala is without doubt the most talked about personality from Mayfair days. The picture that emerges from the blend of memory and mirth is a larger than life intuitive character with a wonderful sense of humor and hands of gold.

Cynette and Harold adored him, and Harold showed his extreme appreciation for his inestimable value to the practice by giving him his prized DKW Auto Union, a gift that spoke volumes for the mutual affection and admiration that existed between these two talented men.



Cynette (right) with daughter Risa and Derrick Twala

In the forty years of its existence, Mayfair Optometrists moved premises only once. It remained in its first premises in African Theatre Building in Central Avenue for approximately the first ten years (there was a popular bioscope in the same building). The relationship with the landlord was not good, however, and Harold and Cynette were constantly on the lookout for new premises. When an opportunity presented itself to take premises on the same block, at 132B Central Avenue, in a building owned by a wonderful man by the name of Mr Gilinsky, they wasted no time in seizing the opportunity to move the practice. Mr Gilinsky operated a jewellery business in his own building a couple of doors away from Mayfair Optometrists, and he and Harold and Cynette were a constant presence in one another's lives. It is a mark of the sincerity of their friendship that not once in the next thirty years did Harold and Cynette ever give a moment's thought to moving the practice from Mr Gilinsky's building to other premises in Mayfair.

The treatment of impaired vision is a skill akin to that of a trained medical doctor, except that the skill and associated knowledge are confined to the biology of the eye. It is for this reason that the prescription of ocular aids is included in the spectrum of medical services covered by medical aids. From about the mid to late eighties, there was a gradual exodus from Mayfair of the nucleus of the practice's patient pool covered by medical aids, and the financial viability of the practice naturally began to decline.

This is a dangerous but not unusual occurrence in the running of a longstanding business or practice. One requires considerable vision to stem the tide of decline through relocation, especially after forty years of familiarity deeply rooted in mutual loyalties and trust to people and place. The bold, if painful decision to close Mayfair Optometrists was made jointly over time by Harold and Cynette, a perfect example of their exemplary synergy, and one that neither of them could have taken without the input, support and guidance of the other.

An opportunity presented itself at the time for Harold to take over as resident optometrist in an existing practice called Darras Optometrists in Darras Centre, Kensington. Darras Optometrists had been established some years before by Harold in partnership with Ari Neutel, a son of lifelong friends of Harold and Cynette, Marcel and Rae Neutel (now resident in Irvine, California). The decision of the resident optometrist in their employ at Darras Optometrists to emigrate was perfectly timed for Harold to take over and seamlessly continue in practice.

In the fitting embrace of Kensington's graceful tree-lined avenues sprinkled with Victorian architectural flair reminiscent of early 20th Century Johannesburg, Harold and Cynette infused Darras Optometrists with the same old world charm of Mayfair Optometrists. It was in fact the perfect adjustment to maintain the compatibility of the noble ethos of Mayfair Optometrists, albeit in novel surroundings. The patient profile of the practice did, however, change from the colourful mix of English, Afrikaans, African, Lebanese, Jewish and Muslim in Mayfair to a more mainstream

Afrikaans and English-speaking South African character buttressed by burgeoning Portuguese-speaking immigrant communities to Kensington. Harold and Cynette catered specially for the newly acquired Portuguese clientele by employing two Portuguese-speaking receptionists who worked in alternate shifts and by the use of the Portuguese word for Optometrist, 'Oculista', in the shop signage.

A mark of the high regard in which Harold and Cynette were held by old patients of the Mayfair days is that more than a trickle was prepared to undertake the trek across town to avail of Harold's service. It provides some idea of the void left in Mayfair by the closure of Mayfair Optometrists.

Further testament to Harold's reputation in the field of optometry is that when his partner in Darras Optometrists, Ari Neutel, decided to immigrate to the USA some fifteen years ago to join his parents and siblings in Irvine, the Value Vision group of optometry practices agreed to acquire his 50% interest in the practice and to partner Harold, at the age of 75, and Cynette in the continued running of Darras Optometrists. Effectively, this made Darras Optometrists part of the Value Vision stable, with the perks of the Value Vision group's buying power for discounted supplies of frames and lenses, enhanced negotiating leverage in signing of leases with landlords and employment contracts with staff, and in the appointment of locums when Cynette and Harold took vacation.

It was not all work and no play. Up until about six years ago, the famous Portuguese confectionery chain, Belem Bakery, had a branch in Darras Centre which Harold and Cynette used to frequent daily for a light lunch, leaving the receptionist on duty in charge of the practice. Harold beams with delight when relating that all the waiters knew his and Cynette's standard order - two cappuccinos and a toasted tuna and mayonnaise to share - and that no sooner had the waiters seen them walking in at their usual time, one of them would spin round and dart into the kitchen, returning moments later flourishing their order.

All this changed drastically when Covid 19 hit South Africa. Harold's partners in the Value Vision group rightly advised that it was too risky for an optometrist of Harold's age to continue eye testing, and summarily appointed a locum to replace him in the practice. This decision, the merit whereof it must be emphasized is beyond question, had the effect of ending two enormously successful and meritorious working careers spanning more than sixty years.

I agonized over a suitable conclusion, eventually settling on this short but telling tribute to two people for whom I have the deepest love, admiration and respect. In an atmosphere of waning old world charm, the loss of such dedicated delivery of skill, expertise and service is indeed irreplaceable.



Cynette and Harold lock up after a rare after-hours visit to Darras Optometrists during the Covid-19 pandemic



Nonagenarian Harold continues to put in regular spells on the tennis court

Postscript

Two things worthy of mention have happened since I submitted this article to Jewish Affairs. The first is that it emerged that Harold has not abandoned hope of returning to work. On the contrary, he is firmly of the view that he will be able to do so, albeit only for a few days a week. His resolve in this regard manifested when I found a potential buyer for his and Cynette's second car, which he had indicated he wanted to dispose of due to his changed circumstances. However, when it came to being confronted with a serious potential buyer, Harold balked.

"The vaccine has arrived", he said to me, "and I will need the car to get to work and back once things normalize." To his family's utter disbelief, Harold is evidently far from reconciled to the prospect of drifting into permanent retirement at age 90.

The second is a story from Cynette and Harold's Mayfair practice Days that Harold recalls. He happened to be sitting in the testing room with the door to the testing room ajar when he noticed a longstanding patient Mr du Plessis (name changed for reasons that will become evident) enter the practice. A mirror in the reception area afforded a fully reflected view thereof to anyone seated in the testing room while the door leading to the testing room was ajar. Unaware of Harold's reflected view, Mr du Plessis approached a display of Rayban sunglasses in the reception, and tried on a pair. To Harold's dismay, he then slipped the pair into his jacket pocket. Harold remained calm - in a snap he resolved to ask Cynette to send Mr du Plessis an Invoice for two pairs of Rayban sunglasses. A few days later Mr du Plessis returned with a complaint – he had only taken one pair of Rayban sunglasses, not two!

To hell and back: A South African Jew in Stalin's Russia

Boris Gorelik

Boris Gorelik is a Russian writer and researcher and faculty member at the Institute for African Studies - Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow. He has an MA in linguistics from Moscow State University (2001).

Two men, a Russian and a South African, video-chatted for hours. Although Ilya and Bradley had never met before, they had eighty years to catch up on. Their grandfathers, Joseph and Barney, said good-bye in Johannesburg in the 1930s. One was moving to Moscow, the other remained in their native city. They never saw each other again.

'It's incredible', Ilya told me. 'We spoke until late at night. I'm seeing this red-haired man in front of me, and he's truly my brother. He's a Glazer, just like me!'

Joseph (Joe), his grandfather, had passed away in 2011. His passport read, 'Yuzef Genrihovich Glazer'. He was the only South African survivor of the Soviet labor camps. I did not have a chance to interview him, but managed to find people who knew him well. Joseph rarely spoke about his 'nightmare years' in the labor camp. Apart from his family and friends, the British historian Allison Drew was probably the only person to whom he told his story in detail.[1]

Joseph spent most of his life away from his native country, but his command of English remained perfect. He even used some typically South African words and expressions, like 'bioscope' instead of 'cinema'.

'After several hours, I asked if he wanted to take a break', Allison recounts. 'He exclaimed, "Seven years in the gulag, and you think I'm tired!"'

In the communist era, his story was put into service of propaganda. Soviet journalists gushed over the fact that Joseph relocated to Russia of his own free will to find 'warm-heartedness, brotherly solidarity and support'. [2] They omitted one crucial point: both he and his father fell victim to state repression.

Joseph's parents, Henry and Rose, came out to South Africa from Poland. By the time Joseph was born, in 1916, the family had established themselves in Johannesburg.



The Glazer family, circa 1917: Rose with baby Joseph, Henry, Barney and Abe

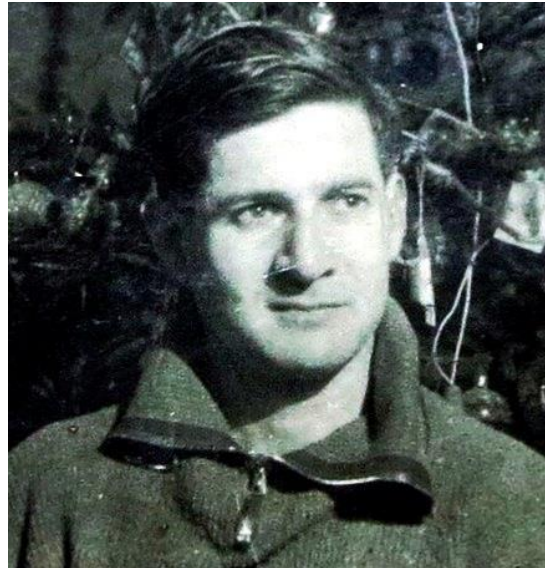
Henry Glazer once sported stiff collars and handlebar moustache, aspiring for a bourgeois lifestyle. But after reading Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, a novel about the tribulations of an East European immigrant in an American city, he woke up to the idea of class struggle. [3]

'We, the Glazers, are like that', says Bradley, Joseph's grand-nephew in Johannesburg. 'If we see injustice, or when someone is being treated unfairly, everything just boils up inside us. We can't put up with it.'

During the Rand Revolt of 1922, Henry, a member of the Communist Party, was detained as a dangerous agitator. [4] In his office, the police found a letter to the prime minister with all sorts of curses, the most decent one being: 'May the hound of hell chase him over the blue rocks of buggery.' [5]

Henry was blacklisted and sacked from his job at the mine. When Stalin invited engineers to come to the Soviet Union and work for the world's first socialist state, he decided to try his luck. In 1931, he went to Russia on spec, with his son Joseph. According to Allison Drew, Henry was the only known socialist who voluntarily emigrated from South Africa to the Soviet Union in that decade: 'He did not go to the Soviet Union on behalf of the [Communist Party of South Africa] or as a member of a trade union delegation. As his son recounts, he was inspired by Stalin's call to socialists around the world to help build the Soviet state and develop its industries. But his decision was made against the backdrop of the Great Depression that had swept across the world and into South Africa.' [6]

'I came out here for adventure', Joseph used to say. But from the first day in the Soviet Union, the South African teenager felt that 'things were bad, very bad indeed'. When Henry asked fellow passengers on the train about the health of the great dictator, everyone kept quiet. They wanted no trouble from this foreigner with his loaded questions.



Joseph Glazer in Moscow, early 1930s

Later, Henry's wife joined him with their other sons, Aubrey and Michael. Rose didn't like Henry's Spartan way of life in Moscow, the poverty, the food shortages. And the plain clothes and kerchief that her husband had her wear so that she would resemble a Russian worker. Maybe she had a premonition. She and Michael decided to return to South Africa. As their train was pulling out of the Moscow station, Michael leaned out of the window shouting, 'Whoopee!' [7]

The following year, Joseph's father was arrested. The 61-year-old man had not seen it coming. In South Africa, Henry had been known as a communist agitator. And in the Soviet Union, he was sentenced to five years of hard labour for 'anti-communist propaganda'. Someone reported him for a disapproving look he had when someone spoke of Stalin. Joseph never saw him again. Perhaps he died in the labour camp.

As the son of an 'enemy of the people', Joseph lost his job at the factory. He was blacklisted, like his father had been in Johannesburg. It took Joseph four years to find steady employment, as a trolleybus driver. And after the war, he found a steady girlfriend: Eleonora, an Estonian of Podolsk, a town near Moscow.

'We dare not get married and kept our relationship secret', he recounted. Eleonora could be compromised by her involvement with him. After she got pregnant, the authorities urged her to leave Joseph. She refused. Then came 12 June 1949. Joseph came home with his pay, and Eleonora had a surprise for him: tickets to an opera at the Bolshoi for the 14th. But the biggest surprise came later. At two in the morning, they heard a loud knock. The secret police came to arrest Joseph. They rummaged the

flat and led him away. Like his father, Joseph was accused of anti-communist propaganda.

‘My colleagues must have reported me’, he assumed. ‘Maybe they didn’t like that I praised some American equipment. Who knows? It was no use asking for a reason.’

Nine months of questioning began. He committed no crime and didn’t want to ‘confess’. They would send him down to the cold cellar. Then back to the office, for a lengthy interrogation, after which they would deny him sleep for two days. If they saw that Joseph closed his eyes, back to the cellar he went.

‘When you return to the interrogator, you’re glad to sign anything’, Joseph recounted. ‘Then I had to sign a paper that I was given a ten-year sentence. My hand was shivering. I couldn’t defend myself. It was a three-man jury, and they decided everything for you.’

He was put in a cattle wagon and shipped to Karlag, an enormous labor camp on the arid plains of Kazakhstan. Sixty-five thousand people were living and working there. Only then did he realise the extent of the repressive system. Many inmates were as innocent as he was. ‘I used to believe in the newspaper propaganda’, he admitted. ‘I thought that everything was wonderful in our country.’

The guards addressed them by the numbers stitched to their jackets. His was 3566. Inmates were dying by the hundreds. One of Joseph’s pals fell ill and committed suicide: he approached the fence and reached for the barbed wire. The guard shot him dead.

Convicts weren’t allowed to communicate with their families. But somebody smuggled a photo of Joseph’s daughter, who was born soon after his arrest, into the camp. Joseph asked one of his inmates to draw her portrait in colored pencil from that photo. The artist charged him in the hard currency of the camp: two daily rations of bread.

Joseph was released in 1957, four years after the dictator’s death. Eleonora was in Podolsk, raising their daughter. Eventually, he joined them. When Allison Drew interviewed him, they were living in a small one-bedroom flat.



Joseph Glazer as an inmate in a labor camp, 1952

‘When I got out, I tried to forget that I ever was there’, Joseph told her. ‘There was nothing I could think of that could make me glad. But I couldn’t grumble. Grumbling won’t help.’ [8]

His brother Aubrey, a taxi driver, lived in Moscow, and they saw each other from time to time.[9] Joseph was an enthusiastic photographer, ever since his father gave him a camera for their trip to Russia. Most of his snapshots were lost or confiscated after the arrest. But Aubrey kept the family pictures, their only tangible connection with South Africa.

In the 1990s, Joseph visited his brother Michael, who settled in London after his departure from Moscow. They had had no contact for decades. He managed to trace him through the Red Cross. Thereafter, they exchanged letters and phone calls.

He was also hoping to get in touch with his eldest brother Barney, who didn’t go to Russia and remained with his family in Johannesburg. In the Soviet era, when Russia and South Africa had no diplomatic relations, this was an impossible task. Later, foreign correspondents heard about Joseph and came to see him in Podolsk. One of the journalists, a South African, promised to track down Barney or his descendants. Joseph waited for the news, in vain.

But now, the two branches of the family have been finally reconnected.

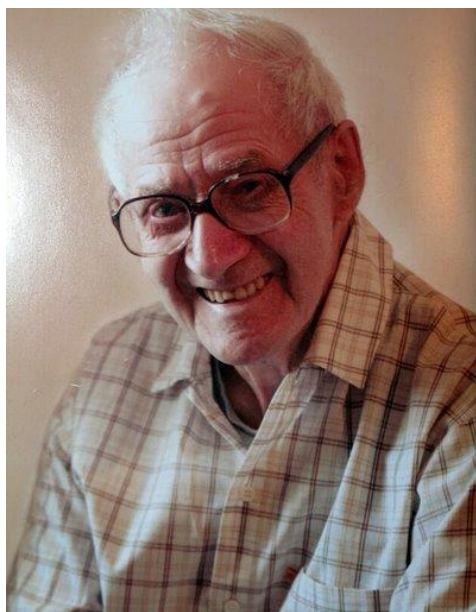
‘I hope to visit Bradley in South Africa one day’, says Ilya Drobyshesky, Joseph’s grandson and freelance cameraman for Western TV channels. ‘My grandad used to tell me about his childhood in Johannesburg.’

Joseph could still clearly remember their house in Simmonds Street, the red-brick walls of his school on the corner of Beit and Davies (the present-day I H Harris Primary School, Doornfontein), the Afrikaans songs that he liked to sing, the

weekend outings to the Zoo Lake with mum and dad. He recalled playing games that his Russian grandchildren did not know, such as rugby, cricket and *kennetjie*.

‘I showed him photos of Johannesburg on the Internet’, says Anatoly Drobyshevsky, his son-in-law. ‘He could still recognise a few places. Though he really wished to go there, it was beyond his means.’

Most of Joseph’s friends were from his time in the camp. He hardly made any new ones in Podolsk. ‘I just live with my family’, Joseph used to tell interviewers. ‘I love



them, and they love me. And I try not to remember those terrible years.’

But once, he revisited a place that brought back his painful memories. Ekaterina Kuznetsova, a journalist from Karaganda, took them to a field where many thousands of inmates were buried in nameless graves.[10]

It was sleeting on that grey November morning. Standing there, in the middle of the field, Joseph threw up his hands. ‘Then he knelt down in the autumn mud and cried out’, recounts Kuznetsova. ‘His voice didn’t sound human. It was as if he were no longer with us. He was facing his past.’

Joseph Glazer in his 90s, Russia

Notes

1 A Drew, ‘Prisoner number 3566: An interview with Joseph Leon Glazer’, *Socialist History*. No 22, 2002, pp 32–55.

2 L Haikin, ‘Joseph Glazer vybirayet Podolsk’ (Joseph Glazer chooses Podolsk), *Sotsialnoye Obespecheniye*. No 3, 1984, p 52.

3. Drew, ‘Prisoner number 3566’, p 32.

4 ‘Forbidden literature’, *The Rand Daily Mail*. 16 March 1922, p 3; ‘Socialist arrested’, *The Star*. 13 March 1922, p 5.

5 L Lange, *White, Poor, and Angry: White Working Class Families in JHB*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, p166

6 Drew, ‘Prisoner number 3566’, p 35.

7 D Merkusheva, ‘A Brit abroad’, *The Guardian*. 28 August 2001.

8 Drew, ‘Prisoner number 3566’, p 52.

9 F Wills, ‘The happy grin on the face of Comrade Cabby’, *Daily Mirror*. 3 December 1966, p 9.

10 E Kuznetsova, ‘Te, kto vyidut otsyuda, naveki rodniye’ (Those who leave this place are forever dear to us). *Nasha Yarmarka*. 29 August 2008, p 14.

The conflict between High Commissioner H L Samuel and Lt.-Colonel F H Kisch in Mandatory Palestine, 1923-4

Glenda Wolf

Glenda Woolf, a frequent contributor to *Jewish Affairs*, is a novelist and essayist whose articles and stories on Jewish themes have appeared in Jewish publications worldwide. Her novels, published under the name Gita Gordon, include: *South African Journeys* (2002), *Flashback* (2007), *Mystery in the Amazon* and *Scattered Blossoms* (both 2008) and *Guest House* (2012).

In the early years of the British Mandate, two Jewish men who had become part of the British establishment found themselves on opposing sides when they entered what was then Palestine. They were Viscount H L Samuel and Lt-Colonel F H Kisch.

Samuel recounts in his memoirs^[1] written many years later that his summons for the position of High Commissioner of Palestine came on 24 April 1920 at the St Remo conference, when “..... [David] Lloyd George.....asked me if I would undertake the administration of Palestine”.

After much discussion with the Foreign Office, “The date fixed for my takeover was July 1st (1920)”.^[2]

Who was this man who thus became the first Jew to govern the land of Israel after so many years of foreign rule?

Herbert Louis Samuels was from a family of wealthy Jewish bankers. His family, as his *Memoirs* (p4) record, “all observed conscientiously the dietary laws and other requirements of the Jewish faith”. One of his uncles was a Member of Parliament for the Liberal party. The young Samuels was not sent to Public (fee paying) school but instead remained at home and attended local schools. When he was 19, he went to Oxford University, spending his holidays touring the Continent. In 1897, aged twenty, he married Beatrice Franklin, with whom he had four children.

Thereafter Samuels became involved in politics. For many years he was involved on the periphery of political activities until, on his 32nd birthday, he was elected to the House of Commons as a member of the Liberal Party.^[3] He served in Opposition from 1902 until 1905 when the Liberals came to power, and over the years served in the Government in many important capacities, becoming Home Secretary in 1916. Though not a supporter of the Zionist movement, in 1914, he wrote that because “the prospects of any practical outcome had seemed so remote..... I was not a

member of the Zionist Organization but in the years 1918 to 1919 was closely co-operation with its leaders.But now the condition are profoundly altered”.[4]

He and Beatrice visited Palestine, and on their return to England went on to San Remo, where an international Conference was taking place. It was there he was offered, and the following day accepted, the position of High Commissioner of Palestine: “I thought that British influence ought to play a considerable part in the formation of such a state, because of the geographical situation of Palestine, and especially its proximity to Egypt, would render its goodwill to England a matter of importance to the British Empire”.[5]

As this makes clear, it was not only the good of the Jews that was in his mind, but also the welfare of the British Empire. If these two interests were to clash, what side would, Samuels, the Jew, favour? This issue arose shortly before Samuels left for Palestine: “Curzon ...told me that he had had a very disturbing telegram from Allenby in Cairo who thought that the appointment of any Jew as the first Governor of Palestine would likely be the signal for an outbreak of serious disorder, with wide spread attacks upon Jewish settlements and individual Jews”. Advised to “think matters over”, Samuels did so by consulting with “a delegation representing the Palestine Jewish community who happened to be in London at the time”.[6] His decision was to accept the appointment.



Viscount H L Samuels, 1870-1963

For Lt-Colonel F H Kisch, the call to Palestine came some time later, in 1922. As he records in his diary, “when serving on the staff of the British embassy in Paris.....I received a telegram transmitting a request from Dr. Weizmann that I should undertake the representation of the Zionist Organization in Jerusalem. The invitation came to me it of the clear blue sky”. As a result, he met with Weizmann, “who

pressed upon me from the point of view that the Zionist Organization had no-one available who could negotiate with the High British officials on equal terms” and explained, “the urgent need of systemic efforts towards reconciliation with the Arabs....I accordingly resigned my Commission in the army---though not without many regrets- and in. November1922, together with D. Weizmann arrived in Palestine to be introduced to my new duties”. [7]

This sets the stage for two Jewish men representing opposing interests to meet, and to disagree.

Although both were well integrated into upper class English society, their backgrounds differed.

As opposed to Samuels, scion of a wealthy family of bankers and politicians, Frederick Hermann Kisch was a child of the Indian Empire and a soldier. He was born in Darjeeling, India, where his father was head of the Indian Postal Service. After some years the family returned to England, where Kisch attended Clifton College, the only Public (private) school with a separate Jewish House. This seems to suggest a family aware of Jewish traditions without following every precept, since this would have been difficult in Colonial service in India.

Kisch then went to Sandhurst and in 1909 joined the Royal Engineers. He served with distinction in France in the First World War, being wounded three times and receiving the D.S.O, and the Croix de Guerre. He was sufficiently well thought of to be a member of the U.K. delegation at the 1919 Peace conference. When he arrived in Palestine he was 36 years old and a bachelor.



Brigadier-General F H Kisch, 188-1943

Palestine and Samuels

On 30 June 1920 Samuels, aged fifty, a family man, an experienced politician arrived in Palestine as High Commissioner. It was during the week of Tisha B'av, the date of historic tragedy on the Jewish calendar when both the first and second Temples were destroyed, and other national calamities happened as well. Upon his arrival he said, "I am the first Jewish leader of Palestine since Hyrcanus II, the last Maccabee leader in 40 BCE." To a certain extent that was true.

On *Shabbat Nachamu*, as the first Shabbat following the fast day of *Tisha B'Av* is called, Samuel and his wife walked to the Yehuda HaHasid 'Hurva' synagogue in the Old City. When he entered, people reacted as if the Messiah had arrived. Rabbis and secularists rose as he was called to read from the Torah and additional reading called the *Haftorah*. Samuel read from the book of Isaiah, "Comfort, comfort, My people, says God. Speak to her heart of Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her time [of exile] has been fulfilled..." Rabbi Kook and other rabbinic luminaries of Jerusalem gave speeches in his honor. The story is important to point out that Sir Herbert was a Jew who knew enough to walk on the Sabbath, to say the blessings and read from the ancient books. Though not fully observant, even observant Jews were elated with this man who represented the strongest country in the world.

In his memoirs Samuel makes no mention of this event, so seemingly it was of little importance to him. However, to the Jews then living in Palestine it was a momentous occasion. Samuels had indeed arrived at a propitious time. The Jews were thrilled to welcome British government after experiencing the corrupt Turkish rule.

The second public event was the wedding of the Samuels' son Edwin, who had arrived before him to take up an administrative post in Jerusalem. This he does mention. Edwin Samuels had joined the British Army and served in Allenby's forces in Egypt. He had come to Palestine as a soldier, and rented a room at the renowned Hebrew scholar Grazovsky's home in Tel Aviv. He and the daughter of the house, Hadassah Grazovsky, met and decided to get married. The wedding was held at official residence of the High Commissioner, the Augusta Victoria building.

Soon after his arrival Samuels appointed Wyndham Deedes, head of intelligence of Allenby's staff, as the top man, as Civil Secretary. Ronald Storrs continues as Governor of Jerusalem. Norman Bentwich, "a Jew and a committed Zionist", was made Attorney General. Samuels insisted that all his staff had to pass a qualifying examination in either Hebrew or Arabic, and "All of them... chose Arabic: a few added Hebrew". He makes no comment on this apparent pro-Arab sentiment among those who serve him and his administration. Samuels had brought with him a message from the king declaring that "a respect for the rights of all races and creeds would govern its actions. The message announced measures for the gradual establishment in Palestine of a National home for the Jewish people a week after his arrival he..... held a great Assembly....with ...the notables of all sections, lay and ecclesiastical, together with the heads of the administration". In view of the corruption of the

previous administration, he emphasized that the new regime “would not tolerate corruption among judges and officials”.^[8]



Viscount Samuels giving an address, circa. 1924

Samuels set about establishing a Police force, a judiciary and, using a generous subsidy from Hadassah, a Public Health department. He gave attention to education in the Arab sector and the issue of land tenure and began to improve the system of communications. In the chapter of his *Memoirs* entitled ‘Palestine: Jews and Arabs’, he lays out his intended policy dealing with the “basic problem of relations between Arabs and Jews”, as well as the results.^[9] He sincerely felt that it was possible to “establish a Jewish National Home...without prejudice to the civil and religious rights of the rest of the population”, and that as a Jew he would have “counted it as a shame to the Jewish people if the renewal of their life in the ancient land of Israel were to be marked by hardship, expropriation, injustice of any kind, for the people now in the land”. He stated clearly that he was there “not commissioned by the Zionists, but in the name of the King”.^[10] His loyalty is thus clearly and unequivocally stated.

It was on this subject that Kisch, the representative of the Zionists with no problem of dual loyalties, had many disagreements with the High Commissioner. The stage was set for two upper- class Jewish Englishmen, the politician and the soldier, to meet from two opposing sides.

F H Kisch in Palestine

The diaries of Kisch cover his time in Palestine much more extensively than Samuels does of his own time there in his memoirs, 459 pages in all, with each day painstakingly recorded. This means that it is his views, rather than that of Samuels that are before us in much detail.

In his dealings with the Jewish Lord Samuels, Kisch he seems to have been less than successful. His anger is evident even years later, as is his restraint. "Having regard to the terrorism which unhappily prevails at the time of the present publication. I thought it right to exclude altogether my minutes of official interviews with the High Commissioner of the day".[11]

Kisch travelled the length and breadth of Palestine. He met with Jews in towns and settlements, with moderate Arab leaders and Arab royalty, with British officials and with visitors from abroad, Jew and Gentile. Palestine at that time was a multinational place.



Col. Kisch speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the Massaryk Forest at Sarid in Emek Jezreel, 14 April 1939

The daily activities of the High Commissioner are not available to us. What will be detailed is all from the point of view of Kisch and are taken from the relevant pages of his published *Diary*. The views of Samuels come from his memoirs published much later, in 1944.

March 30.....Good Friday- arrival of the Nablus contingent for "Nebi Musa" in the presence of the High Commissioner greetings were exchanged between Storrs and the Mufti Haj Amin who remained seated on horseback. The head of the procession, seated behind the Mufti the cries (in Arabic of course) "Long live Haja Amin" "Long live the Arabs", "Down with the Jews". For the possibility of such a thing to occur we have to thank Richmond's support of the Mufti and Herbert Samuel's weakness (p46).

A short time later Kisch met with the Syrian Arab, Riadh el Sulk who was in Palestine:

April 3... Riadh el Sulk repeated his opinion that the Government ... do not wish to see a rapprochement between Jews and Arabs. I cannot believe this to be the case but undoubtedly the Government has acted and are acting as if this were true (pp46-7).

The question that must be asked her is ...Was this official British policy? Was this the way British officials applied their mantra of "Divide and rule?" Was this due to incompetence? To what extent was Samuels influenced by his advisors, the permanent staff of Palestine? Was this in any way deliberate policy by Samuels? These are questions of interest, but seemingly with no way of elucidation all these many years later.

It was not only Arab dignitaries who expressed such opinions to Kisch. British officials also expressed to him their worries.

April 4...Saw Deedes off at the station. Deedes last words to me were "Try to counteract the High Commissioner's waning popularity among the Jews." I replied frankly that I myself wanted to be convinced that this change of attitude was not justified (p47).

This attitude, that The High Commissioner was hindering rather than helping Arab rapprochement, was expressed also by other officials:

May 1...Later an interesting conversation with Arthur Cust, a young officer who had been for a year and a half A.D.C. to Sir Herbert Samuel. Speaking of the High Commissioner, Cust said that H.E. had achieved what only a Jew could have done, namely the reduction of Jewish ambition in Palestine to a moderate level and enthusiasm (pp.52-3).

Cust suggested that it was time for a replacement, by someone who was an experienced Eastern Administrator, suggesting Lord Ronaldshay. With all these opinions in his mind Kisch went to his interview with the high Commissioner. He was dismayed by the attitude he found.

October 7...Interview with H.E. Found him very affable, although he is discussing the most dangerous combinations with the Arab extremists, he seems quite happy in his conviction that nothing he is doing can injure the Jewish cause (p72).

Only a day or so later he found even in the heart of the High Commissioners office there was a disagreement with the plies of Samuels policies:

October 9...I can see that although, Clayton (Chief Secretary) is very loyal to Samuels...that in matters such as neutrality in regard to friends and enemies Palestine cannot be governed according to Liberal methods appropriate to England (pp 73-4).

This was reinforced in an alarming manner by an Arab source:

October 12...A visit from an Arab friend from Nablus, ...my informant stated that Anti-Zionism had become a sort of religion in the country and that it was necessary to do something to combat it (ibid).

The year 1923 ended on a bitter note. It was not only the policies of The High Commissioner towards Arab extremists that disturbed Kisch, but also his lack of interest in helping the Jews to make improvements:

December 5 ...A constructive-minded and far seeing government would have planned their economic policies so as to encourage industrial development and take advantage of the unprecedented interest in which Jews throughout the world are taking in Palestine. Nothing of the kind has been attempted here under Herbert Samuels regime (p85).

The year of 1924 did nothing to make Kisch feel more sympathetic to Lord Samuels:

April 14 (1924)... And which has appeared in both the Arabic and Jewish Press. In this letter the lies about Jews having press insulted Islam at the Purim celebration at Tel Aviv are repeated.....Protested very strongly that the man who the Government treats as a responsible leader of the Arabs is allowed to spread false and provocative information (p113).

After discussing the matter further with Deedes and Storrs it appears that the information had been kept from everyone by a junior official. Since the letter blamed the Government for “*All that had happened*”, this does not throw a very favorable light on the state of knowledge of the country, of these high officials. This raises a question, all these years later. How had such a thing occurred? Was this correct or had the junior official merely been used as a scapegoat to mask bad government policy?

May 21 10 a.m. Interview with H.E... As usual I came away from Samuel as if I had been taking a cold shower (p121).

The subject discussed in not mentioned. This leaves us wondering what was discussed, and why Kisch was so upset.

The prejudice of the High Commissioner and his officials towards the moderate Arab dignitaries continues to be brought to the notice of Kisch:

June 4 ...A visit from sheiks from Beisan: the usual story about alleged persecution of friendly Arabs by Junior Government officials. I blame the High Commissioner for not insisting that our friends among the Arabs be treated favorably (p126).

Once again the matter of the matter of lack of financial support towards the Jewish community is raised:

June 18, 10.a.m. Interview with H.E., at which Dizengoff was present, on the subject of the Tel Aviv Jetty. H.E. opposed it very strongly, stating that the Government were being asked to spend money...

Kisch then explains how necessary the harbour is to Tel Aviv, that the money spent would be soon recouped, and continues, “...I took exception to the question being

approached from the view that the project must not cost the Government a penny having regard to the large proportion of revenues derived from Tel Aviv (p129).

In financial matters large and small, Kisch finds the High Commissioner lacking in sympathy and practical help. On 20 June, at the request of a tobacco manufacturer "...[he] came to seek exemption from duty for tobacco imported for blending with Palestinian tobacco.....This was my last interview with Sir Herbert Samuel before his departure on leave, and he struck me as tired and rather hostile, but perhaps this was a reflection of my own mood" (p131).

When Samuels returned from his leave, things went from bad to worse. On 17 November Kisch was distressed about a speech made by Samuels during Health week at which he made no mention that most of the funding came from Hadassah (p152). The year ends with Kisch leaving Palestine to visit Rome, Paris and America.

Land purchase was an essential component in Jewish settlement of a then arid and unproductive land. As head of the Zionist Office, Kisch was heavily involved in such matters. Arab extremism promoted violence. However, it also made the purchase of land more difficult. There is a note of quiet despair in the following entry:

December 4-15 (Summary)...Thinking over our situation in Palestine I am much concerned at the increasing tendency of Arab extremists to organize opposition to our land purchases (p153).

By contrast, in his autobiography Lord Samuels looks back on this time, and all his time in Palestine with satisfaction: "My term had been extended to include a fifth year. The second year was a time of steady progress and comparative calm. Public security was well maintained (p178).

It is true there were no large serious outbreaks of violence, but the term, "comparative calm" may be misleading in view of the insecurity of the Jewish populace, particularly those settling the land, at this time.

Kisch and Samuels

That story of two Jewish men, from similar backgrounds, working in unhappy opposition was concluded, as Samuels records, in 1925 on July 1st we left Jaffa by sea, and that chapter of my life was ended (Memoirs, p178). However, there was still one link. In October 1927 Kisch, aged 39, married the niece of Lord and Lady Samuels. The book of his diaries is dedicated to her.

Kisch remained in Palestine, and his work and their records in his diaries continued. The last we hear of him in the diary volume is 1938. This was time of danger to Jews in Europe and the refusal of the Mandate government to allow in more than a small token of Jewish refugees: "A gesture cannot save an oppressed people" (p459). However, when Britain went to war Kisch resumed his military career, serving as Brigadier in British Eighth army Battalion in Tunisia. He is recorded as being the most

Senior Jew in the British army. On 7 April 1943, aged 56, he was killed after stepping on a landmine and was buried in Tunisia.



Samuels had wanted to remain in Palestine with his wife. However, the newly appointed High Commissioner, Lord Plumer, had told him “It would be an embarrassment..... if the ex-High Commissioner was a resident in the country.”^[12] Instead, he and his wife travelled to Italy, with the intention of retiring there.

It seems, if he was not well thought of by the Jews and moderate Arabs in Palestine, matters were quite different in England. There had been a debilitating General Strike. There was much disagreement within the Liberal Party with conflict between Liberals who favoured Asquith and those who favored Lloyd George. Since both sides found Lord Samuels agreeable, “The leaders of both sections agreed that I should be invited to be the chairman of the joint Liberal organization”.^[13]

Samuels was thus asked to return. This he does. He puts Palestine and its issues behind and returns as a Liberal to political life in England. Between 1931-2 he was Home Secretary. After resigning he remained in the House of Commons until 1935. A multitude of different activities occupied him until the time he ends his diary in 1944, when he was living in Oxford and involved in University matters. His stint in Palestine is but one episode in his busy and influential life.

However, there is one last reference to his time there: “Note - as there has appeared in recent years, especially from Zionist quarters Some criticism of the Policy I pursued in Palestine I venture to add here, two resolutions and a letter I received at that time.....”^[14] There are formal letters of thanks from the Zionist Organisations of London and America, and also one from Weizmann. After all this time, it is difficult to tell if they were truly complimentary or merely the formal and correct thing to do.

Their legacy

To end the *Memoirs* of Lord Samuels. So too, ends the story of two British Jews, who cared for the land of Israel, who lived there for some time, and then had to leave. The both worked, in their own and very different ways, to make the land flourish.

Samuels and Kisch lived and worked in Jerusalem. They left a record of their time there. Whose policies were correct? Would the outcome have been any better if Kisch had persuaded Samuels to act differently? Such speculation leads nowhere.

However, both men left a legacy, in the form of talented grandsons.

Professor David Samuel, Edwin's son and Samuel's grandson, is Professor Emeritus at the Weizmann Institute in the Department of Neurobiology. Kisch's grandson, Yoav Kisch, is a distinguished member of the Knesset.

Today, in spite of all that has gone before, the Land of Israel is under Jewish governance, and the grandsons of these two men, both make their unique contributions to the Land.

NOTES

[1] *Memoirs, by the Rt. Honourable Viscount Samuel*, London, the Cresset Press, 1945 (hereafter , 'Memoirs')

[2] Ibid, pp120, 122

[3] Ibid., p38

[4] Ibid., p140

[5] Ibid. p141

[6] Ibid., pp151-2

[7] *Palestine diary* by Lt-Colonel F H Kisch, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1938, Preface.

[8] Samuels, *Memoirs*, pp155-6

[9] Ibid., pp164-179

[10] Ibid., p168

[11] Kisch *Diary*, preface

[12] Samuels, *Memoirs*, p182

[13] Ibid, p196

[14] Ibid., p178

Free to Choose

Charlotte Cohen

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Each Jewish festival seems to give expression to a particular aspect of human experience.

As Rosh Hashanah deals with renewal and rebirth, and Yom Kippur with remorse and remission, so the underlying message of Passover is one of deliverance and redemption.

Passover reminds us each year of its underlying message of liberation. Because there were several Jewish members in the Toastmasters club to which I belonged, it was decided that although the next meeting did not actually fall within the week of Passover since it coincided with the celebration of Easter, we would organise a meeting with a combined theme of Easter and Passover. The Christian members of the club would bring Easter eggs and speak about the meaning and customs of Easter; whereas the Jewish members would bring matzos and Passover delicacies and discuss the significance of the rituals and practices associated with Passover.

Taking into account its fundamental message of emancipation, my assignment was to speak on 'Freedom.'

There was only one problem: I could think of nothing to write about it. For days I tried to imagine an illustrative story; or how to explain the concept of freedom in an inspirational way or how to present this abstract noun as identifiable

But still nothing came to mind.

With only three days before the meeting, I decided to look up the word in a dictionary, hoping it would provide some spark to alleviate my impasse. The dictionary however only described 'freedom' in antonyms: It was not being in bondage; it was not being in captivity; it was not being enslaved.

It evoked no interpretive response.

I decided to check a thesaurus: Under the heading 'Freedom' I found this quotation by Franz Kafka: "*It is often safer to be in chains than it is to be free.*"

It still provided me with no relevance

How does one define 'freedom'? What state of existence must one be in to be free? It may mean something entirely different to each individual person. Is a mother free when she has 3 children to look after, has to work and has an elderly parent to care for as well? Is a man free to resign from a job in which he is unhappy, when he is committed to the hilt with home and business commitments and a family dependent on his income? Is one free when beset by ill-health or physically dependent by being confined to a wheel-chair, or worse?

Does freedom mean doing or saying whatever one wants - ignoring protocol or convention?

And I still had nothing

Finally, I decided to go to the root of it all:

As the reason for speaking about 'freedom' in the first place was its association with Passover and the emancipation of the Jews, I began to wonder how Moses and the children of Israel, after wandering 40 years in the desert, must have felt when they finally reached the 'Promised Land'? I wondered whether the bible provided any insight into the emotion Moses experienced at that time and whether one could reach into it.

... I fetched a bible from the bookshelf and paged through it to find the part where Moses finally reached the promised land.....

In doing so, in my quest to find something meaningful to say about freedom, the journey on which I had embarked would bring two discoveries:

The first - was something I did not realize (- and which, it would appear, very few people are aware of either). The second, although simple, was in my terms, more of a revelation!

Besides providing me with the topic for my speech, it provided me with a concept which had a profound effect on my thinking ever since.

I found what I was looking for in Deuteronomy. As we know, Moses does not enter the promised land – but only looks across at it. And then, Chapter 5 verse 6 reads: *"I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage"* before it continues to recount the rest of The Ten Commandments.

What struck me as odd was the reference to the 'house of bondage' a in the first place - and that after the 4th Commandment (-- but the seventh day is the Sabbath; in it thou shalt not do any work) was again the interjection: *"And remember thou wast a servant*

in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee thence through a mighty hand and a stretched out arm."

I wondered what these reminders from 'The Ten Commandments' had to do with being a slave in the land of Egypt and now being free? In fact, why were 'The Ten Commandments' interrupted like this at all - with reference to 'our being servants in the land of Egypt'?

I told my son, Steven, about the interjections and asked him why he thought they were there.

He stared at me blankly.

"There are no interjections about being slaves given during 'The Ten Commandments', he said.

"There are!" I argued. "I saw them with my own eyes."

"There aren't!" He was adamant.

He fetched the bible – and opened it at 'Exodus' – where Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God.

There were no reminders or interpolations in it!

I was astounded! I insisted that I had seen it.

Steven said I must have been hallucinating. In fact, trying to be funny, he got up and with arms waving madly around, he shouted "A miracle! A miracle!"

And he said I must have been hallucinating. In fact, trying to be funny, he got up and with arms waving madly around, he shouted "A miracle! A miracle!"

Then the penny dropped!!

We had seen 'The Ten Commandments' in two different places! My son read them as they were given to Moses, in 'Exodus'. Whereas, by my focusing on when Moses had actually reached the Promised Land, I had read them in 'Deuteronomy' - where the commandments are *repeated* by Moses to the 'children of Israel'.

The interjections were, of course, made by Moses and not by God...

Right, so that problem was solved.

But still, why did Moses repeat them? What significance did they have?

What did the liberation of Jews from being slaves in Egypt have to do with 'The Ten Commandments' anyway?

Furthermore, thinking along those lines, the connection between 'Freedom' and the 'Ten Commandments' could be no coincidence. Why were they mentioned at the same time? What had the one to do with the other? How were they bound?

AND THEN, SUDDENLY, THE IMPLICATION OF IT, HIT LIKE A TON OF BRICKS!

What a contradiction! What a paradox!

The Israelites finally, after forty years, were to enter the 'Land of Freedom'. However, with them, THEY CARRIED TEN OF THE MOST PRESCRIPTIVE LAWS EVER GIVEN TO MANKIND!!

How could this be defined as 'Freedom'? ... especially if this 'freedom' was unequivocally regulated by laws which forbade certain things and which decisively drew boundaries?

..... Now I began to understand what Kafka meant: "It is often safer to be in chains than it is to be free." ...

A lamb put out in the wilderness is not free at all. It is doomed: Yet, within the confines of a pen, it is safe: There it is able to eat and play without risk. The lamb is 'free' there because it is protected.

THEREFORE, FREEDOM IS NOT FREEDOM UNLESS IT HAS PARAMETERS.

And freedom is *only* freedom when we are protected by the confines of just and prescribed laws.

Although one may be free inasmuch as one is not at someone else's beck-and-call, real freedom is dependent on the restraints of conscience and integrity. These are our controls. These are our limits.

....oOo....

Referring again to The Ten Commandments, we find that the first four deal with man's relationship to God, whereas the last six, with man's relationship to other men. ...

Yet - perhaps with the exception of the personal discipline of "Thou shalt not covet" - there is no commandment which puts a limit on our thinking.

Therefore, the only unconditional freedom we have as human beings is freedom of thought. Here we are free to question, to contemplate, to consider, imagine, plan, calculate and, most importantly, we are free to choose.

Our power of choice (described as a power even greater than the angels, seeing they can only do good) is the greatest power bestowed on any living creature! If then, the truest meaning of freedom is the application of our power of choice within the

confines of a moral and ethical code of behavior, the message of freedom which we learn at Passover, extends itself to every decision we make, every single day of our lives. For it is then - where we have the freedom to contemplate and consider; to reposition ourselves; to rethink and reaffirm our values - that we genuinely exercise 'freedom' in this miraculous power of choice we have been given.

Many learned and respected leaders have spoken about the necessity of bringing principle and honour back into our thinking; and particularly in South Africa, despite our individual faiths and backgrounds, to our having a common code of morality. It has been emphasized that as nations, we can be 'individual yet united' just by the simplicity of implementing what is 'good or bad' ... and starting with ourselves, acting from the standpoint of what is clearly right or wrong.

And what is clearly right or wrong is dictated by our conscience and the freedom we have in our power of choice.

Kismet

Clark Zlotchew

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I, Professor Drew Whitney, am going to relate the curious case of Dr Isaac Newton Levi, an American professor of Semitic languages and Near East studies at Oxford. He had never believed in reincarnation or the transmigration of souls; those ideas were too far removed from science, observed reality. But after his rather unusual experience in May 2019, he's a bit more open to the possibility. "Just a bit," he stressed, when he last spoke to me. But I shouldn't get ahead of myself, so let us start at the beginning.

The beginning? But what really is the beginning of anything? If a man robs a bank, is the beginning of this event when he woke that morning, or when he planned it a month before its execution, or when he lost his job and stopped receiving a good salary? Or was the true beginning involved with the manner in which his parents raised him, their morals and ideals? Or when he was born, with the tendencies programmed into his genes? Or when he was conceived? Or how and why his parents conceived him? And on and on in reverse until arriving at the first homo sapiens? Or to the first homo erectus? And so on all the way back to the first case of a living creature: a one-celled entity? Or all the way back to the ultimate beginning, the start of everything, which some call the Big Bang,^[1] and others call by the Biblical Hebrew title *B'reshet* (In the Beginning), or its English/Greek name *Genesis*. I can see I've said much too much, much more than necessary. Well, I'm a garrulous old professor. Retired. Let's cut to the chase, as they say. For the purpose of this report I feel it appropriate to start only as far back as May 2019 and then reach further back to 2005. And then to one thousand years earlier. And, come to think of it, to almost four thousand years ago. Really.

#

May 2005: Levi told me he had signed up to travel with a group of Spanish teachers, professors and students on a Florida State University-sponsored month-long program to travel around Spain. Crossing the Strait of Gibraltar from Algeciras to Tangier for a

three-day stay in Morocco, it struck Levi that on this clear day he could see both Europe and Africa simultaneously. He felt –very strongly-- that this ordinary fact concealed a hidden meaning –a personal message-- submerged in his unconscious, barely tapping at the gates of his consciousness.

He shook his head in wonder when he spied in the distance to the west and to the east the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, respectively. Simple geographical facts, he knew on a rational level. Yet he marveled at this view of two continents and two great seas joining hands, so to speak. He felt odd to be in the very center of this confluence of the waters and the encounter of two great land masses pressing in on him from the four cardinal points of the compass.

I felt like telling him, “Get over yourself, my boy. You’re not the center of the universe.” Naturally, I held my peace.

Levi knew it was foolish to feel this way. People traveled this short route every day; it was commonplace. It took an hour and a half to cross. I could see he was somehow disturbed by this irrational sensation, as he unburdened himself to me. I told him that one shouldn’t agonize over feelings, to just accept them. Perhaps at some later date the meaning of it would reveal itself to him. If it had a meaning.

Then Levi mentioned that when he debarked from the ferry, a tall, blonde, blue-eyed stevedore reached to take his suitcase. The man was attired in wide red trousers of the type worn in the days of Sheherazade, a black sash around his waist and an open black vest over a bare chest. He looked like a Viking disguised as a guard of the Caliph of Baghdad. Or a Cossack. Physically not at all typical of most Moroccans. In fact, he could easily be taken for a native of Norway. *Must be a descendant of the Vandals*, Levi decided. *Interesting*. Somehow, he sensed a submerged connection between this dock worker and the near epiphany he experienced on crossing the Strait. I thought he was adding two plus two and arriving at five.

He told me that in 2005 Tangier was a large cosmopolitan city, as it still is, in which men and women wearing the latest European fashions unconcernedly mingled with women in hijabs and men in jellabas. This juxtaposition of modern Western garb and traditional North African apparel added to his sense of an impending discovery. As did his hearing the babble of several languages simultaneously. The study group toured the city by bus and on foot, and in the evening went to a club in which they were entertained by local musicians as well as a Spanish dance troupe, and were able to dance to a band that played salsa, merengue and “slow dances.”

On the third day they took a chartered bus across a thirsty beige landscape to Tetuán, a dusty, sleepy, old-fashioned backwater about forty miles east-south-east of Tangier. Here all the men wore jellabas and clothing that looked like they came straight out of the *Alf Laila w’Laila*, the *Thousand and One Nights*. Women were a rare sight but when seen in public at all were wrapped from head to foot in black, the eyes alone visible. He mentioned that their clothing, except for the face covering, reminded him of the traditional garb of Catholic nuns. As the tour group proceeded down a main street,

the local men lined up on the sidewalks to simply stare at them, mostly at the young miniskirted women in their group.

Levi started to worry: was he obsessing about some as yet inchoate idea represented by seeing two continents at the same time? Because that crossing flashed into his mind again upon observing miniskirted girls being ogled by men in jellabas.

I interrupted to say, “Well, that’s only logical, my boy. Two continents juxtaposed and then two cultures in confrontation.”

He smiled, nodded and continued. This scholarly young man felt he and the other Americans were being scrutinized the way people watched the antics of animals in a zoo. Except that these Moroccans did not smile or speak to each other; they just stared sullenly, or glared, eyes radiating disgust, he felt, and even hatred. And lust.

“Naturally, Isaac, what would you expect?” I said. “The girls should have been warned to dress modestly there.”

#

May 2019: Fourteen years after his first visit, Professor Levi had presented a paper at a conference in Seville, and decided to revisit Morocco. He couldn’t explain to me, even to himself, his motive for doing so. “It was just a whim, for old times’ sake, perhaps.”

I thought, but would not say, *Come on, my boy. You must be joking. You know the reason, you incorrigible sentimentalist.*

In 2019, Levi could not help noticing that Tetuán had a more energetic air. While there were still old sections of town where many still dressed the way their ancestors did, in the bustling downtown area he saw men who wore modern Western clothing, who would not seem out of place in Los Angeles, and women who wore jeans or skirts that reached below the knee, however, not miniskirts. The city was much larger, as well, and had some interesting examples of ultra-modern architecture.

As he explained this, I thought, *mildly interesting, but you’re stalling. You are resisting getting to the consequential part.*

Levi strolled along a narrow winding lane in the older part of Tetuán, a street that seemed familiar. No vehicular traffic was permitted on this street. An unnecessary regulation: no car would fit into this space. There were no sidewalks; the street was not much more than a dusty path, with two-story buildings of white-washed stucco on both sides. The noise of city traffic and voices of hucksters did not penetrate this remote alley in which a perfect silence reigned. It occurred to him that he probably had been on this very street fourteen years earlier. No, he corrected, not probably: *definitely*. With *her*. With the nineteen-year-old student, Jazmine Toledano.

He almost passed it: a small unobtrusive shop. The name was written on the window in black in Arabic and in Roman alphabet: *Dar al-Musayr*. Reading the name, the American chuckled. *Quite an impressive name, Abode of Destiny*. A hand-written sign in that window --in Arabic, French and Spanish-- announced *Curios & Ancient Books*. He felt immediately impelled to enter. Curiosity, of course, but something stronger as well. When his eyes had adjusted to the penumbra of this tiny shop, Levi noticed the white plastered walls almost entirely blocked by bookshelves of dark wood loaded with dusty tomes. The pleasant smell of old paper brought him back to his childhood wanderings among the stacks of his neighborhood library. The smell was unexpectedly comforting. The professor had a fleeting vision of Miss Fletcher, the kindly white-haired librarian.

Yes, I thought, he really is a sentimental fellow.

He finally discerned, in the semi-darkness, a distinguished-looking man wearing a mahogany-colored jellaba and red fez, almost invisible at first, chameleon-like, camouflaged by the dark wood behind him. He had a kindly smile on his white-bearded face. The shopkeeper placed his hand on his heart, inclined his head, and greeted the academic with “Marhaba, ya estadh” (*Welcome, Professor*).

“You know, Professor Whitney,” Levi told me, “while there I felt the man looked vaguely familiar. I just realized why.” He gave me a peculiar look.

“You don’t mean he looked like me, do you?”

He shrugged and smiled, then continued his tale. It seems the shopkeeper’s Arabic had a strange accent to it, unlike that of Tangier or Dar al-Baida, or even of Marrakech. It was a pronunciation Levi was not familiar with. A word or two surprised him because he had come across those words only in ancient documents, never in the speech of modern-day Arabs of the Middle East or of the Maghreb. Speaking in Arabic, Levi asked him how he knew he was a professor, to which the antiquarian responded, “Who but an academic or scholar would come to this shop?” He chuckled. “We have no Harry Potter books or comics in my humble establishment.”

The proprietor invited Levi to sit on one of the two chairs, then went into the dark backroom and returned a couple of minutes later with two small cups of strong, sweet coffee. He placed the cups on a small table and seated himself on the other chair facing the young man. They spoke about trivial matters, as was customary, but the elderly gentleman finally inquired if the visitor was looking for something in particular, offering to help. Levi told him he had nothing special in mind, that he was just browsing. The antiquarian smiled and said, “I am sure you will find something fascinating here. *Inshallah*.” He then retreated into the greater darkness of the back room.

The American stood and wandered around the shop, flipping through dusty old books at random. Levi had been under a strain recently, but somehow felt very much

at ease in this hole-in-the-wall antiquities shop. The books were in Arabic, French, English, Hebrew, Aramaic, Spanish and Greek, on various disciplines: navigation, history, geography, astronomy, mathematics, theology, mysticism, philosophy... Even alchemy and magic! All interesting, of course. A reflection from outside flashed for a few seconds on a corner of the room in which a brown folder seemed to be jammed between the end of a bookcase and the wall. It would be an understatement to say it drew his attention; it exerted what seemed like a magnetic attraction on him. Levi walked over to it and plucked it from its cranny. He blew off a cloud of dust, wiped it down with a paper tissue, laid it on a table and opened it. A faint trace of something in the air suddenly sparked a vague feeling of happiness followed by disappointment. The folder held unbound sheets of yellowed paper as well as parchment, all containing handwriting in various alphabets on it. Many of these sheets were prosaic business accounts or advice about health.

Then he saw them: six sheets of sheepskin on some of which was writing in Arabic and others in Hebrew. Some were in the Hebrew language but using Arabic script. As he riffled through these documents, he came upon poetry of a kind he was familiar with: verses written in Moorish Spain from the tenth through the twelfth centuries. They were *muwashshahs* with their corresponding *kharjas*.^[2] He knew that a *muwashshah* is a long poem in either classical Arabic or formal Hebrew, with a definite rhyme scheme. He also knew that at the end of this type of poem is the *kharja*, which is a bit of lyrical poetry –probably a popular song-- of from two to four lines. But unlike the longer poem to which they are attached, these short verses are in *Mozarabic*, one of the early Romanic dialects commonly spoken among Christians living under Moorish rule in Spain.

Levi remembered that these verses, which almost always expressed the pain a young woman feels at the absence of her lover, are in what could be loosely called “Spanish,” he thought, or perhaps proto-Spanish, with a sprinkling of colloquial Arabic vocabulary. But, as he saw confirmed by these documents, this early Spanish was written in either the Arabic or Hebrew alphabet, depending on the language of the *muwashshah* to which it’s attached. He smiled at the thought that the earliest examples of poetry in Spanish language were written in either Arabic or Hebrew letters. ^[3] His simultaneous view of Europe and Africa on crossing the Strait of Gibraltar flashed through his mind for a fraction of a second.

And, he noted, these *kharjas*, like the ones found in Cairo, continued the same rhyme found in the preceding *muwashshah*. Levi enjoyed the idea that the *kharja* was the transcription of a popular song that everyone knew and could be heard on the streets of Córdoba or Granada or Seville a thousand years earlier.^[4]

His discovery of these hitherto unknown *muwashshahs-kharjas* was an incredible piece of luck! For his career. Then, it hit him like a blow to the gut! A fragrance that stirred his memory seized his heart, causing it to race. The image of a beautiful face in profile, in three-quarters view, in full face, dark hair cascading to smooth shoulders flashed through his mind. His body, his nerve-endings, his unconscious, recognized

the intoxicating bouquet three seconds before his conscious mind did. There was no mistaking it. It was *her* signature scent. Hers, no one else's.

#

May 2005: Nineteen-year-old Jazmine Toledano had been one of the students on the tour in 2005. As they traveled with the group, she and Isaac began to pair off at the end of local day tours. They spoke of their academic interests, favorite movies, music, languages. They agreed that Bogart and Bergman in *Casablanca* was a masterpiece. They danced in clubs and went for long walks in the evening. After the first two weeks, she and he had fallen in love. It was there in Tetuán, on that very lane transformed into a white ribbon by the full moon, that Levi had told her he loved her.

She beamed with delight and looked into his eyes. "I love you, too, Isaac." Her smile then morphed into a frown and she looked down at the ground.

"That's wonderful!" he said. He noticed her change of emotion. "But why are you staring at the ground, looking so sad, Jazmine? We love each other. Aren't you happy?"

She looked up at him with tears in her eyes. Her voice cracking, she said, "Isaac, my grandparents were born in Baghdad. My mother and father still follow the old customs."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

She spoke rapidly, as though to spit the words out and be rid of them, "They've arranged a marriage for me. To a man I don't even know." She sobbed. "I can't go against their wishes, Isaac. I can't."

Levi stood speechless for a moment. Then, "Jazmine, this is 2005. You don't have to go along with that ridiculous custom. Tell them to break off the engagement! I want to marry you. Tell them you're in love."

"I can't, Isaac, I just can't" She sobbed. "You don't understand."

When Levi told me this, it struck a chord. Years ago, an uncle of mine told me that when he told his father he was in love, his father had seemed annoyed and said, "We were just talking about your going to be married. We're talking about marriage. Why are you talking about love?" So, I understood the girl's plight. I mentioned this to Levi.

"Dr. Whitney," the boy said, "with all due respect, this is *my* story, sir, not your uncle's."

Levi continued with his story. Jazmine broke away from him and ran up the lane that now looked to him like a trail of spilt milk.

The next morning the group was boarding the bus for the ride to Ceuta, a city although physically on the North African coast, was an integral part of Spain. (*When he mentioned this fact, I, Drew Whitney, had a flash of seeing Europe and Africa simultaneously. Good grief! His obsession was rubbing off on me.*) As the bus closed its doors, Levi yelled for the driver to wait, then asked the group leader where Jazmine was.

“She took the first flight to Madrid on her way back to Seattle.” He shrugged his shoulders and said, “Said it was a family emergency.”

#

May 2019: And now this scent, her personal bouquet, issued from one of the parchments. Levi had an attack of vertigo and had to sit. He quickly found the document on which this scent hung heaviest, the unmistakable bearer of this sharp reminder. He extracted it from the pile with cold hands and placed it on the table. He had to calm down, regulate his breathing. The shopkeeper watched the American intently.

Levi examined this kharja, which was written in Hebrew alphabet. He could tell that this parchment was a palimpsest.^[5] This fact alone drew him back to that fateful moment in crossing the Strait of Gibraltar. He transliterated the kharja: g’r sws dbyn’/ydbyns blh’q/g’rm knd my brn’d/myw hbyby ‘yshq. The young man concentrated and was able to perform in a half hour what should have taken at least twice that amount of time. He filled in the vowels that made sense in context and came up with: Gare: sos debina?/ E debinas bi-l-haq?/Gar-me kand me bernad/Mio habibi ‘Ishaq. ^[6] In English this would mean: Speak: Are you a fortune teller? And do you prophecy correctly? Tell me: when will my friend (lover) Isaac come to me?

This kharja rocked the American. True, the *Isaac* in the text could not possibly refer to him; it would be madness to think it did. But how did the unmistakable fragrance come to cling to this manuscript? And why would it be strongest on this particular document? The slight residue of scent on the ones surrounding it were no doubt the result of being contaminated by being in close contact with this palimpsest.

The shop keeper had been watching him keenly. He murmured, “I see these muwashshahs interest you.”

Levi took a moment to snap out of his reverie. “Ah... Yes, they do.” He hesitated for a moment. “What will you ask for these six?”

“They are extremely valuable. For a museum or similar institute, I would ask 50,000 dollars each, for a total of 300,000 dollars or 3,000,000 dirhams.”

Levi hung his head.

The shop keeper continued, “But that one, the one you hold in your hands... I see that your soul cries for that one. It should belong to you. I could not possibly ask for money.”

Levi started to say something, but the antiquarian cut him off, saying, “I know you can’t afford to purchase the other ones. You can request your university to acquire them. And they, through the British Government, are well able to afford the price.”

Levi stood, tears in his eyes, and embraced the old gentleman. He looked back as he opened the door to leave. The old man bowed slightly and said “Ma’ salami”

#

September 2019, Oxford: Levi, in a red polo shirt, jeans and grey tweed jacket, stared glumly through the window at the dark and dreary Oxford campus with its decaying sixteenth-century buildings. A heavy rain propelled by wind pelted his office window, sounding like a machinegun being fired. At him. He became aware of the wet dog smell of his damp woolen jacket. *Oh, yes, Merry Olde England*, was his wry thought. He looked back at his computer and checked his email. The usual: messages from friends and colleagues. Political ads asking for contributions. He saw one with an unfamiliar sender address: jazzto@fredonia.edu. He felt as though an electric current surged through his midsection.

Jazto...? Could it be? No, why would she... His heart rate was elevated, his hands had turned cold and he imagined catching a whiff of that special, intoxicating perfume. *Oh, come on, dammit, stop hypothesizing and just click on to the email and see for sure who it is.* He did so.

It was indeed from Jazmine. She was going to be in London for a conference from October fourteenth to the seventeenth. Could he come down to London. She needed to talk to him. He began to perspire. Why would she want to see him after fourteen years, and she, a married woman? What the hell! He wrote back in unemotional tones that yes; he could do that.

#

On the evening of the fourteenth he met her at seven o’clock in the crowded little lobby of the Regent Palace, on Piccadilly Circus. She hadn’t changed that much, even though she was now thirty-three years old. He had the urge to run to her and hold her in his arms, but he told himself to simply smile and say “Jazmine, how good to see you.” He took one step toward her, but on seeing Levi she ran to him, flung her arms around his neck and pressed her face against his jacket lapel. Levi felt as though he were melting like a wax statue next to a bonfire.

He found his voice and stammered, “Jazmine, how are you?” *What a lame thing to say.*

She tore her face from his chest and raised her eyes. There were tears streaming down her cheeks, and a wide smile on her face. “Can we get out of this crowded hallway and go someplace to chat?” she murmured.

#

They were seated at a small table for two at the Brigantine Public House, a dimly lighted pub. The walls had murals depicting eighteenth-century sailing ships in full sail before strong winds, with foam-tipped waves crashing against bows sending spray into the air. In the distance was painted a lighthouse with a beacon that flashed on a timer.

“It’s a good thing I’m not troubled by motion sickness,” Jazmine laughed. She turned serious and explained, “Isaac, I’m a widow. My husband died five years ago. We had no children.”

“I’m sorry, Jazmine.” He really did sympathize with her, but at the same time felt a weight slide from his shoulders.

“Isaac, have you ever...” She hesitated, seemingly not sure if she wanted to finish her sentence.

“Have I ever...what, Jazmine?”

She reddened, then, “Not important.” She looked down at the table.

“Oh, come on, Jazzy. What did you want to ask?”

She sighed. “Have you ever been back to Tetuán?”

He cocked his head. “Yes, actually, I have. Why?”

“Really?” A smile brightened her pretty face. “Well, I was there on a side trip from a conference in Tangier last March. And, remember that narrow street where we...” She hesitated.

“Where you rejected my offer of marriage, and then fled?” He immediately regretted the harshness of his tone.

She nodded. “Don’t be like that, please, Isaac.”

Gently, he murmured, “Sorry, Jazzy. Go on.”

“Okay. I found this tiny little shop just packed with old books and documents in different languages. At one point, as I was browsing through it all, the proprietor, a distinguished-looking gentleman in a jellaba and fez handed me a folder, and said, ‘Here, miss, I think you will find these interesting.’ It contained a few ancient parchments. I recognized among them some poetry of the kind you told me were muwashshahs with their kharjas. One of them leaped out at me. It was in Hebrew letters but the language was an early Spanish dialect. The narrator, a young woman, wonders when her lover will come to her. I know it’s silly, but the name *Tshak* struck me.

“There I was, on a street in which I had tearfully left you and broke my own heart, so long ago, and there was a woman, a thousand years ago, with my name, impatient to

see her Isaac. It was as though that long-gone Jazmine and I were together in that room, although separated by a millennium. The tenth century and the twenty-first right there together!” She stopped and looked at him. Her face burned. “Like I said, it was silly of me. But...” She shrugged.

The image of Europe and Africa visible simultaneously, his passing from one to the other, between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, flashed in his brain. This time the Biblical phrase, “passing between the pieces,” an act referring to a solemn agreement, came to mind.^[7] He stared at her.

After a moment, she said, “What?”

“You just said it was a woman with your name?”

“Yes, why?”

“There’s no woman’s name on the document I have.”

“Wait... You have the document?”

“I was in that shop last May. I couldn’t believe it, but...”

“But what?”

“Your perfume wafted off the document.”

Jazmine’s eyes widened and she smiled.

“The proprietor gave me the document as a gift.” Seeing her wrinkled brow, he explained, “He could see I was emotionally affected by it, and just gave it to me.” Levi shrugged.

Her face softened and she laid her hand on his. “Incredible,” she breathed.

“Yes, but Jazmine, no woman’s name appeared in that kharja or anywhere on the document. And it’s not customary in those poems.”

She closed her eyes in concentration. “But I saw it. I read it. The last line of the kharja said, *‘Spira Yasmin sanna alf.*

Levi said, “*Jazmine waits a thousand years!* First two words in that old Spanish dialect, the last two in Arabic.” He mopped his brow with a napkin. “How can that be? It isn’t on my parchment, but your fragrance is. It’s the same document you read.”

She smiled and said, “It’s a question, all right. There are a lot of questions. Maybe it’s kismet. But the most important question, Isaac, is where do we go from here?”

I didn’t have to ask Levi. The answer seemed obvious.

NOTES

[1] But I have always wondered: How did the material/matter/substance that would explode get there in the first place? And what caused the explosion? These are questions the human brain is laughably too limited to even try to answer. We are the only species that even wonders about these matters and is frustrated by the tragic inability to discover the answers.

[2] This type of poetry was first discovered by the scholar Samuel Miklos Stern in 1948 in the Geniza of a synagogue in Cairo. Stern was what was then called a “Palestinian,” i.e. a Jew born in British Mandate Palestine. Stern found twenty of them. At a later date he discovered thirty more. These Hebrew poems with accompanying kharjas in Spanish language, but written in Hebrew script, were the very first ones discovered. Others were found later in Arabic.

[3] These popular songs presented a problem for modern translators. One would need to have scholars with a knowledge of Late Latin and Old Spanish as well as scholars of Arabic and Hebrew to try to piece together the meaning. Since the entire composition was written in either Arabic or Hebrew script, in which there were no indications of vowels, some educated guesswork was necessary.

[4] Many scholars believe the song pre-existed as a popular unwritten ditty, familiar to everyone, and that the poet composed the muwashshah in Hebrew or Arabic based on the kharja.

[5] A Palimpsest is a parchment or other document which has had an original text erased, scraped off, for a newer text to be written over it. Usually, the erasure is not perfect, and traces of the original can be detected.

[6] The phrases *bi-l-haq*, *habibi* and the name *Ishaq* are Arabic. They mean, respectively: legitimately; my friend or lover; Isaac. (*Ishaq* is the Arabic from the original Hebrew *Yitzḥaq*.)

[7] Referring to the carcasses of sacrificed animals cut in half and the covenant between God and Abram. “When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.” Genesis 15:17.