

JEWISH AFFAIRS

ROSH HASHANAH 2009

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JEWISH AFFAIRS

MISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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Cover: *The Scuola Grande Tedesca synagogue
in Venice, built 1528-9.*

Original, unpublished essays of between 1 000 and 6 000 words on all subjects are invited,
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The Editor, JEWISH AFFAIRS, PO Box 87557, Houghton 2041, david@beyachad.co.za

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Research papers should assemble all notes and references as endnotes and follow
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JACK BLOOM – LIFE AND TIMES OF A WORKING POLITICIAN

*

Jack Bloom has been his party's spokesperson in the Gauteng Legislature on Health since 1994, first for the Democratic Party (DP) and thereafter for the Democratic Alliance (DA). He was Chief Whip until assuming the role of Leader of the Opposition in December 2007, a position he held until April 2009. Today, he continues to hold the Health portfolio and is also the DA's spokesperson on issues pertaining to corruption.

This interview was conducted by the editor on 13 May 2009.

When you were elected as City Councillor for the then Democratic Party in 1991, you became just one of many Jewish politicians then holding local or national positions. Today, only two Jewish members of the National Assembly remain while you are the only Jewish Member of the Provincial Legislature (MPL) in all nine provinces. How do you explain this dramatic falling off of Jewish involvement in politics at all levels?

Jews certainly used to be very active in Johannesburg local politics – every second or third mayor was Jewish. There remains a fair number of Jewish local councillors in Johannesburg – Shirley Ancer, Ray Wolder, John Mendelson, Darren Bergman, Allen Fuchs and Marcel Bloom-Ravid for the DA, Sol Cowan and Joy Coplan in the ANC and Mervyn Cirola for the Independent Democrats. So there is still a presence at the local level.

It's a slippery path to get from provincial government to Parliament. There's not that many seats and you need to work your way up. Funnily enough, there are more opportunities now, because there are more seats compared to in the past. In the old Johannesburg, for example, there were 51 seats in total. Today the DA, even as the Opposition, has some sixty seats.

I wouldn't say there's a lack of civic action, but it's not the kind of action that is channelled into politics. If you want to see massive civic activism by Jews it's in the Glenhazel Active Patrol, something pioneered by the CSO and Chief Rabbi. There's almost a withdrawal from official institutions, and a prevailing attitude that we'll look after ourselves because the State isn't looking after us. That's really what GAP and its allied bodies are all about.

So far as creating alternatives outside the official structures goes, we also see initiatives like Hatzollah (Medical Rescue) and the fact that most Jewish children now attend private schools.

Absolutely. So there's been an opting out of public education, health and security, and you can't get more basic than that. There has certainly been an inward turn, which is part of the broader phenomenon of white withdrawal from active politics. We find in certain areas people vote massively for us at election



time but don't want to join the party and become involved. We also see that our most active branches are in the townships. Politics is very real to the residents there - they have grievances they want addressed. There are obviously grievances in the [mainly white] suburbs as well, but residents there don't see redress through politics but through self-help activities. It's really a failure of institutions – you shouldn't, after all, have to set up private security, because it is the primary duty of the State to protect its citizens. So while there's a lot of talent out there, we don't see it being channelled into political actions.

The DA won just under 17% of the national vote in the last elections, increasing its overall support by nearly 4%, and with at least a third of support coming from non-white voters. How do you account for these gains?

The proportion of non-white support was probably even higher than that, actually. It's primarily minorities who support the DA now. The ANC has evidently lost virtually all its white support. There was a visible white support in 1994, largely Jewish in fact. It was all part of the Mandela enthusiasm of

the time. There were important left-leaning Jews representing the ANC in Parliament, like Jeff Peires and Andrew Feinstein, but all that's tailed off. ANC white support was at its lowest-ever ebb in this last election.

Feinstein was quite disillusioned with the ANC in the end, writing a book to that effect after resigning from Parliament.¹

Absolutely – disillusionment has very much taken root. Minorities in general have turned away from the ANC, which has also lost significant coloured and Indian support and is becoming de facto a uniraical party. They do, of course, appoint minorities to Cabinet posts, even if this can be seen as a form of cooption, and they have a praiseworthy attitude to diversity, in which everyone gets a place in the sun.

Turning to yourself and your own career, what motivated you to go into politics?

Moral outrage against apartheid, actually – I felt it was the right thing to do. I went knocking on doors for Douglas Gibson of the Progressive Federal Part in the Bezuidenhout constituency in 1981. Then, I was not a member of the party, but a volunteer. (On that point, the PFP had a high calibre of people involved as volunteers in those days, giving time and expertise for what they saw as a worthy cause). I formally joined the PFP in 1987, and lost the council seat to Howard Bloomberg of the National Party the following year, by 28 votes. It was Bloomberg's father, Sam, who got me into politics in the first place, in fact – I was outraged that Jews were standing for the National Party. But ultimately, I suppose I am intrinsically a political animal.

I was elected unopposed in the Highlands North constituency in August 1991, becoming the youngest member of the DP in the Johannesburg caucus. After 1994, I jumped over everyone's heads to become one of only five DP members in the Gauteng Legislature and, because so few were elected in 1994, I am today the longest-serving DP-DA MPL in the country.

The DP did very badly in the 1994 national elections, but already was performing somewhat more strongly in the subsequent municipal elections.

We did appallingly in 1994, winning only seven parliamentary seats. We recovered to a degree in the municipal elections, and still had a base in Johannesburg, but the real breakthrough came in 1999. There we emerged as a much larger party, with more opportunities. However, even in our smallish caucus prior to that we had Jews like Peter Horwitz and Peter Leon. Today, even at branch level, there is little Jewish participation, although I see Jews as being very active in civic activism – rate-payers associations and so on – in Cape Town as well as Johannesburg. But it is very hard to get any whites, Jewish and non-Jewish, involved politically nowadays.

Could you tell us something about your role within the Gauteng Legislature over the years – what kind of issues you focused on and what you feel your main achievements have been?

I've been Health spokesman since 1994. I was not particularly enamoured with doctors and hospitals and suchlike, but was given the portfolio and ran with it. Certainly, my name recognition today on hospitals is high. I pioneered hospital visits by political representatives, and still visit hospitals very regularly, acting on complaints. The DA's policy on health was largely written by myself – I think it's not enough for the Opposition just to criticise; we have to have alternate policies as well.

With regard to hospital visits, the then Gauteng Health MEC Brian Hlongwa tried to bar me from conducting them, but Advocate Jules Browde of the Integrity Commission ruled in my favour, saying I could visit whenever I felt it necessary without prior notice. So I have an official ruling, applicable to any institution, which I regard as a victory for all public representatives.

I also now have a new portfolio, called Corruption (which is all pervasive across the board and not just in the health sphere). Actually, I believe I have already been very successful in exposing corruption, uncovering areas that people would prefer to remain hidden. I certainly was the one who brought down Brian Hlongwa, and can claim to have had some part in Paul Mashatile not being reappointed as Gauteng Premier.

Over the past five years, I've asked 380 questions in the Legislature, acquiring something of a reputation for this. The ANC was very hostile to questions initially. We started off with the spirit of 'national unity', in which asking a question was regarded as being almost disloyal. I can probably claim to have been the highest profile member of the Legislature since 1994. The former Speaker even acknowledged this, calling me the 'spokesperson for the Legislature' and saying that if it wasn't for me people wouldn't know that the Legislature even existed.

Presumably, one of the regular issues you've brought up has been the HIV/Aids question.

Yes. I was the first politician in Gauteng to call for anti-retrovirals for pregnant women and rape victims. In fact, I was publicly credited in the Legislature by former Gauteng Premier Mosiuoa Shilowa with having influenced him in this regard. I was also the first to call on Mandela to make a statement on it. Looking back to the 1990s, we see how late we were in mobilising on this. I got into some controversy recently because I disapproved of condoms in schools, saying in general that condoms were not necessarily the answer (Gauteng has distributed over a billion condoms over the past ten years and the HIV rate has hardly budged). I was attacked for this by Zachie Achmat and Nathan Geffen from the Treatment Action Campaign – was

accused of all sorts of things. On HIV/Aids, I believe it is a question of behaviour change, and values have to be a part of it. You cannot get away from the fact that the epidemic is spread as a result of mass promiscuity and multiple partners, something many people are denying.

It was the late Chief Rabbi Harris who said that there is a 100%-effective moral vaccine for Aids. I try to bring a moral dimension to politics, and this whole ethos of 'moral neutrality' is wrong. I think that we need to make judgments – we may be a multi-faith and diverse country, but I do think that there are objective standards and that we do need to make moral judgements. I certainly haven't steered clear of making value judgments, and that can be awkward in a country which is diverse.

What other important areas do you think you have helped to bring to public attention?

Well, I was the one who raised the whole issue of teenage pregnancies. I obtained the figures from the Gauteng education department, and they reported a school with over fifty pregnant students. That provoked a huge public debate.

That would tie in with the HIV/Aids question.

Yes, because by definition teenage pregnancies is unprotected sex. If the number of teenage pregnancies is large, that means there's more high-risk sex, so we should find out what's going on in these schools. It was quite pleasing to me [following my raising the issue] when I compared the relevant schools from one year to the next, and found that because we had identified high-risk schools they went in with a team and tried to improve things. The school that had had fifty pregnancies the one year did not have the next, because some action was taken. So that's one way of working as a politician - you expose the information and affect debate that way.

JA: *You have been very active in countering anti-Israel propaganda and antisemitism in your private capacity. Has this impacted on you politically?*

JB: Pot-shots have certainly been taken at me in the Legislature from time to time because I'm Jewish. The question of Israel will suddenly be raised, without any relevance to the topic at hand. Still, such incidents have been few and far between.

I must stress that I am a politician who happens to be Jewish and don't represent Jews in my political capacity. However, as a Jew I am very concerned about antisemitism and anti-Zionism, and in my private capacity make available what expertise I can. The eye-opener for me was the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, which I attended and where I saw how minimal Jewish activism was. That conference exposed the lack of Jewish preparedness very cruelly. Since then, fortunately, the community has built up impressive resources in this area, websites such as Its Almost

Supernatural and the like.

JA: *You've authored three books to date. Could you tell us something about them?*

The first was called *Black South Africans' Disinvestment Dilemma* (published by Jonathan Ball), which I saw as a treatise on political ethics – what sort of means you employ to attain what ends. It was adapted as a political ethics model and used by the Wits Business School for a course on labour relations, and the balancing of means and ends. I interviewed black trade unionists and asked if they felt it was worth putting their members out of work to force political change. It was an acute ethical dilemma that I found very interesting and which they had various ways of responding to.

Out of Step (2005) was really something I needed to get out of my system. It's part autobiography and part presenting my views on a whole range of issues, including religion.²

The most recent book, *Rising Tide – How freedom with responsibility uplifts everyone* [reviewed in this issue], is a book of essays on a whole range of issues, many of which had been previously published (mostly in the *Citizen*, where I am now writing a regular column). It comprises a fair mix of articles, originally emails that went out every Monday to senior media people and key opinion-formers. Two of these attracted a fair amount of public attention, were discussed on Radio 702 amongst other things. Some were ultra-topical at the time, others were reflective.

I believe in the concept of liberty with responsibility concept, "How Freedom With Responsibility Uplifts Anyone" as the subtitle of my new book has it. There are two common themes – freedom but also responsibilities – constraints.

DS: *It's a very Jewish approach, really - the idea that true freedom is bound up with self-restraint and the acceptance upon oneself of certain obligations and standards of behaviour.*

JB: Very often I put out Jewish concepts – Torah concepts - without explicitly saying so and have been amazed at how positively many people react to what they see as fresh ideas. In the beginning of *Rising Tide*, I include the famous quote from Hillel – "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" That has been a guiding light to me, and it summarises much of the book. So what do you do with your freedom and is your freedom going to impinge on others? It's Pesach leading up to Shavuot – freedom followed by the acceptance upon the nation of certain responsibilities.

NOTES

1 Andrew Feinstein, *After The Party: A Personal and Political Journey inside the ANC*, Jonathan Ball, 2007

2 Reviewed in the Pesach 2006 issue of *Jewish Affairs*.

THE OTHER "DOCTOR RUTH" – RUTH RABINOWITZ AND THE INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY

*

Dr. Ruth Rabinowitz, a medical doctor based in Johannesburg, represented the Inkatha Freedom Party in Parliament for 15 years, initially in the Senate from 1994-1997 and thereafter as an MP until April 2009. During this time, she was an active member on the Portfolio Committees for Health, Science and Technology and Energy. This interview was conducted by the editor on 26 May 2009.

JA: You embarked on your political career in the early 1990s. Could you tell me a little bit about your background and activities prior to that?

RR: I was born Ruth Zilibowitz in Springs. My parents, like most of the Jews in South Africa, came from Lithuania, and my father was an active member of the Springs Jewish community. I went on to qualify with an M.B.BCh. from Wits, and at the same time got a diploma for teaching drama from the London Academy of Dramatic Art. (I roam between the creative and scientific). I married one of my teachers, who was a surgeon at Baragwanath Hospital, and we had three children. It was at the same time my children were leaving the country to study overseas, that I went into politics. Being a Jewish mother, you have to have something to care about, so I adopted the cause of putting out the real story of the Constitution. I started to write letters, organize workshops under the auspices of The Democracy Trust and Dr. Buthelezi sent me an appreciative letter thanking me for my efforts. That was the start of our relationship.

JA: *It was unusual for any member of the Jewish community to join the Inkatha Freedom Party, let alone play a significant role within it. How did this come about in your case?*

RR: It made perfect sense to me. My son organized a debate at Wits when Mandela was released. The legal issue of the time was the Constitution, which was the subject of many family discussions.. My daughter, who was the chairperson of the Wits Law Society, organised a conference to discuss the Interim Constitution in 1993. Kadar Asmal and Tony Leon, amongst others, attended it. I went and was fascinated by the IFP's proposals, which were federal in nature, similar to the US and ideal for South Africa. I asked the IFP speaker why we heard so little about their ideas and he told me about the propaganda campaign to smear INKATHA. I have since carried his story with me like an albatross. People did not tell the IFP story. Buthelezi was the best alternative leader for this country – he had international support and White support. The communists targeted him – smartly. They vilified him and sidelined him, undermined him with death threats and misrepresentation. They did so because he was dangerous – he was the one thing that could spoil their agenda. The more I found out about it, the more it inspired me to uncover the truth. I've always tended towards exposing myths. Anthea Jeffreys,



whom I admire tremendously for her courage, has just released a marvelous book that bears testimony to this strategy.

JA: *You started to come to public attention in the lead-up to the inaugural non-racial elections in 1994. What were your activities during this period?*

RR: I worked with an organization, The Democracy Trust, that was lobbying for a federal constitution, and through that I organized a workshop to expose the truth about where the IFP was positioned pre elections. It was through that event, in which all parties participated, that international mediation [in resolving the impasse between the IFP and ANC over the forthcoming elections] came about. I suggested to Bobby Godsell that the business community, by throwing themselves so completely behind the ANC, was not doing enough to resolve the deadlock. He was not very happy with me, but he did then say that the business community would support international mediation if that was the way out of the crisis. It turned out that this was indeed the mechanism through which the IFP was brought back on board. It didn't resolve the constitutional crisis, but it averted more bloodshed. The breakthrough was achieved by Kenyan academic Washington Okumuo, a friend of Buthelezi, who was in South Africa for the mediation.

He influenced Michael Spicer to approach Mandela, who had first to check with Joe Slovo, to let the IFP come into the elections. It was a dramatic, last minute decision, and it was overwhelming to feel that I had somehow been a part of it.

JA: It was certainly quite remarkable how following that turn-around, ANC-IFP violence stopped virtually overnight.

RR: It would have escalated. The IFP would have gone underground and kept fighting.

JA: Following the elections, you entered Parliament as an IFP Senator. How did this come about?

RR: I was not at that stage a member of any political party. When the IFP came on board, I accepted an invitation to be on the Party list, to give them endorsement. I had no intention I had no intention of going into politics. After watching the inauguration, I wrote to Buthelezi summarising what I had done and assuring him that I would work with him in whatever way I could to help in taking the country forward. The next thing, I got a phone call asking whether I would be a Senator. I spoke to my husband and children, and they all responded differently but positively. My oldest son said, "You're jumping into a pit of snakes. If you think you'll cope (because you're such an idealist), go for it". My daughter said, "You've always tried to change the world. This will give you a platform to do so". My youngest son quipped "mom for president, why not!"

So I entered Parliament as a Senator.

JA: *One never hears anything from or about the Senate nowadays.*

RR: In those days the Senate still had some power, thanks to the IFP's impact on the Interim Constitution. Now it is the Council of Provinces, a handmaiden of the Legislature.

It was at the first IFP caucus meeting that I actually met Buthelezi. He said to me, "I'm so happy to see you; I never thought you would come". I replied, "Between G-d and you, I somehow felt that I had to be here!" We worked closely together. I would say that he was the most significant person I've met in my life, outside my personal family. It was such a privilege to meet someone who had been through what he had, with his faith and his deep roots in traditional Zulu culture, which most Whites understand in the most superficial way. I learned so much about the Zulu traditional structures, their values and what they could teach us – its similarity to Judaism. I learned more about the value of being part of a Jewish community through being associated with Zulu people than I had through my conventional, middle-class Jewish life. I have turned more and more towards Jewish learning and Jewish community living. That in itself has been a fascinating and rewarding journey. Buthelezi always called me a Julu- a Jewish Zulu and often asked me to open National Council meetings in Ulundi, by reciting a psalm of David. He knows the psalms backwards and always found the appropriate one for the times.

Once I was in the Senate, I was fired up with

enthusiasm, ready to change the world. I was on the Constitutional Committee, Education, Justice, Health, Science and Technology, Environment. I don't do things in half-measures, and immersed myself in work. At the end of two years, I understood the centralizing agenda that was developing under the banner of the rainbow nation. It was frustrating and I couldn't break through the media blanket on truth. I came to realize that Hansard is just full of words which die there and make little difference, so I started working on grass roots projects to put my ideas into practice.

JA: *Nevertheless, you say that at least initially the Senate had some influence.*

RR: It did. One time I was in hospital with pneumonia, and my colleagues came to take me out of my bed so that I could talk on a local government issue and vote with the IFP to block something that was going to affect traditional leaders. My most important work was on the new constitution which took away many benefits the IFP had leveraged into the Interim one. Eventually, overworked and frustrated I became ill, and told the party that I needed to take leave, and that I was not prepared to come back into the Senate under the new Constitution. It reflected the vision of people like Chaskalson, Slovo, Albie Sachs – and others who dreamed of transformation, by placing power in the hands of people who would socially engineer the country toward equality. At that time, IFP MP Walter Felgate left Parliament, and I took his seat. I began focusing on specific portfolios – Science and Technology, Energy, Health, HIV/Aids and Education.

JA: How involved were you with KwaZulu-Natal?

I had a leg in three provinces then, and commuted often to Ulundi, and also to Cape Town. It was exhausting and frustrating in some ways, but amazingly gratifying in others. I feel that I've seen so much of the country from an in depth perspective.

Now, what was I promoting all the time while I was in the National Assembly? I worked towards achieving checks and balances throughout society – in Parliament and in the private sector, a balance between Government and private enterprise, freedom and responsibility, tradition and modernity, with Government creating a framework within which people could work, through give and take relationships, to achieve a state of harmony. That, and Pluralism, was my blueprint in everything I said and did.

JA: *This obviously would apply to political systems as well, with an appropriate balance between central and local government.*

RR: Absolutely. And because I was so frustrated with watching how the ANC was constantly bleeding power to the centre, to manipulate and engineer, and realizing the waste of words, I put more effort into projects in KwaZulu-Natal, and in Gauteng. Here in Alexandra I began Khayaletu (Our home) which was akin to setting up five businesses, because it was craft, recycling, food gardens, Aids education and business training. I was determined to show that you

can empower people from the bottom up. Frankly, over the years, I got “conference cramp”. I just saw millions of pages of papers being tossed in the bin, with few MPs reading them.

JA: What were some of the main things you championed in Parliament?

RR:

1. I pushed Minister Zuma to allow rape victims to be treated with AZT. She initially refused saying it was unethical as there had been no trials. I accused her of being unethical to leave rape victims to die from HIV.
2. I helped keep the private health system alive when government’s dream was to have a national socialist type health care system that provides equal care to all.
3. I fought legislation to close down Discovery Health. It was amended and Discovery has thrived.
4. I maintained pressure on the government to treat AIDS like an ordinary illness and to manage it better through partnering with international donors and strengthening provinces and local health teams.
5. I pushed for a change in the SA National Aids Council so that it was less political.
6. I worked to make the right to non discrimination of people with HIV, more important than the right to secrecy, with routine testing and scaling up of treatment.
7. I pushed government to negotiate with the drug companies to make HIV treatment cheaper at a time when they preferred to take a belligerent stance and accuse companies of not making generics freely available. This argument was used to divert attention from government’s failure to treat.
8. I pushed government to use mobile clinics in the rural areas, to rely more on community health workers to provide home based care for TB and HIV, to identify vulnerable children and to accept a partnership with the Global Fund in Kwa Zulu Natal.
9. I succeeded in reviving legislation to close loopholes in tobacco laws, when the ANC had been persuaded to drop it.
10. I put the renewable energy agenda noticeably into parliament through starting a lobby group of parliamentarians for renewable energy and by introducing a bill on a REFIT (renewable energy fed in tariff) regarded world wide as the most effective financial instrument to stimulate use of renewable energy.
11. I introduced a bill banning transfats which is currently being developed.
12. I changed the new bill for the Medicine Control Council so that it would become a more accountable body.
13. I pressured the Minister of Justice to act on the appalling lack of protection of juvenile victims in courts.
14. I made scores of small changes to bills and to people’s lives by putting hundreds of questions

to Ministers keeping them transparent and aware of issues that were important to the public.

15. I exposed weaknesses in health financing and information that led to the Minister’s appointing a task team to investigate the issue.
16. I tried, but failed, to demonstrate that the Constitution is an albatross around government’s neck and that efficiency will not be realized until the Constitution is changed. It must provide for power from the bottom up, a voting system that is more accountable to the electorate, rights that are less easily limited for the sake of equality and more balanced with responsibilities. The institutions that protect democracy must become more independent. For Zuma’s and the country’s sake I hope these changes are made. One can talk ad infinitum about accountable government but it will not happen until programs are designed close to the level where they must be implemented and managed in terms of need, not by line function Ministers, whose laws and priorities conflict with each other. The desire to have sameness across all of the provinces, implemented through a system of co operative governance, where all national and provincial ministers must agree before plans can be implemented, is obstructive. Catering to provincial differences and empowering people from the bottom up, within the framework of accountability, would change the face of this country.
17. I obliged all the Ministers, through questions I asked in parliament, to do an audit of energy usage in their departments, so as to become more aware of bad environmental policies in their departments.
18. I initiated an education and craft project in KZN and one in Gauteng. I still manage this one which does recycling, develops small businesses, provides language and literacy skills and work for women, either with or without HIV.
19. I helped expose the truth about Buthelezi’s constructive role and fostered a better understanding of the more positive values in traditional Zulu culture.
20. I worked, mostly behind the scenes, to forge a better relationship between the IFP and the DA. It led to a partnership in one election, but that partnership was not popular with either Party and did not achieve the desired effect of strengthening the opposition.
21. I learnt an immeasurable amount about the real South Africa about politics and about life. It was an enriching and rewarding period of my life.

I hope that knowing what I was able to achieve, often behind the scenes, will encourage South Africans to work with all political parties and not only with those seen to hold the reigns of power. Influence on government comes from many quarters. I hope to continue to be one of those spheres of influence through my newly created Democracy Foundation.

REMEMBERING LEO LOVELL

*

Barbara Brown

Editor's note: During the 1950s, a little remembered trio of Jewish Labour Party MPs - Alex Hepple, Hyman Davidoff and Leo Lovell - vigorously opposed the mounting tide of apartheid legislation. Lovell's life and career was a particularly interesting one. In addition to his distinguished years in Parliament, he made his mark as a Jewish communal leader, soldier, brave campaigner against antisemitism, lawyer and, at the end of his life, pioneer Finance Minister of a newly independent Swaziland.

The following article is based on a synopsis of *For the Love of Justice*, a new book on Leo Lovell prepared for publication by his daughter, Barbara Brown. The book mainly comprises Lovell's own memoirs up until the commencement of his parliamentary career, including especially engrossing chapters on his leading role in (literally) routing a Greyshirt attempt to establish a presence in Benoni and on his wartime experiences. To this, Brown has added an introduction and a lengthy postscript, which include excerpts from Lovell's speeches in Parliament demonstrating his views on labor, justice, democracy, racial prejudice and apartheid in general.

Lovell was a proud and fully conforming Jew, and was adamant that Jews, given their own history and ethical heritage, had a particular duty to oppose apartheid and all that it stood for. In her preface, Brown quotes from a letter he wrote to the SA Jewish Board of Deputies following an approach from the latter attempting to dissuade him from addressing a meeting of the Democratic Association held to protest against the Group Areas Act. Here, Lovell acknowledges that while in general there could not be said to be a specifically Jewish point of view when it came to political matters, this did not apply to measures that amounted to injustices based solely on the grounds of race. He wrote: "I claim to be able to say this as a man and as a Jew, by virtue of the suffering of our people in many lands throughout their history, solely on the grounds of race or religion. That Jewish point of view is to me as clear as the commandment 'Thou shalt not steal'".

For the Love of Justice has been published by, and is available through the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town (021 650 3062).

The lifetime of Leo Lovell (1907-1976) spanned many momentous events: the First World War and its repercussions, the rise of Fascism and Communism, the emergence of Nazism leading to World War II and the aftermath of that war. In South Africa, major political changes and intense struggles were taking place, leading to the creation of a battlefield scenario that demanded from each individual a strong decisive viewpoint and a willingness to fight for his principles.

For the Love of Justice is the autobiography of one such individual. It incisively comments on many of these tumultuous events while bringing to them the personal experiences and emotions of one who lived through much of it. Lovell's life and standpoint on the important issues upon which he commented and with which he was confronted can now be assessed with the valuable knowledge and relevance of hindsight. These factors transform the book from a dry historical narrative into an interesting anecdotal commentary on the events and philosophies that were current at the time.

Barbara Brown studied at the University of the Witwatersrand, obtaining a B.A. degree and going on to work in the Non-European Affairs Department with Dr. Melville Edelstein. Thereafter, she entered the business world, where she remained active until recently, when she immigrated to Israel.

Lovell traces his journey through life from his birth in the little town of Willowmore in the Eastern Cape to his education at Grey College in Port Elizabeth



and Rhodes University in Grahamstown. He describes the wonderment of his discovery of the classical philosophers at the age of fourteen, which influenced so much of his thinking in later life and relates how he came to take up law as a profession that nurtured his passion for justice and fair-play.

Lovell writes further of his growing appetite for knowledge about current affairs, contemporary world politics and recent history, provoked by the build-up of Nazism, Fascism and antisemitism in Europe and the appearance of the Greyshirts in South Africa. In a chapter, which reads like a detective novel, he describes his role in ridding Benoni, his home town, of the Greyshirt scourge, using well-planned military strategies. This was for him the beginning of what became an astute awareness of current philosophies and their impact on world events.

Next, Lovell recalls his five years in the South African army during World War II, recounting his feelings and experiences during that time and bringing life to South Africa's role in the East Africa campaign. This chapter ends with his co-option into the SA Air Force and his being tasked with the compilation of its Manual of Administration. The latter he accomplished in just over three months, to the great satisfaction of the second in command, Col. Rod Douglas.

The autobiography ends with the events that led up to Lovell's election to Parliament in 1949.

Lovell's memoirs show the development, from a very young age, of the ideas and values that later shaped his political opinions and cast light on the emotional and intellectual passage which led to his strong opposition to the apartheid policies of the Nationalist government during his time in Parliament. Throughout, the strong influence his Jewish background had on his thoughts and actions is evident.

By far the most significant period of Lovell's life was his Parliamentary career. He was elected as a Labour Party member for Benoni, a year after the National Party came to power. During the ensuing decade, he and the other members of his party were the most vocal and fervent opponents of the apartheid policies in the country. (Helen Suzman was at the time still a member of the United Party and as such subject to Party policy decisions, which often meant crossing the floor to vote with the Nationalists).

Unfortunately, Lovell died before he could complete this part of his life's story and I, his daughter, have written a postscript to the book which covers this period. In doing so, I have used excerpts from his speeches in Parliament to demonstrate his views on labour, justice, democracy, racial prejudice

and the apartheid policy in general. These speeches show a very dedicated opposition to everything that the Nationalist Party stood for. They were eloquent, hard-hitting and courageous and, in this period of introspection and evaluation of the apartheid era through which we are now passing, they have become of more interest and relevance than ever.

During his nine years as an MP, Lovell was noted for his integrity and courage. He was described by Deryck Humphriss in his *History of Benoni* as "an outstanding representative in Parliament". He was recognized by the English media for his eloquent attacks on government Bills, with *The Star* newspaper referring to him as "the only real opponent of apartheid."

The importance of Lovell's role in the apartheid era lies in the fact that so many other opponents of the government at the time were being silenced by bannings, imprisonment, house arrests and other measures under the new laws of the country. Of the few that were left standing to express abhorrence at the Nationalist government policies, he was one of the most vocal and outspoken.

Following his very effective Parliamentary career in South Africa, Lovell went on to help shape the government of a newly independent African state. He came to Swaziland when it was on the brink of historic times, playing a constructive, innovative role in its successful transition from colonial rule to democratic government. As Swaziland's first Minister of Finance, he gained membership for the country to such organisations as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the International Development Association. He worked tirelessly to improve the economy of Swaziland and create a better life for all its people, interacting with eminent politicians, financial experts and dignitaries from all over the world and showing himself to be "a consummate man of the world and intrepid history maker." He left his mark on Swaziland and was held in very high esteem by all, including King Sobhusa II.

For the Love of Justice is the story of a lawyer, soldier, anti-apartheid Parliamentarian, first Finance Minister in the Swaziland government, Jewish communal leader and, above all, of a dedicated critic of racism and oppression. It traces the journey of a man whose thinking was influenced by his rich Jewish heritage, ennobled by the influence of the classical philosophers and enriched by his continual search for knowledge and his quest for truth and justice.

DID THE HOTTENTOTS DESCEND FROM THE JEWS? EARLY TRAVELLERS DEBATE THE ISSUE

*

Gwynne Schrire

Early travellers' tales often have to be taken with a pinch of salt. That pinch must be added to a kernel of truth, wrapped in a shell of plagiarised information and covered with a large dollop of reminiscences, misinterpretation and prejudice.

To the travellers of the 17th and 18th Centuries, the people in the Cape were strange indeed.

Where had they come from? Why were they so different from other men? What was the explanation for their strange customs, so unlike those of Europe? Many answers were proposed, but most of them served only to deepen the darkness that surrounded the image of Africa. At last, the Europeans resorted to an easy conclusion... Africans... were just savages, inferior beings and had always been so.¹

At that stage of scientific development, it was all but impossible for people to have a non-Biblical concept of the world. The belief then was that the entire world had been repopulated by Noah's sons - Japhet in Europe, Shem in Asia and Ham in Africa. There were also the monstrous races described by Pliny in his authoritative *Historia Naturalis*.²

But then, Europeans rounded the Cape and came across the Khoisan. These did not look like the creatures described by Pliny, nor like the one-legged Sciopodes described by Bishop Isadorusa of Seville. Where, then, did they fit in? Willem ten Rhyne of Deventer, who stopped off at the Cape in 1686, mused:

Did these people spring originally from Ham, the son of Noah, with the exception of some Arabs of the stock of Shem who entered Africa later on? Or did the native races of Africa increase and multiply... frequently send out their youth in quest of new lands to settle until... these emigrants, spreading far and wide... finally settled in the remotest shores of Africa?³

Thabo Mbeki, then South African Deputy

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President, took strong exception to Pliny's descriptions of African people. Speaking at the United Nations University symposium, "The African Renaissance, South Africa and The World" on 9 April 1998, he cited some of them:

Of the Ethiopians there are diverse forms and kinds of men. Some there are toward the east that have neither nose nor nostrils, but the face all full. Others that have no upper lip, they are without tongues, and they speak by signs, and they have but a little hole to take their breath at, by the which they drink with an oaten straw ... In a part of Afrikke be people called Pteomphane, for their King they have a dog, at whose fancy they are governed ... And the people called Anthropomphagi which we call cannibals, live with human flesh. The Cinamolgi, their heads are almost like to heads of dogs... Blemmyis is a people so called, they have no heads, but hide their mouth and their eyes in their breasts.⁴

These images, said Mbeki, "must have frightened many a Roman child to scurry to bed whenever their parents said, 'The Africans are coming! The strange creatures out of Africa are coming!'"

Other Africans Pliny described were the troglodytae, who could outrun a horse, the syrbota, who were more than 4m tall, and the minismini, who lived on milk.⁵

Pliny's book became part of accepted knowledge and was handed down through the centuries. Modern anthropologists, however, have described Pliny as having drawn from every source of information, good and bad, with no powers of discrimination, no critical sense and no solid understanding of the meaning of the more serious works from which he drew; however, his apparent learning impressed his readers and saved them the trouble of acquiring information firsthand.⁶

The early visitors to the Cape shores would have had to fit the native inhabitants they met into the prevailing world-view according to the Plinian beliefs of African races. There was an accepted hierarchy, from bestial animals to people with divine souls. Christians like themselves, they knew, were the highest and the only ones assured of salvation. The Hottentots⁷, according to Sir William Petty (1677), were the "Most beastlike of all the Souls of Men with whom our Travellers are well acquainted."⁸

It was not easy to find sufficient sailors and personnel willing to endure the harsh discipline of the Dutch East India Company, with the result that most of the latter's employees were illiterate destitute peasants roaming the streets of Dutch cities when they were enlisted.⁹ Few would have met any Jews other than those in the pages of the Bible, and hence sailors and visitors rounding the Cape would probably have had little knowledge of either Hottentots or Jewish customs. It was therefore not surprising that, in seeking answers to these questions of origin, some concluded that the Hottentots must have descended from the Jews.

One of the earliest such linkage was made by Georg Meister, who stopped off at the Cape on the way to Batavia in 1677 and observed that "bestial men or animal-like" Hottentots used "a very sharp flint to shave the hair of their beards, as the Jews are said to do in their circumcisions, with which they can smooth their chins as neatly as if they had the best razors."¹⁰ However Meister, did point out that, unlike Hottentots, "Jews, like the Turks, West- and East Indians, had a spark of knowledge of God and of His Will and [were] therefore as far from these savages as is the Sun from the Moon".¹¹

Twenty years later, more similarities between the Jews and the Hottentots were noted. In 1695, JG Grevenbroek wrote in a letter that it was:

...supposed that it is from the Jews that the inhabitants of the remoter parts have learned the practice of circumcision (although it is a more serious operation with the Africans, involving the cutting away not only of the prepuce, but of the skin right up to the base of the abdomen. From the Jews also the natives near us must have acquired the practice of removing the left testicle, if you will excuse the mention of it.) Indeed who is so blind as not to see that it is from the Israelites that both divisions of Hottentots have derived all their sacerdotal and sacrificial rites, which are redolent of the purest antiquity, although admittedly the lapse of so many centuries has obscured the connection.¹²

In addition, Grevenbroek noted a similarity in the names of Jews and Hottentots: "Here I think I should mention that among our natives the names of brother and sister are, in the Israelitish fashion, bestowed on cousins on the father's or the mother's side".

Grevenbroek also thought Hebrew and the Khoisan languages were alike ("I am of the opinion that the language of the natives has something in common with Hebrew, for it seems to consist of guttural labials, dentals, linguals and other sounds that fall with difficulty from the lips and are hard for us to pronounce").

Pierre Kolbe,¹³ regarded as the leading authority on the Cape for that period, used Grevenbroek's work and established many more similarities between the two peoples. His *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum*, published in 1719, was highly regarded and was translated into many languages. As a result, the

relationship between the Jews and the Hottentots became so accepted that as late as 1933 anthropologist I Schapera found it necessary to explain that there was no basis to any such theories: "Many of the early writers believed that the Hottentots were descended from or considerably influenced by the Jews or other Semitic peoples. This theory, a hardy perennial still often used to account for the origin of savage customs with a superficial resemblance to those recorded in the Old Testament, has no solid foundation in fact".¹⁴

One of Kolbe's followers was Gysbert Hemmy, who delivered a Latin oration, *De Promontorio Bonae Spei*, in the Hamburg Academy on 10 April 1767. This was the first published account of the Cape of Good Hope written by someone who had actually been born in the Cape and not just passed through it. He states that "Kolbe is of the opinion that the Hottentots are descended from the Jews. There is no lack of evidence to add considerable weight to this conjecture".¹⁵

Hemmy then provides the evidence: There is the widespread tradition concerning the first parents of their race who arrived in this region of the earth through a window and a door. There are their well-known sacrifices, through which they strive to correct anything that is evil. There is a great variety of practices which are known to be especially common among the Jews. They divorce their wives for the most trifling causes. In marriage, they never depart from the forbidden family relationships. Firstborn sons have special privileges regarding inheritance. Women who have just given birth or who are menstruating are unclean and their husbands are not permitted to have any relations with them. They abstain from eating pork and other food that Jews are forbidden to eat.

Hemmy did note one difference: "In squalor and uncleanness, they surpass the Jews", adding, adding that there was "no doubt that the practice of excising the left testicle suggests imitation of the Jewish rite of circumcision."

To Hemmy, the proof was overwhelming – to Jews it is ludicrous. The notes to the Latin translation states that Hemmy's own knowledge of Jewry was probably confined to conditions in Hamburg where, in effect, the Jews were more tolerantly treated than in many parts of Europe. But if so, the conditions in Hamburg allowed the most peculiar beliefs to circulate.¹⁶ At the Cape, where he was born, there were neither Jews nor religious freedom.

Why did people know so little about Jews? After all unlike the Khoisan people, about whose very existence the Europeans had been ignorant until they started rounding Africa in the search for the fabled Spice Islands, the Jews had been living in Europe for centuries.

Meister and Kolbe were from Germany. They knew the Jews in the Bible, but not those in their homeland. This can be seen in Meister's comment that the Hottentots used a very sharp flint as the Jews were said to do in their circumcisions. This shows his knowledge of the Bible - Zipporah used a flint to circumcise her son (Exodus 4:24-6) - but not of

contemporary Jews, because already by Roman times metal knives were being used. When Meister and Kolbe went on their travels, Jews in Germany were still suffering from expulsions and restrictions. An unending series of laws and regulations, ordinances, decrees, patents and privileges circumscribed the entry and settlement of Jews, the length of their stay, their conduct of business, their moral behaviour, their taxes and even the goods they had to buy.¹⁷

In 1670, Emperor Leopold I had "most graciously resolved that the Jews who are here shall be removed hence and from the whole country." The Great Elector Frederick William in 1671 allowed fifty of the wealthiest Jews expelled from Vienna to settle in Brandenburg "for commercial and general benefit" for twenty years. In Berlin in 1716, it was resolved that "Jews, culpable killers, blasphemers, and thieves" were to be kept out.¹⁸ Prussian Jews were accorded religious toleration but not civil rights. First born children of protected Jews were allowed to settle, a second child could buy such a right and all subsequent children had to remain unmarried or emigrate. In 1750, Frederick the Great made those restrictions even more stringent.

Jews were scapegoats of the developing social and economic upheaval. With the general level of suspicion of and ignorance about Jews, it was understandable that Meister and Kolbe would not have known facts to contradict their credulous fancies. Dutch travellers like Willem Ten Rhyne and Johannes de Grevenbroek grew up in a more tolerant atmosphere than the German travellers. After overthrowing Catholic Spain in 1571, the Dutch declared that every citizen "should be accorded freedom of worship and no one should be molested on account of his belief."¹⁹ Jews were not formally recognised as citizens but enjoyed religious freedom although were not allowed to intermarry or enrol their children in Christian schools, and were debarred from trades requiring guild membership until official emancipation was granted in 1796. Jews could not settle in some cities but Amsterdam accepted them, despite hostility from a minority of politicians. Most Amsterdam Jews were very poor Ashkenazi refugees from Eastern Europe, but there was a wealthy Sephardi aristocracy formed of earlier arrivals from Spain and Portugal, refugees from the Inquisition. Jews in the seventeenth century made up 10% of Amsterdam's population and these exotic people became a tourist attraction. Visitors from all over Europe, especially from France and Italy, made it a point, when in Amsterdam, to go to the Jewish quarter to look at Jews and to attend a synagogue service where they could watch real live Jews at prayer.

"I came to Amsterdam. The first thing I went to see was a Synagogue of the Jewes (it being Saturday)" wrote the English diarist John Evelyn.²⁰ Directions to the Jewish quarter were even incorporated in guide books. The synagogues were keen to make a good impression and instituted regulations to ensure that the worshippers behaved themselves before the tourists. These included instructions about when to

stand or sit, no walking about when the Torah was being read, no fistfights to be allowed and no weapons were to be brought in - unless the person had a quarrel with a non-Jew and needed it for defence, in which case the committee was to be informed.²¹

Among the Dutch intelligentsia, scholarship on Jewish matters was an esteemed intellectual discipline in the belief that understanding Hebrew was essential for understanding the Bible and Dutch universities ran courses on Hebrew, Jewish belief and doctrine. This knowledge would also be of help in converting the Jews, a necessity for the anticipated Second Coming of the Messiah.²²

"Of course this kind of philo-Semitic interest in Jewish literature and concern for the universal fate of the Jewish people should not be confused with a benevolent and sympathetic or even tolerant attitude toward Jewish individuals and communities. A reverence for Judaism as a religion, a body of texts, and a historical tradition is certainly compatible with a hostility towards actual Jews, particularly when they insist on living at the heart of a Christian society."²³

Travellers overseas did not necessarily share the same intellectual discipline or interests. Arriving in a strange land and confronting strange people, they would adapt the knowledge and prejudices at their disposal to make sense of the new. Not everyone believed all that they were told. Although Kolbe became *the* authority on the early Hottentots, and his work remained so for a century, he did face some harsh contemporary criticism.

Astronomer Abbe de la Caille, who was at the Cape fifty years later, called Kolbe unreliable and inaccurate, and claimed that everything he had written about the Hottentots came from Grevenbroek: "After his death, [Grevenbroek's] papers were sent to Kolbe, who pieced them together without any skill or judgement."²⁴

De la Caille's editor provided more details, asserting that Kolbe was sent to the Cape in 1705 to make astronomical observations but was so incompetent that he lost that job, was employed as a secretary in Stellenbosch, lost that job too and returned to Germany in 1713 where he:

...discovered that during his stay at the Cape he had done nothing but drink and smoke... Not knowing what to report in Europe or to show the fruits of his expedition, he applied to some residents of the Cape... who conceived the idea of dictating to Kolbe a description of the Cape and in order to make it seem more interesting they collected all the current popular beliefs and palmed them off onto Kolbe, who did not know the country, together with numerous marvellous details derived from their imagination... Kolbe, delighted... caused it to be printed in Holland as a translation from the German. The book was read with astonishing avidity, and the edition soon sold out.²⁵

Kolbe's work was read by Otto Fredrik Mentzel,

who had lived in the Cape at the same time as he had. But unlike Hemmy, he did not swallow it hook, line and sinker. Mentzel was so dismayed at what Kolbe had written that he sat down and wrote his own account, accusing Kolbe of superficiality, slovenliness, affectation and plagiarism.²⁶

Berlin-born, Mentzel was well read and a keen observer with an insatiable curiosity. He arrived in Cape Town in 1732 and lived happily there as a tutor for children until one unfortunate day in 1741, eager to catch the mail, he boarded a ship to deliver a last minute letter. The wind came up suddenly and prevented him from returning to shore that night so he had no choice but to sleep over. When he awoke the next morning, he found that the captain had forgotten he was there and that he was on his way back to Holland, sans all his clothes and possessions. He was never able to return. Back in Europe, he entered the Prussian Civil Service in the recently acquired Province of Silesia, rising to become Chief of Police at Neustädte in Lower Silesia and dying there in 1801.

Infuriated by what Kolbe had written, Mentzel wrote his own book, *A Complete and Authentic Geographical and Topographical Description of the Famous and (All Things Considered) Remarkable African Cape of Good Hope*, many years after his unexpected return.²⁷ He felt that his eight years spent in the Cape made him more qualified than those who had not been in Cape Town as long as he had and he did not hesitate to correct other writers when their statements conflicted with his own personal observations. Mentzel ends his author's preface to the Second Volume as follows:

My work still has to be judged and I submit it to every intelligent and critical reader to whom I offer my best respects, and whom I commend to the grace and protection of God. O.F. Mentzel, 26 February 1787 on my 78th birthday.

I can say with certainty that everything that Kolbe and several others on his authority have written over and above what I have mentioned, is inconsistent with the truth, in so far as they have written down exaggerations of unimportant things to lengthen their accounts, and one can truthfully say of them: It is easy to tell falsehoods about distant countries... I do not wish to concern myself with any more refutations. It is enough that I have shown what Kolbe's work is worth.²⁸

Mentzel did not, like Kolbe, write for public success but out of a desire to spread the truth as he saw it. Unfortunately, unlike Kolbe's work, Mentzel's book attracted little notice and fell into obscurity. This is a pity, because his book is a primary source on what he saw and a critical commentary on the writings of his contemporaries. It is interesting and readable and he comes across as somebody who is sympathetic and the possessor of sound common sense, insight and humanity.²⁹ He had enjoyed meeting and talking to all sorts of people and had a finely

developed sense of curiosity. It is obvious from his work that he had read literature on the Hottentots, but that he had also obtained information from talking to them, as well as to people who knew them from elephant hunters to farmers.³⁰

Mentzel has a long chapter on the Hottentots, which is essentially a criticism of Kolbe. Here, he looks at the question troubling all of the early visitors: "What is the origin of the Hottentots? From what nation are they descended? And how did they get to the most Southerly point of Africa?" Mentzel says that "up to now, only a great deal of silly nonsense has been the outcome of these questions".

The practical Mentzel reasons that the Hottentots could not possibly have come down from Asia "where without any doubt man first lived after the Deluge" because the terrible deserts, mountain chains and big rivers that lay between these two continents "almost exclude the possibility of believing in an emigration to such a remote place". He concludes that it would be futile to trace their descent, "but when a few scholars theorise about or even try to determine from which nations the Hottentots are descended, such as the Carthaginian tribes of Africa, or the troglodytes, or even the Jews; surely the few customs they have in common with these prove nothing: for these may have come about accidentally".³¹

Mentzel spends considerable space demolishing Kolbe's comparison between the Jews and Hottentots. "Kolbe takes great pains to prove that the Hottentots have much in common with the Jews; but this theory does not hold. I shall give his reasons and my opinion in parallel columns".³²

Mentzel then proceeded to draw up a business-like table to refute Kolbe's list of similarities between Jews and Hottentots, placing Kolbe's statement on one side of the page, and his own rebuttal on the other. He balances Kolbe's opinions with factual, and sometimes sarcastic, rebuttals that show considerable knowledge of the customs of both people. The whole table is included for interest.

Kolbe's supposed evidence for the comparison was based on the following claims:

(1) Since they [Hottentots] often make offerings; (2) since they calculate their days and especially their festivals by the new and full moon; (3) since they are not allowed to cohabit with their wives at certain times; (4) since, if caught in non-observance of this custom, they have to sacrifice again; (5) since, just as the Jews often eat unleavened bread and unsalted food, they may never eat salt, unless they are among the Christians; (6) since they have to undergo a definite kind of circumcision; (7) since they eat nothing that has died of suffocation; (8) since they eat no scaleless fish; (9) since they never allow their wives to attend their meetings dealing with public affairs and (10) since they may divorce their wives.

To each of these, Mentzel responded as follows:

(1) Hottentots never make sacrifices in honour of a God; but for a different purpose, that is they

slaughter cattle to cure a patient with the fresh fat. The meat, entrails and hide are eaten by the entire village as a common food, but none offered to the Gods by fire

(2) All Indian tribes reckon the seasons according to the changes of the moon. The Hottentots however have no festivals calculated and fixed according to changes of the moon; indeed, they have no festivals at all. Their dancing at or about full moon is no festive act which they have to perform, but merely a merry-making which they have in common with many tribes and which they omit if the weather is unpleasant or rainy

(3) At such times the men of no nation touch their wives.

(4) Not sacrifice, but present the kraal with a head of cattle as at weddings or the birth of a child, especially a son.

(5) *O! Sancta Simplicitus!* Hottentots have no bread and are accustomed to lack of salt from their childhood since most Hottentots live in regions where salt is unobtainable. But when they visit the colonists, leavened bread and food spiced with salt taste excellent to them, and they may also eat it. Is it then in abstinence ordered by a law when I have to do without something I do not possess?

(6) The excision of a testicle and the practice of cutting out a testicle or the circumcision of the foreskin are radically different: and all the Hottentot tribes have at least nowadays done away with the initiation into manhood. Only the Great Namaquas still retain it.

(7) By suffocation the Jews mean anything that has died a natural death, retaining its blood. If an animal belonging to a Hottentot dies, it is consumed.

(8) This (if true, but unknown to me) must originate from a natural aversion.

(9) Since, of all uncivilised nations, they think least of their wives; and I do not remember having read in a single book of travels, that women of other nations are permitted in such assemblies.

(10) This should read "may separate from them" or no longer cohabit with them. This is done by all uncivilised nations; they take wives and leave them again if they believe they have a reason. They are not married under oath and since the woman's father reserves the right to take back his daughter (according to Kolbe's own account), the man may also separate from her.

Mentzel concludes that "the reasons brought

forward appear far-fetched" and points out that if one looked for similarities between people, one could just as easily find similarities between the Jews and the Germans!" He then lists the similarities of Jews and Germans. "We Germans too have a good deal in common with the Jews: we respect the Sabbath, we keep the Ten Commandments, we still retain much of what Moses prescribed in Marriage and Policematter; in a word we still have the Jewish Old Testament, Moses and the Prophets", but ends by saying "but what intelligent person would on that account imagine that we are descended from the Jews?"

He then points out that the Hottentots could not have been descended from the Jews because no matter where Jews settle, they never forsake their customs and faith.

The Jewish nation has been scattered all over the world and has since then been divided into countless sections, but not one of these is known to have discarded or forgotten the laws of Moses. Even supposing there are descendants of Jews, who live in far distant lands without Rabbis and without any written code, and thus had forgotten the Mosaic Law in the course of time, yet they would never forget the holiness of the Sabbath, circumcision and the aversion to shedding blood. Besides, the Mosaic ceremonial law is so deep-rooted in all Jews in many respects that it would not be improper to say that it has become second nature to them. In additions one should only consider this, that the Mosaic law enjoins nothing more strictly than cleanliness, so that the Jews dare not touch anything which in the smallest way is unclean in their eyes, according to this law; or if needs must, they wash themselves again, purify themselves or even have to remain unclean for a definite period; thus there is no greater contrast between day and night than between the cleanliness of the Jews of the Old Testament and the filthiness of the Hottentots, who live in constant squalor like a dung-beetle in the dung... They not only touch but handle everything that is intrinsically unclean and eat animals that have perished of disease, even such as have already begun to putrefy.³³

Mentzel concludes that the Hottentots are in all respects quite distinctive, with little in their national customs or religious rites comparable to others, and that they probably had separated from the rest of mankind "immediately after the Babylonish confusion of languages". His own theory of their origins is that hundreds or thousands of years before, people were shipwrecked along with their cattle and sheep at the furthest point of Africa after they had been driven into the open sea by a storm. After all, "Carthaginians, Phoenicians from Tyre and Sidon, or even Solomon himself or King Hiram, had ships that sailed the seas." What, he supposes, if the survivors then died, leaving behind some children who had not yet learnt to speak properly, and these

orphans grew up without education. This could then explain the unusual language and lack of education of the Hottentots. He finally demolishes Kolbe by saying:

Almost all facts known about Hottentots have up to the present been taken from Kolbe, and Kolbe who in his time lived as long at the Cape as I did afterwards, namely eight years, describes this people to us as wearing long moustaches and whiskers like half-shaven Jews. It is impossible that he should never have seen Hottentots during his eight years' stay, but to judge from this description of his, he cannot have seen any, for there are rarely any traces on their faces of the woolly hair of their heads, and as far as one can see their naked bodies and those of their women, not a single hair can be noticed. (I can vouch for the reliability of my account.)

Unlike Georg Meister, Johannes de Grevenbroek, Pierre Kolbe or Gysbert Hammy, Otto Mentzel's statements imply a basic knowledge of Jewish beliefs and practices. Where would he have acquired such knowledge? Mentzel grew up in a cultured and intellectually stimulating home. His father was a Prussian Hofrat and Court physician, whose extensive library was later included in the Royal Prussian Library. It is possible that he met Jews in his parent's home or read books about Jews in his father's library. Neustädte in Lower Silesia, where he became Chief of Police, is now known as Nowe Miasteczko in Poland, and there in his position and with his open-minded curiosity about people, he would have come across many Jews, on both sides of the law. He probably learned about them, as he had previously learned about the Hottentots, by talking to them and observing their customs.

The truth is now out. The Hottentots have come from Africa. So have the Jews. Indeed, so have the ancestors of the Dutch and German travellers. Grevenbroek, Meister and Kolbe were right so far as that goes and Mentzel wrong. The Hottentots and the Jews are related, but then so are Grevenbroek, Meister and Kolbe. So, in fact, are all human beings. We all carry within our genes the same mitochondrial DNA that can be traced back to a single woman living in Africa over 150 000 years ago.³⁴ Despite beliefs in racial superiority, 80% of modern Europeans are descended from the old African hunter-gatherers. So much for their much vaunted cultural superiority!

The writer of this article had her DNA tested. Her mitochondrial DNA shows that her ancestors left Africa, between 60 000 - 80 000 years ago, finding a foothold during the ice age in Asia, Australia and parts of Europe. It is the mitochondrial DNA associated with Eurasian groups and is shared with many people living along the Mediterranean, including many Ashkenazim.

To answer Willem Ten Rhyne of Deventer's question 400 years later: The KhoiSan did not spring from Ham, with the exception of some Arabs of the stock of Shem who entered Africa later on. Ham and

Shem sprang from the KhoiSan and exited Africa later on.

NOTES

- 1 Basil Davidson, 'African Kingdoms', *Great Ages of Man, A History of the World's Cultures*, 1967, 17
- 2 Andrew Smith, 'Different Facets of the Crystal: Early European Images of the Khoikhoi at the Cape, South Africa', In *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series* 7, 1993, 9-10
- 3 William ten Rhyne of Deventer, 'A Short Account Of The Cape of Good Hope and of the Hottentots who Inhabit that Region', Schaffhausen, 1686 in *The Early Cape Hottentots described in the writings of Olfert Dapper (1668), Willem Ten Rhyne (1686) and Johannes Gulielmus de Grevenbroek (1695)* Van Riebeeck Society, 1933, 93
- 4 Mbeki states that the quote was cited in: *Africa: A Biography of the Continent*, John Reader, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1997.
- 5 From *The Natural History of Pliny The Elder*, book 7 <http://oaks.nvg.org/pliny.html>. Smith op cit, 9
- 6 Stanley Casson, *The Discovery of Man: The Story of the Inquiry into Human Origin*, 1940, 77-8
- 7 Originally so called by early travellers because of the sound of their language, the term is now regarded as insulting and the preferred word is Khoisan. In this article the language used in the historical period under discussion is retained.
- 8 Smith, op cit, 12
- 9 Yvonne Brink, 'Figuring the Cultural Landscape, Land, Identity and Material Culture at the Cape in the Eighteenth Century', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 1997, 52, 108-109
- 10 He was a gardener from Thuringia at the Duke of Saxony court, went on to Amsterdam and spent three weeks at the Cape, where he was taken on as a cadet
- 11 Georg Meister, *Orientalisch-Indisch Gartner*, Dresden, 1692, translated, R Raven-Hart, R Raven-Hart. Cape Good Hope, 1652-1702, The First 50 Years of Dutch Colonisation as Seen By Callers, Cape Town, 1971, pp 203 and 206
- 12 NG Grevenbroek, 'An Elegant and Accurate Account of The African Race Living Round the Cape of Good Hope Commonly Called Hottentots', from a letter written by JG Grevenbroek in the year 1695, Translated by B Farrington, Van Riebeeck Society, 1933, edited by I Schapera pp 209 and 287
- 13 His name is variously spelled Kolb, Kolbe, Kolben and Kolbius. I have standardised it to Kolbe. His first name is given as Pierre or Peter.
- 14 Schapera, 'Introduction', in *The Early Cape Hottentots described in the writings of Olfert Dapper (1668), Willem Ten Rhyne (1686) and Johannes Gulielmus de Grevenbroek (1695)* Van Riebeeck Society, 1933, v
- 15 Gysbert Hemmy from Africa, *Oratorio Latina, De Promontorio Bonae Spei 1767*, transl KD White. SA Public Library, Cape town, 1959, 29-30.
- 16 GS Nienaber and DH Varley, *Ibid*, 39
- 17 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1972, Vol. 7, 474
- 18 Nahum Gidal, *Jews in Germany from Roman Times to the Weimar Republic*, Köln 1998, 112-113
- 19 Franz Landsberger, *Rembrandt, the Jews and the Bible*, Philadelphia, 1946, 15, 17
- 20 "I came to Amsterdam. The first thing I went to see was a

- Synagogue of the Jewes (it being Saturday) whose ceremonies, Ornaments, Lamps, Laws and Scholars afforded matter for my contemplation" (John Evelyn 1641). "Here in this congregation, no good order, no great zeal and devotion here appearing much time spent in singing and talking." (Sir William Brereton 1634), "There was no good order. We observed some of the Jews to bow at times, they seemed very careless, discovering and laughing with strangers in the midst of the service" (Philip Skippon, 1663). "There was too much laughing, talking and idly wandering, as if about prophane Affairs, though in a Presence so sacred" (John Northleigh) IN Steven Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews*, University of Chicago Press, 2003 168 -174
- 21 *ibid*, 173-175
- 22 *ibid*, 90-91
- 23 *ibid*, 93
- 24 De la Caille was at the Cape from 1751-1753 I Shapera, Foreword *NG Grevenbroek*, op cit, 162-4
- 25 *Ibid*.
- 26 HJ Mandelbrote, Introduction, in Mentzel, *A Complete and Authentic Geographical and Topographical Description of the Famous and (All Things Considered) Remarkable African Cape of Good Hope, Part 11, Van Riebeeck Society, 1925, xx1*
- 27 Glogau, 1787, translated by GV Marais, Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1944
- 28 OF Mentzel, Author's Preface, Part 111, in Mentzel, Van Riebeeck Society, 1944, 9
- 29 An example of his even-handed humanitarianism: "It is quite true that the Hottentot is lazy, idle, improvident and so forth... But when it is said of the Germans that they are fond of drink, the question arises: Are all the Germans therefore drunkards? ... in the same way there are exceptions to the rule among the Hottentots."
- 30 HJ Mandelbrote, Introductory Note in Part 111, in Mentzel, Van Riebeeck Society, 1944, xxv
- 31 He also states that "the Hottentots do not form part of the Kaffir nation has been competently proved by the learned Ludolf... and he has shown that the word Cafar was derived from the Chaldean language in which Cafar means an infidel. This being the reason too, why the Jewish rabbis call those who deny G-d or abandon their religion Cafar. The Arabs have actually given this name to the entire Eastern part of Africa since it was inhabited by people ignorant of the true God and call them Cafers or Caffers.", Mentzel, op cit, 266-267
- 32 Mentzel, op cit, 267-269
- 33 Mentzel, op cit, pp 206-271 He adds that he does not want to take the trouble to analyse Kolbe's comparison of the Hottentots with the troglodytes.
- 34 Stephen Oppenheimer, *The Real Eve: Modern Man's Journey Out of Africa*, New York, 2003

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THE CAPE JEWISH ORPHANAGE: *BES YESOYMIM*, 1911-1939

*

Veronica Belling

The commandment to care for the widow and the orphan, the most vulnerable members of society, is one of the most basic precepts of Judaism. Although the oldest Jewish organisation in South Africa, Cape Town's Tikvath Israel congregation, was founded in 1841, a Jewish orphanage in that city was only established in 1912, eight years after that of the South African Jewish Orphanage in Johannesburg. Prior to its establishment, abandoned and destitute children were sent to Norwood, the Jewish Orphanage in London. After the establishment of the orphanage in Johannesburg, the general feeling was that one Jewish Orphanage in South Africa was sufficient, and six Cape Town orphans were sent there. The proposed establishment of an orphanage for Cape Town was first raised and discussed at the Cape Town Jewish Philanthropic Society in 1907.

The idea of founding this body was first conceived by Mrs Natalie Friedlander, a prominent charity worker in the Cape Town Jewish community. At the end of 1909, in response to a rumor that there were Jewish children living in a state of great neglect in the Western Boland, Mrs. Friedlander, accompanied by Miss Henrietta Hill (at the time a high school student), discovered three Jewish children – two boys and a girl, aged eight or nine – who had been living with a Colored family in Piquetberg since their parent's death. The children were found at the back of a hotel washing bottles and glasses from the Bar! Another little boy was subsequently found on a farm in Namaqualand. These children were brought to Cape Town and homes found for them, but the question was what would happen to future cases. An Orphan Aid society was established by the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, but this was clearly not enough.

Mrs. Friedlander inspired her friend Joseph Kadish, a Cape Town jeweler well known for his public-spiritedness, to convene a meeting. This took place on 15 July 1911. Participants were Kadish himself, his brother, I. Kadish, J. Isaac Wittenberg,

one of South Africa's earliest clothing manufacturers, Louis Gradner, a printer and future mayor of Cape Town, Meyer Lintern, a hairdresser in Long Street; Simon Frank from Gordon Street, J. Isenstein, William Street shopkeeper in District Six, and the Reverends B. Strod and Weinberg. As the Very Reverend Dr Adler, Chief Rabbi of the United Congregations of the British Empire, had passed away only a few days before, it was proposed to name the institution "The Doctor Adler Jewish Memorial Orphanage." This name is written across the first page of the minute book, but is never heard of again.

Within a month, the committee had expanded to include Advocate Morris Alexander, Parliamentarian and Jewish community leader, the Policansky brothers, well known tobacco merchants, popular theatre impresario, Harry Stodel, the medical doctor, S. E. Kark (who offered his services free), Messrs R. Barnett, M. Davies, R. Weinberg, M. Papert, and Isaac Ochberg. The latter was to play a pivotal role in the history of the Orphanage. The committee was joined by the charities: the Hebrew Dividing and Benefit Society, the Grand Order of Israel, the Wynberg Synagogue, the Roeland Street Synagogue, the Helping Hand Society, the Bnoth Zion Association and the Jewish Girls Circle. A system was devised whereby all Hebrew congregations, charities and societies of various kinds that took out annual subscriptions to the orphanage would also be members of the committee.

While the original committee was a predominantly a male affair, by October a Ladies committee consisting of fifteen women, chaired by Natalie Friedlander with Mrs A. H. Stodel, wife of Harry Stodel, as vice chairlady, was appointed. In the meantime the new institution was officially named the 'Cape Jewish Orphanage, *Bes Yesoymin*.'

There were four basic preconditions for the orphanage's establishment, viz. money, a building, a matron to care for the orphans, and the orphans themselves. All were achieved in the short space of six months. Money was the most pressing requirement. The Jewish community of Cape Town and surrounding districts already had a well-established tradition of fundraising and a communal network comprising a numerous Hebrew congregations and charities. 100 subscription lists were initially drawn up. The first lists were sent to Simonstown, Diep River, Hopefield and Port Elizabeth, indicative of the policy of the orphanage of catering for the whole of the Cape Province.

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Within a fortnight the first contribution of £8 17s 6d was received.¹ Yet notwithstanding institutional support and that of the wealthier patrons, it was noted at a meeting in May 1912 that the majority of the subscribers came from the poorer section of the community, proving how necessary this institution was to Cape Jewry at large. Anyone donating £50 or more was eligible to endow a bed that would bear a plaque bearing the donor's name. The beds, however, could only be endowed in the name of living people; the names of those deceased person would be inscribed on a Memorial Board at the entrance.

The task of finding a suitable house was not easy. Committee President Joseph Kadish offered a house that he owned in Mill Street, but it did not have any grounds and with the shop attached could only accommodate between 12 and 14 children.² A house in Hatfield Street belonging to the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation that could accommodate fifty orphans was initially favored, but it was considered to be too central and the congregation was not agreeable.³ A certain Louis Elias, a member of the Grand Order of Israel, offered a plot 80' by 100' in Upper Mill Street.⁴ This offer, which was bound to the condition that the ground only be used for an orphanage, was finally abandoned.⁵

As no other houses were available, it was decided to use Kadish's Mill Street house from 11 December 1911.⁶ Renovations were immediately set in motion and the house was soon equipped by generous donations of linoleum, furniture, beds linen, toys, and books. The Orphanage was opened in February 1912 by Colonel David Harris. Colonel Harris, while being deeply sensitive to the complement paid to him, "regretted that such an institution was not kept by the state" and that, as it was sectarian, it would

only be supported by the Jewish community. Still he "hoped that they would receive outside support, as the Jew had always proved himself to be a reliever of human suffering."⁷

By June 1913, the house in Mill Street was running out of space.⁸ It was proposed that plans should be put forward for the erection of a building that could accommodate fifty orphans.⁹ Two plots were considered: the first was in Upper Mill Street that could be leased from the Cape Town Municipality at a nominal fee, and the second was in Montrose Avenue in Oranjezicht, that was far more expensive but could be bought outright. Reservations were expressed about the possible penetration of Coloreds into Upper Mill Street, as well as the possibility of the area becoming more industrial. It was decided that the Oranjezicht plot would be the better asset, and it was duly purchased.¹⁰ South Africa Governor General Lord Buxton laid the foundation stone of the new building.¹¹

With the flue epidemic of 1918, an extension to the building was envisaged.¹² The following year, it was reported that there was space for another three more boys and six more girls.¹³ In January 1920, a scheme was outlined to build on two extra wings that would each be able to accommodate thirty six children.¹⁴ In February 1921, just before the arrival of the Ukrainian orphans, it was reported that there were 51 children from 19 different families in the home.¹⁵

Even before advertisements were put in the paper for applicants, the committee made sure to ascertain whether there were any Jewish orphans who were being kept at any of the Christian orphan asylums in the city, such as the St John's Home, Nazareth House or the All Saints Home. One Jewish girl was located



Residents of the Cape Jewish Orphanage, as they appeared in a Rosh Hashanah fundraising, 1920.

children of separated parents was that this would be an inducement for them to remain separated.²² Another determining factor was a means test. If a parent had the means to support the child, it was unlikely to be accepted.²³ In all cases, parents were required to contribute towards the child's upkeep according to their means. Grandparents and aunts and uncles were also exhorted to contribute.

It is interesting that there were no applications for the admission of children from unwed Jewish mothers during this period. However a newborn male baby, found abandoned in a basket at the Home in April 1933, could have been the exception to this rule. This anonymous child was unanimously declared to be Jewish, circumcised and given the name of 'Abraham', the first Jew in the Bible. ('Theodor Herzl', the first name suggested, was ultimately rejected). The baby was then put up for adoption by a Jewish couple.²⁴

It was initially resolved that no more than two children from a single family should be admitted. This criterion was put to the test in the case of the very first application received in December 1911, when only two of the four applicants were admitted,²⁵ but was subsequently abandoned.²⁶ The home also initially refused to accept children who were under five years of age,²⁷ but this criterion too fell away.²⁸ It was not until 1928, however, that the first set of infants were admitted - aged three and a half, two and a half, and six months - and a Nursery Department established.²⁹ Besides a minimum age, a maximum age was also determined, fourteen years for boys and fifteen for girls.³⁰ This could be extended if the boy or girl had not yet passed Standard Seven.³¹ In January 1925, the maximum age was increased to sixteen.

Admissions were on the whole restricted to the Cape Province. Children from elsewhere, such as the Orange Free State or Durban were refused,³² although children from Bulawayo and from Elizabethville in the Belgian Congo were accepted.³³ On the other hand, three children from Beira in Mozambique were advised to apply to the SA Jewish Orphanage in Johannesburg.³⁴ Children who were physically disabled or retarded were also excluded and their families were referred to the community charities.³⁵ Very early on, it was laid down that the home was for poor and destitute orphans who were physically healthy.³⁶

The circumstances of the applications reflect the exigencies of the time. A particularly poignant case was that of a woman who had arrived from Russia only seven months before to join her husband, who was acting as a *shoykhet* in Sutherland, Western Cape. When he suddenly passed away, she was forced to apply to the Orphanage to admit her two sons aged six and seven.³⁷ In another instance, a ten year old boy whose mother had died in Vilna was placed in the orphanage by his father, who was working as an ice cream vendor and could not look after him.³⁸ Similarly another six year old, who had been deserted by his mother in Russia, was admitted because his father was working as a bus conductor.³⁹

The Ukrainian pogrom orphans

The number of orphans at the home was doubled with the arrival of the Ukrainian pogrom orphans. The first mention of them appears in the minutes of 8 August 1920, when Isaac Ochberg, by then President of the Orphanage, reported that due to the war and pogroms, there were about 300 000 Jewish orphans in the Ukraine and stated that it was imperative that some of these be brought out to South Africa. By the time that he approached the Committee, Ochberg had already made contact with Dr Jochelson of the Federation of Ukrainian Jews, who was willing to bring the orphans to London, and had obtained the permission of the Minister of the Interior, Patrick Duncan, to bring them into the country. Ochberg initially envisaged bringing some 50-100 orphans at a time. He saw the Orphanage as acting as a clearing house, putting the children up for adoption and keeping the remainder at the Orphanage. Looking back, it was an amazingly romantic and heroic scheme and one that reflects the character of its originator. Isaac Ochberg, himself an immigrant from the Ukraine, had become a very wealthy man in South Africa. He was totally committed and involved with the Orphanage, on one occasion describing it as being his "whole life".

It was suggested that £10 000 should be raised by the Cape Relief Fund and that a public appeal should be published in the press to adopt the orphans. The SA Jewish Orphanage was also approached to co-operate. The Committee sent out appeals for funds as well as to ascertain how many orphans would be adopted, so as to determine how many children to bring in the first batch.⁴⁰ The public was asked to subscribe £25 000 towards the scheme and it was decided that Ochberg himself should travel to the Ukraine to fetch the children.⁴¹ By January 1921, fundraising tours to the country districts had raised over 15000. The Johannesburg Committee had in the meanwhile succeeded in convincing General Smuts to agree to contribute towards the fund on a pound for pound basis.⁴² Immediately on Ochberg's return in September, the campaign to raise £25 000 was set in motion.⁴³

Ochberg originally collected 233 orphans and brought them to the Temporary Shelter in Warsaw, but 37 ran away while others took ill so that it was impossible to take them to London. He finally departed for South Africa with 167 on the *Edinburgh Castle*, on which special accommodation for the orphans had been arranged. Various welcoming receptions were arranged in Cape Town including a Memorial and Thanksgiving Service in the synagogue.⁴⁴ It had been agreed that the children be divided equally between Johannesburg and Cape Town, with seventy ultimately being sent to the former while the balance was accommodated at the Cape Jewish Orphanage.⁴⁵ Ochberg also brought along a Mr. and Mrs. Maman to act as the new principal and matron respectively, a Mrs. Zalkow to be an assistant doctor and a Miss Bettman to teach Hebrew. Fortunately, the incumbent matron had

recently married and volunteered to retire.

At the 8th SA Zionist Conference in January 1922, it was proposed to bring out more orphans and to take some of them to Palestine.⁴⁶ Although Ochberg had originally envisaged bringing 500 to 1000 orphans, in May 1922 a resolution to bring in more orphans from Eastern Europe was opposed in the light of the upheavals on the Rand and the resultant wave of antisemitism throughout the country.⁴⁷ Instead, it was decided to establish a temporary home for a maximum of 100 Jewish pogrom war orphans in Eastern Europe, to be maintained by funds provided by the Cape Jewish Orphanage, until such time as would be suitable to bring them out to South Africa.⁴⁸ A sum of not less than £3000 would be donated to the Orphans Fund in Europe.⁴⁹

Through the arrival of the Russian orphans in 1922, numbers at the Orphanage peaked at 100. At the institution's May 1922 AGM, it was reported that 44 of these were South Africans (21 boys and 23 girls) and 53 were Russians (20 boys and 33 girls). The question of the adoptions became urgent. Preference was to be given to couples who had no children and next to couples who had girls and wanted a boy, and vice versa. It was determined not to split families if possible.⁵⁰ By November 1921, twelve of the orphans had been adopted, with the number rising to 21 by the following month.⁵¹ By 1931, numbers in the Home had dropped to 64.⁵² In the next two years, they increased slightly to 73 and 77,⁵³ rising to 83 in September 1936 (39 boys and 44 girls).⁵⁴

The employment of a suitable matron proved to be the biggest problem in the very early years. Advertisements were inserted in the local papers as well as in London. While it was never specified, the matron had to be of the Jewish faith, hence the applications of several Christian ladies who responded were not entertained. She further had to be educated and able to maintain the home in a strictly kosher manner.

Between January 1912 and April 1913, three different matrons served the home. Standards were strictly Victorian, and the first matron was dismissed after three months, having been found with a man in her room at 9.45 p.m.⁵⁵ The second stayed only for six months, leaving of her own accord to join her husband.⁵⁶ The third, a Miss R. Davids, was a volunteer and a member of the committee, who stood in between matrons and proved to be extremely popular with the children.⁵⁷ Finally, in January 1913, Miss Lily Berliner, who came highly recommended from London, was engaged.⁵⁸ Except for a period from October 1914 to November 1915, she served the Orphanage continuously until June 1918.⁵⁹ Generally, her service was considered exemplary other than a complaint of excessive punishment when she was accused of plastering the children's mouths! Her response was that this form of punishment was common in Europe, but if the Committee objected she would not do it again.⁶⁰

The administration of the Orphanage was completely changed with the arrival of the pogrom

orphans and the employment of the Mamams, who had accompanied them from Warsaw. The Matron was replaced by a Principal, Mr. Maman, who would also supervise the Hebrew education and teach the boys for their barmitzvahs while his wife took charge of the domestic side of things. However, the couple did not prove that popular and when their contract expired at the end of 1926, it was not renewed. In March 1927, a Mr. and Mrs. Beresinski were employed in their place. Mr. Beresinski had been the principal of a large orphanage in Israel, where his wife had been the Matron. He was also a competent Hebrew teacher and could replace the current incumbent, Mrs. Gordon.

The Beresinskis remained for eight years until 1935, when they resigned to return to Palestine.⁶¹ In October of that year, they were replaced by a young British couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hickman. They lasted for five months before being summarily dismissed in April 1936. It would seem that they were too rigid in applying the rules of the home, on one occasion leaving a widowed mother of six who arrived unexpectedly to visit her children, out in the grounds and in the corridor in a howling southeaster. Moreover Mr. Hickman was not a competent Hebrew teacher, a very important function that the former principal had carried out.⁶² In May 1936, the Beresinskis re-applied for their former positions and were accepted unanimously.

Conditions at the Home

First and foremost, the Orphanage aimed to ensure that the children were brought up as observant Jews, and Jewish law was strictly enforced at all times. At the outset, a member of the community was engaged to make the Friday night *Kiddush*,⁶³ and the Matron was instructed to take the children to the synagogue on Saturday mornings.⁶⁴ A regular *minyan* was held at the home and it was laid down that "No boys other than those who are not necessary to make a *minyan* should be allowed to join any synagogue choir."⁶⁵ The children were to attend Reverend Bender's Sabbath afternoon services at Gardens Synagogue.⁶⁶ Passover *Seders* were conducted at the home; the Cape Town Jewish Philanthropic society donated such necessities as *matzos* and wine, and donations were received to buy the children new clothes.⁶⁷ On the High Holidays, services were generally conducted at the Home. Barmitzvahs were celebrated in the local synagogues, followed by a tea at the Orphanage. In September 1936, a Consecration Service for girls was introduced.⁶⁸ The children were not allowed to attend amusements on Shabbat and Festivals⁶⁹ (a performance of the Yiddish operetta, *Shulamis*, by Goldfaden, at the Opera House in May 1925 was refused because it was scheduled for a '*yontef*').⁷⁰ On the very rare occasion when the children were invited out on a picnic, they were not permitted to go unless the food was kosher.⁷¹ Offers of domestic employment for orphan girls in homes that did not observe *kashrut* were not entertained.⁷²

To prevent parental interference, in January 1914

the Orphanage applied to the courts for power of guardianship over the children.⁷³ Holidays presented a problem, with parents applying to take the children out for those occasions, and which was generally refused to avoid favoritism.⁷⁴ On the other hand, Morris Alexander's offer to take two orphans to his home in Muizenberg on weekends was greatly appreciated.⁷⁵ For very specific occasions, such as a child's birthday or a relative's barmitzvah, the parent was sometimes allowed to take his/her child out. Considerable problems were experienced with parents coming to visit their children at all times, and in October 1914 it was declared that visiting hours would be displayed on a plaque on the door and would also appear on all stationery.

Life was Spartan for the children. Clothes were made from blue serge,⁷⁶ but an offer of second hand boots was refused on the grounds that the children were only to wear new clothes.⁷⁷ A crisis occurred when one of the girls was allowed to spend a month with a family in Ceres. Apparently, on her return she refused to dress the same or have her meals in common with the other children. However, within a month she seems to have relented.⁷⁸ In September 1925, it was resolved by fourteen votes to eight that no scrubbing was to be done by the children!⁷⁹ In June 1929, for the first time provision was made for the children to acquire dressing gowns and slippers. It was also resolved at that time that either the Matron or the Principal were to be present at all meal times, and that once a month a lady investigator should arrive unannounced to a meal and to inspect the kitchen.⁸⁰

Entertainments and treats were few and far between. In June 1912, the children were taken to a matinee at the Tivoli,⁸¹ but it is not until December 1914 that we hear of another such outing. In that year, the children were taken to the circus, the Sea Point Pavilion⁸² and Hout Bay.⁸³ Annual outings to Stellenbosch were organised by the Stellenbosch Young Israel society, and once a year the children were invited to a picnic at the Balmoral Hotel in Muizenberg.

Entertainments and lectures were also held on occasion at the Orphanage on Saturday nights. However, these could not have been too well patronized as the children were specifically exhorted to attend them. In 1925, it was decided to hold a holiday camp, either at Hout Bay or Kommetjie. Muizenberg was very specifically excluded.⁸⁴ Later, extremely successful holiday camps were organized at the Strand during the Christmas break.⁸⁵ In 1937, the camp moved to Muizenberg.

Education

The first children were sent to the Hope Mill School at the top of Government Avenue. By 1911 Hope Mill, the original Hebrew Public School, had become a government school, and the School Board agreed to provide the children with free education. Three years later, however, the children were transferred to the West End Public School as it was

closer to the Orphanage.⁸⁶ In the earliest years, the children's education generally ended at Std 6, the end of elementary school in those days. The writer found only one case before 1915, where a young girl was considered worthy of being transferred to Good Hope Seminary to study beyond Std 7.⁸⁷ Discussion was initiated in September 1915 over having the older girls attend Higher Grade Schools.⁸⁸ In June 1922 a teacher of dressmaking was engaged for the girls.⁸⁹ In later years extra-murals were even provided for the children: in 1933 15 children (13 girls and 2 boys) were taking piano lessons,⁹⁰ while elocution, physical culture, Scouts, and Girl Guides were also provided.⁹¹

The children's Jewish and Hebrew education was regarded as crucial. In the words of the famous Yiddish playwright and traveler Peretz Hirschbein, who visited the home together with his wife in May 1921,⁹² the importance of this could not be over emphasized. In the beginning, Hebrew classes were provided by volunteer teachers⁹³ until, in response to complaints by Rabbi Mirvish as to the poor standard of the children's Hebrew,⁹⁴ it was decided that those over nine years old should be sent to the Talmud Torah.⁹⁵ Two in-house Hebrew teachers were employed for the younger children, and Mark Cohen, principal of the Hope Mill School, was engaged to teach the senior boys.⁹⁶ In January 1939, it was recorded that the children were studying Hebrew for five and a quarter hours a week. Older children who joined late with little or no Hebrew education studied longer hours. Although it was claimed that children in private homes attended Hebrew lessons 8-10 hours a week, the Orphanage children, also attended *shul* twice a day.⁹⁷ In July 1939, it was suggested that due to the disparity of knowledge of the seventy children learning Hebrew, a third teacher should be employed.⁹⁸

The first hurdle for the pogrom orphans was to learn English. As recorded in the minutes, they were initially sent to Normal College for this purpose. However, this did not prove to be sufficient and a special English teacher was employed at the Home.⁹⁹ The senior girls, who were working in the morning, studied English in the evening, and an English teacher was also hired for the adults.¹⁰⁰ Extra teachers were employed to teach Hebrew. Unfortunately, between 1922 and 1925 there is a gap in the minute books, so it is not known exactly how the Russian orphans settled down in their very first years in South Africa.

The boys were sent to the Hope Lodge School and the girls to the Central Girls School, where there was provision for thirty percent of the pupils to be educated free of charge.¹⁰¹ Over the years, a running battle developed between Rosa van Gelderen, the Jewish principal of the Central Girls' School and a progressive educationalist, and the Principal, Mr. Beresinski. In October 1932, when it was decided to transfer the girls to the Tamboerskloof school, it was only through the intervention of Reverend Bender and Morris Alexander that a compromise was reached, and they were allowed to stay on.¹⁰² The last straw came in July 1933,¹⁰³ when it was finally decided to

transfer the children to the Tamboerskloof School at the beginning of 1934.¹⁰⁴

After-Care Committee

The future prospects of the orphans presented the biggest problem. Their lack of academic prowess made this extremely difficult. Very few managed to pass the Junior Certificate. A list of eleven senior boys aged between fourteen and seventeen, compiled in 1929, reveals that three had passed Standard 5, four Standard 6, one Standard 7 and two JC. Of four girls, three (15, 16 and 17), had passed Std 6, and one (16) had passed JC.¹⁰⁵ In only two cases - in 1926 and 1927 - were two children allowed to stay on at the Orphanage so that they could obtain a matric. Both were girls.¹⁰⁶ In the 1930s, the situation improved slightly. More girls went to Underwood and did Shorthand and Typing,¹⁰⁷ but only one completed her matric.¹⁰⁸ In 1938 it was recorded that no child should leave the home without a JC at least.¹⁰⁹ Between 1912 and 1939, only one boy was sent to university. He did the four year teaching course, T1, as he was considered not "mentally or physically fit to stand behind a counter".¹¹⁰

Not long before the arrival of the Ukrainian orphans, in December 1919, Ochberg established an After-Care Committee to oversee the orphans from the time they left the Home until they were able to earn a living. This Committee was to act as guardians of the children until the age of 21.¹¹¹ It succeeded the Education and Vocational committee, established in August 1916¹¹² and which had secured apprenticeships for boys with jewelers, electricians, dentists and farmers;¹¹³ and for girls with dressmakers, milliners and hairdressers. Ochberg recognized this as the most crucial time, when the Orphanage needed to provide supervision, maintenance, and education.¹¹⁴ According to the rules, the children had to leave the Orphanage at age fourteen for boys and fifteen for girls, when on average they had only passed Standard Six, did not have a trade, and were at their most vulnerable. In January 1925, the age of leaving the Orphanage was increased to sixteen.

Two senior girls were on different occasions appointed as assistant to the Matron at a nominal salary.¹¹⁵ One of them subsequently joined the permanent staff.¹¹⁶ Other options that were entertained were to send the orphans to Palestine. However the children were not keen.¹¹⁷ It was proposed to establish a Technical and Industrial School, or to create a farm settlement where the children could learn some type of trade or work on the land.¹¹⁸ This idea later merged with that of the Chalutz training scheme of the Zionist Youth movements, that aimed to send young people to Palestine, as it was believed that "to train poor lads as farmers for this country was creating more Poor Whites."¹¹⁹ Once the children were working, they were boarded out. It was generally felt that on apprenticeship to a trade or a business, the employer, was obliged to provide the children with a home. In December 1926, a hostel was established for the girls with Miss Berliner, the former Orphanage

Matron, as the Hostel Matron.¹²⁰

In 1930, a special memorandum was drawn up regarding the unsatisfactory methods of finding work for the boys and especially for the girls. It was reported that the girls tended to be employed in bazaars where the work was heavy and often irksome, the pay small, the general influence bad and the prospect of eventual independence virtually nil. The boys were 'pitch-forked' into whatever could be found, with little consideration of suitability, future prospects or influence on their characters. Once a billet and a home had been found, no more interest was paid to the children, provided that they held their jobs. It was resolved to adopt a method that had been in vogue for many years in London: that each member of the Sub-Committee choose an individual child for whom he would act as guardian, helping him/her to find a suitable job and receive follow up reports from his employer.¹²¹ However, nothing was done as in December this resolution was reiterated.¹²² For girls, the best prospects often lay in marriage. A bequest to the home by A. S. Nathan provided a Fund to supply the girls with dowries of £20 each. By 1930, at least five of the girls¹²³ were married. Most of the pogrom orphan girls as well as the local girls married.

When Isaac Ochberg passed away in December 1937, he left a bequest to the Orphanage of £1000 and a Fund for Higher Education of £10 000.¹²⁴ Although it was initially hoped that this bequest could assist one of the Orphanage boys to become a candidate for the Rabbinate, it was more realistically decided that it should be used for the purchase of High School and Hebrew books, to pay for extra tuition, and towards the board and lodging for children who were continuing their education.¹²⁵

Conclusion

Isaac Ochberg was responsible for one of the most successful undertakings of South African Jewry: the rescue of the children from the Ukraine. This venture showed the community at its best. It was never replicated. Various schemes to rescue children from Nazi Germany and from Nazi Occupied Europe were entertained, but none of them came to fruition. In July 1936, the admission of fifty German Jewish children of no older than ten years was contemplated.¹²⁶ In June 1938, a proposal to bring 25 children, between the ages of six and ten, from Austria, was dismissed by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies "owing to likely legal and public reaction."¹²⁷ In May 1940, the possibility of saving fifty orphan Dutch Jewish children, between the ages of two and twelve, was entertained, but never materialized.¹²⁸

Besides rescuing the Ukrainian orphans, the Cape Jewish Orphanage played an indispensable role in the years between 1912 and 1939, helping destitute immigrant families and ensuring that their children remained Jewish. The lack of educational attainment of the children is attributable to the standards at that time and to the children's disadvantaged backgrounds. In the case of the Ukrainian orphans, they also had to overcome earlier traumas, learn a new language and

adapt to a foreign land. The Orphanage might not always have been the warmest place, akin to a real family, but what was never lacking was a sense of responsibility and identification with the children, as being among their own, as *eygene*, as members of the Jewish community, who would under no circumstances be abandoned even after they had left the Home. To quote from the Minutes: "our children were not treated as orphans but were happy in their home." All in all the children were, "no worse and no better than the average child in decent homes."¹²⁹

The war years proved to be a watershed for the Orphanage, as it was for the community. The immigrants began to prosper, becoming more established in their new homes. The Orphanage became less and less of a home for orphaned children than a place of refuge for children from broken families. In due course, it became better known as the Oranjia Jewish children's home than as the Cape Jewish Orphanage. Today, its official title is the Oranjia Jewish Child and Youth Centre.

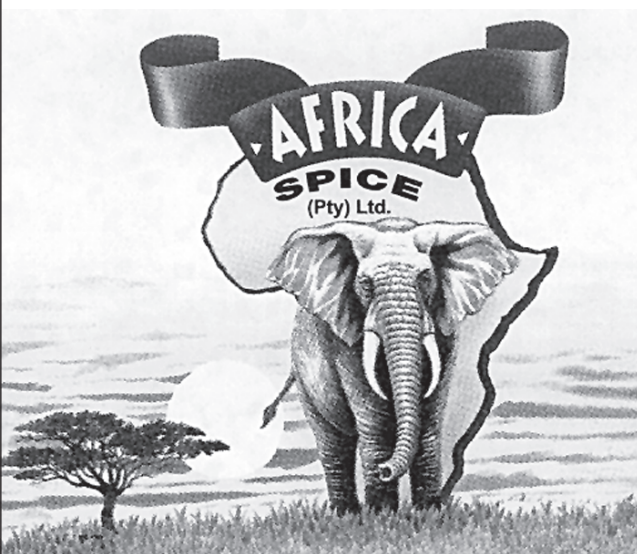
NOTES

- 1 Eric Rosenthal, *The Story of the Cape Jewish Orphanage: Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Oranjia*, Cape Town: Oranjia, Cape Jewish Orphanage, 1961, pp. 1-4
- 2 Minutes, 24 October 1911, Oranjia, Cape Jewish Orphanage, BC 918, Manuscripts and Archives, U.C.T. Libraries.
- 3 Minutes, 17 October 1911.
- 4 Minutes, 24 October 1911.
- 5 It seems as if Elias regretted his initial offer as he progressively increased his stipulations, and finally under the apparent influence of a Johannesburg committee member, even seems to have questioned the need for an orphanage in Cape Town. Minutes, 3 January 1912.
- 6 Minutes, 24 October 1911.
- 7 Eric Rosenthal, 1961, p. 7.
- 8 Minutes, 11 January 1914.
- 9 Minutes, 1 June 1913.
- 10 Minutes, 1 February 1914.
- 11 Eric Rosenthal, 1961, p. 8.
- 12 Minutes, 13 November 1918.
- 13 Minutes, 13 July 1919.
- 14 Minutes, 25 January 1920.
- 15 Minutes, 12 February 1921.
- 16 Minutes, 14 November 1911, 31 January, 14 February, 28 February, 18 August, 31 October 1912, January 1913, 16 January 1916, 25 June, 9 December 1917.
- 17 Minutes, 20 March 1912.
- 18 Minutes, 3 January 1912.
- 19 Minutes, 22 September 1912, 4 May 1913.
- 20 Minutes, 19 September 1920.
- 21 Minutes, 27 May 1930, 1.4,
- 22 Minutes, 29 July 1930, 29 December 1932.
- 23 Minutes, 6 July 1913, 21 March 1920.
- 24 Minutes, 4, 29 May 1933.
- 25 Minutes, 20 December 1911, January 31, 1912, Also 24 November 1912.
- 26 Minutes, 10, 27 April, 1 May, 15 June 1919.
- 27 Minutes, 8 February 1912.
- 28 Minutes, 16 January 1916.
- 29 Minutes, 21 August, 28 November 1928, 26 February 1929.
- 30 Minutes, 6 April 1917.
- 31 Minutes, 18 April 1920.
- 32 Minutes, 16 June 1912 and 15 June 1919.
- 33 Minutes, 31 May, 22 September 1912 and 15 August 1926.
- 34 Minutes, 28 April 1931.
- 35 Minutes, 30 November and 13 April 1913.
- 36 Minutes, 6 April 1917.
- 37 Minutes, 1 March 1913.
- 38 Minutes, 31 March 1930.
- 39 Minutes, 8 March 1932.
- 40 Minutes, 19 September 1920,
- 41 Minutes, 8, 19, 22, August 1920.
- 42 Minutes, 12 January 1921,
- 43 Minutes, 18 December 1921.
- 44 Minutes, 19 June, 21 August, 1, 4, September 1921.
- 45 Minutes, 19 June, 21 August, 1, 4, September 1921
- 46 Minutes, 24 January 1922.
- 47 Minutes, 14 May 1922.
- 48 Minutes, 12 May 1922.
- 49 Minutes, 18 June 1922.
- 50 Minutes, 9 September 1921.
- 51 Minutes, 17 November and 18 December, 1921.
- 52 Minutes, 27 October 1931.
- 53 Minutes, 28 June 1932 and 31 January 1933.
- 54 Minutes, 29 September 1936.
- 55 She was also accused of sending the children out on messages, and not reporting a robbery that had been committed at the orphanage to the committee. When asked to resign she had put her case in the hands of solicitors. Minutes, 27 March 1912.
- 56 Minutes, 31 October 1912.
- 57 Minutes, 19 May, 16 June 1912.
- 58 Minutes, 26 January 1913.
- 59 Minutes, 16 June 1918.
- 60 Minutes, 11 January 1914, 17 December 1916.
- 61 Minutes, 26 March, 1934.
- 62 When in April 1936, three boys who were due to celebrate their barmitzvahs were found to be so unprepared that their barmitzvahs had to be postponed, it was unanimously decided to dismiss the Hickmans. Minutes, 27 April 1936.
- 63 Minutes, 19 October 1913.
- 64 Minutes, 29 March 1914.
- 65 Minutes, 24 September 1925.
- 66 Minutes, 19 September 1926.
- 67 Minutes, 29 March 1914.
- 68 Minutes, 29 September 1936, 3 November 1937.
- 69 Minutes, 22 September 1912.
- 70 Minutes, 12 April 1925.
- 71 Minutes, 13 January 1918.
- 72 Minutes, 16 August 1926, 10 April 1927.
- 73 Minutes, 11 January 1914.
- 74 Minutes, 1 December 1912.
- 75 Minutes, 13 April 1913.
- 76 Minutes, 27 September 1914.
- 77 Minutes, 19 February 1912.
- 78 Minutes, 15 February, 8 March 1914.
- 79 Minutes, 24 September 1925.
- 80 Minutes, 25 June, 20 July 1929. A grocery investigation later that year revealed that only 14lbs of meat a day was being consumed for 72 people, that was considered to be grossly insufficient, 14 November, 1929.
- 81 Minutes, 16 June 1912.
- 82 Minutes, 27 December 1914.

- 83 Minutes, 31 January 1915.
 84 Minutes, 8 December 1925.
 85 Minutes, 29 August 1933.
 86 Minutes, 15 February 1914.
 87 Minutes, 27 September 1914.
 88 Minutes, 5 September 1915.
 89 Minutes, 18 June 1922.
 90 Minutes, 31 January 1933.
 91 Minutes, 29 May 1934.
 92 Minutes, 15 May 1921.
 93 Minutes, 16 June 1912, 19 October 1913, 9 November 1913.
 94 Minutes, 3 August, 14 September 1913.
 95 Minutes, 30 April 1914.
 96 Minutes, 3 June and 14 October, 1917.
 97 Minutes, 31 January 1939.
 98 Minutes, 25 July 1939.
 99 Minutes, 16 April 1922.
 100 Minutes, 12 February and 2 November 1921.
 101 Minutes, 29 March 1931.
 102 Minutes, 25 and 31 October 1932.
 103 Despite the girls' poor reports, Van Gelderen, who did not believe in homework, absolutely refused to abide by the request to provide the girls with extra arithmetic homework. Minutes, 25 July 1933.
 104 Rosa Van Gelderen's educational experiments were very progressive and worked extremely well with the children from more advantaged backgrounds. However, they were not always suited to children from deprived backgrounds such as those at the Orphanage. The Orphanage After-School program devoted considerable time to supervised homework, which she refused to support, but which might have been advantageous to the children. Minutes, 28 June, 30 August, 27 September 1932, Minutes, 29 August 1933.
 105 Minutes, 22 January 1929.
 106 Minutes, 14 November 1926, 17 July 1927.
 107 Minutes, 22 February 1937.
 108 Minutes, 24 November 1936.
 109 Minutes, 1 March 1938.
 110 Minutes, 30 January 1934.
 111 Minutes, 19 June 1921.
 112 Minutes, 3 August 1916, 11 February 1917.
 113 Minutes, 18 June 1922.
 114 Minutes, 28 December 1919.
 115 Minutes, 14 October 1917, 1 December 1918.
 116 Minutes, 15 May 1921.
 117 Minutes, 14 June, 12 July 1925.
 118 Minutes, 14 May 1922.
 119 Minutes, 23 October 1933.
 120 Minutes, 6 December 1926.
 121 Minutes, 27 February 1930.
 122 Minutes, 2 December 1930.
 123 Minutes 27 March 1927, 29 July 1930, 25 April 1933, 25 July 1933.
 124 Minutes, 1 February 1938.
 125 Minutes, 1 March and 3 May 1938.
 126 Minutes, 28 July 1936.
 127 Minutes, 20 June and 2 August 1938.
 128 Minutes, 28 May 1940.
 129 Minutes, 25 February, 19 March and 30 June 1936.

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A LAMENT ON THE DEATH OF YEHUDAH LEIB SCHRIRE

*

Naomi Dison Kaplan

In the course of my research for my thesis on Hebrew laments, I came across a poem, *Al Mot Yehudah Leib Schrire* - "Upon the Death of Yehuda Leib Schrire" - by Benjamin Turtledove, written for his late friend and teacher. I selected this poem because I wanted to make it known that laments were being written in Hebrew in Cape Town, and to counter criticism that academic work in South Africa was Eurocentric and not related to life in Africa.

This lament was written in 1912 by Turtledove (whom, we can guess, had previously had a different, 'Yiddishe', name), following the death of his friend Yehudah Leib Schrire. His lament, in Hebrew, was included in Nehemia Dov Hoffmann's *Book of Memoirs* (1916), the first Yiddish book ever published in South Africa. In 1996, this was translated from the Yiddish into English by Lillian Dubb and into Hebrew by Sheila Barkusky, and published through the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, making it available to a new generation of readers.

Schrire was born into a scholarly family in Vilna and died in Cape Town at the age of 61. He was a poet and writer in Hebrew and Yiddish, and wrote various articles for the Jewish press. He left many Hebrew books, poems and other writings and also devoted himself to promoting secular and Hebrew scholarship.

Benjamin Turtledove himself was born in Medzerich, Poland, in 1872, and studied at *Yeshivot* in Volozhin, Pressburg and Vienna. In Vienna, he also attended university as an "Extraordinary Scholar". He studied French in Paris, lived for a while in Manchester and then came to Cape Town as principal of the *Talmud Torah*. He, too, was a Yiddish and Hebrew journalist, publishing under the pseudonym *Ish Ploni* ("Mr X"), and was recognised as an excellent poet (Hoffmann, 1996:45).

Turtledove's lament addresses 'listeners', as if they are standing at a funeral, mentioned as the grieving family, friends, co-workers in the institutions, scholars, young and old. The Hebrew is eloquently formal and constrained. The poet is sparing in metaphors and poetic devices. The poem includes references to traditional sources, and uses words influenced by the Aramaic of the Talmud.

In each verse, either the verse itself or one of its

lines starts with the word *Ayei* or *Ayeihu*, which is very much like a refrain from *Eichah* (Book of Lamentations). The mainstay of the poem are the constant rhetorical questions "where is he?" and "why did he die so young?" - *Madu'a maheir azav cheled?* ("Why did he hasten to leave this world/lifetime/duration of life") and *Halo yipaked m'komo' bveiti, bein rei'a v'v' mosdim rabim* ("Will he not be missed in my house, [also] among his many friends and many institutions?")² The poet goes on to say: "The work is much and there are no workers".³ He reemphasises that Schrire died so young: *Ha-omnam meit vayispe b'lo yomo* ... In Genesis 18:23, the word *tispe* is used, *Ha'af tispe tzaddik im rasha* ("Will you sweep away the righteous, the *tzaddik* with the wicked?") We are told in the poem that the greatly missed Schrire was a righteous man, and the implied reference seems to question again why the righteous had to die as though wicked.

V'et beito v'et rei'av azav la'atzavim - "He left his house and his friends to sorrow and pain": The word *atzavim* used here has many meanings and could also mean "melancholy" or "toil". In modern Hebrew, *etzev* would probably be used.

Schrire, ayeihu ha'askan v'hasafra? - "Schrire, where is he? The one who knows about books?":

Safra is an Aramaic word used in the expression *safra v'sayafa*, that is, a "knower of books and a swordsman". This could be an intimation that he was a fighter for what he believed in - not only was he a "knower of books", but also an *askan* ("communal worker").⁴ He was also a "basket full of *Torah*, *chochma v'da'at*".

The poet continues: "Will not every one, the hoary head, the young and the child wait for his advice; he was like an eye to them". Barkusky translates the last verse as: "Where is he? Listen and I will tell you!" although the original poem reads in archaic Hebrew *Ma'du'a? a'yei'hu? Sh'ma a'shi v'kha a'ma'rim* - "Why? Where is he? Hear and I will answer your words". The English version continues, "He was a truly noble soul"⁵ and then with "The vanities of this earth being too much for him/He ascended to a higher plane." This latter quotation is a translation of *Va'y'hi ki ozen v'cheiker ha'b'li iha'yitzurim vayikatz bam - va'ya'al hashamayim*. (In using this unusual Hebrew, Turtledove tells the reader that Schrire hated idle conversation and gossip.) Herein there could be a hint that he is leaving this plane and joining the angels, which is more suitable for him.

The speaker begins the exordium by arousing the empathy of the listeners and speaks of the relationship

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between the deceased and those left behind:

*Halo yipakeid m'komo
B'veiti bein rei'av u'mosadim rabim*

(His many friends and associates feel his loss,
Will he not be missed in my house and amongst
his friends and many institutions?)

Questions are asked in refrains. The mourner says, "Where is his place? *Ubi topos? Ubi sunt?* The mourner finds the death difficult to accept.

Where is Schrire? ... Where is Schrire?
Where is he?
Is there an equal in this ungodly land of Africa?
Where is he?
Why was his departure so sudden ...?
Where is he?

"Where is he?" is repeated five times. There is rhetorical repetition, the name of the deceased is frequently mentioned, and a complaint about the shortness of life.

His many friends and associates feel his loss,
Leaving behind his grieving family and friends.

And

Will he not be missed in my house,
Among his many friends and among many
institutions?

The 'departure' is repeated:

He departed this world before his time
Why was his departure so sudden?

Words similar in intonation to *eichah* or *eich*, such as *aye?* and *ayeihu?*, are repeated. These are mourning words. Distressed but restrained, the mourner expresses praises of the deceased. He was an encyclopaedia of knowledge and wisdom and a noble soul. As in the *Book of Lamentations* and other laments, references are made to the young and the old: "All will yearn for his counsel, young and old". "Why did he die before his time" (*b'lo yomo*)? He was so young. The past and present are compared. Life was rich when Schrire was there. Who will be helping them now? There are no people to continue the work. He was the watchful eye and adviser of the people. He was great among the living and now he has gone to another sphere, to heaven. Life is void.

Even though the pain is so great now, there is the recognition that this is *derech olam*, the way of nature. In the poem, the mourner asks, "Why did he leave while the work is so much?" and there are no people to help (stanza 3). *Pirkei Avot* 2:2 says, "It is not thy duty to complete the work, but neither art thou free to desist from it ...", but to the mourner it seems as if all is lost, and there are no people to take over Schrire's work. The reader knows life will take its course and somebody will rise to the occasion to

do it. From early times in history, it is not expected of any human to finish the task, only to do as much as possible. Life goes on; this is an outlook for the future.

This poem is written from a background of traditional learning and imbued with religious belief and a belief in the importance of faith and prayer. In accordance with this belief, the poet would have accepted that Schrire would have been gathered to his people (Gen. 25:8) and he would go to the *Olam Haba*. A comfort for those who are religious is the belief that they will meet with their dear ones again. Death divides and death unites.

The light comes in the answer, "listen and I will tell you"; the poet consoles the mourners by saying that the deceased was too noble for this world. The idea that the deceased went to a better place, the *Olam Haba*, would provide comfort.

This poem was written to express sorrow at the loss of a friend, and it tries to alleviate despair by providing an answer to the mourner's feelings of why it had to happen. The poem praises Schrire's wisdom, scholarship and character and ends by providing an answer to the questions of why this death had to happen: He was too good for this world; he had to ascend to a higher place.

The vanities of this earth being too much for him,
He ascended to a higher plane.

Postscript

One of Yehuda Leib Schrire's descendants is Gwynne Schrire, a frequent contributor to this journal and a member of its editorial board. I asked her if her family was related to the prestigious Gaon Shrerer⁶ (c. 906 – 1006). She replied that the family tradition was that it is so, although there have been many variations on the spelling of her great grandfather's name, viz. Shriro, Schrire, Shrira and Sherira. We cannot personally know about Sherira Gaon, as he died about a thousand years ago, but what is in a thousand years from Sherira to Schrire? Great people, like great ships, sail on.

NOTES

- 1 cf, 1 Sam. 20:27 and also 1 Sam. 20:18. Both of these verses are from the frequently recited *Haftorah* of *Machar Chodesh*.
- 2 The Barkusky translation is: "He has left a void / His many friends and associates feel his loss".
- 3 This alludes to Rabbi Tarphon in *Pirkei Avot* 1:20 "The work is much and labourers are idle".
- 4 Ahad Ha'am also used the expression *askan*, "worker for the communal good" in conjunction with an expression relating to working with books, as follows: *Bayamim haheim lo ha'yiti od lo sofeir v'lo askan*, in those days I was not yet a writer nor a worker for the public good". The work *askan* was also used in the Talmud, *Chullin* 57 in a slightly different sense. *Askan bid'varim* meant a person of initiative, an inventive person.
- 5 A more correct translation is *Schrire haya ish na'a'le bein hachayim*. "Schrire was a man elevated amongst the living".
- 6 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 14, p1381

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT AT THE DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE

*

Wendy Kahn

“Giving the Holocaust-denying Ahmadinejad a platform to lecture the world about racism is like inviting Bernie Madoff to head a global conference on business ethics”.

This was one of the choice quotes doing the rounds in Geneva during the UN Durban Review Conference (DRC) from 20-24 April this year. It was occasioned by an inflammatory opening speech by Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, whose rabid antisemitic rhetoric was all too reminiscent of the event’s notorious predecessor, the September 2001 World Conference Against Racism in our very own Durban.

The purpose of the DRC was to follow up the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the 2001 conference. Much of the efforts of international Jewry in the build-up to the conference had been directed at persuading various countries to pull out altogether, and around ten, including Canada, Italy and Australia, eventually did so. However, the viewpoint adopted by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and others was that this should not be done at the expense of preparing properly for the conference itself, since this was going to go ahead notwithstanding the boycotts.

It was to ensure a strong, coordinated and effective participation by world Jewry at the DRC that the International Jewish Caucus (IJC) was set up. Throughout, the SAJBD had valuable input into the process, inter alia bringing to the table its experience of what had been successful in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Also useful was its contacts with the SA government built up over the years, which enabled it to obtain important accurate information on conference procedure on behalf of the IJC once the DRC was underway.

I was a member of the IJC in Geneva for the duration of the conference representing the SAJBD, which was participating as an accredited NGO and also as part of the IJC.

With me from South Africa was Marc Pozniak, who had participated (with former SAJBD Gauteng Council vice-chairman Gershon Hurwitz) in the previous year’s African Preparatory Meeting for the DRC in Abuja, Nigeria. Both attended under the auspices of the World Jewish Diplomatic Corps

division of the World Jewish Congress. Prior to my departure, I had worked with communications expert Louis Gavin to develop some key messaging and communication tools for the Caucus, and Louis’ company designed some exquisite posters which I took across with me. The following are the essential messages we formulated to convey what the DRC meant to us as Jews:

The underlying lesson of 3500 years of Jewish history is that respecting human rights is not an abstract ideal – it is a necessity.

The history of the Jewish people is a story of constant struggle against persecution, whether racially or religiously inspired. Jews have striven, and continue to strive, to uphold the fundamental principles of human rights, dignity and equality that underpin their faith and national culture. For so long exiled from their ancestral homeland and dispersed throughout the world, they have fought to survive as a marginalised and powerless minority in their host societies. They have succeeded, but the price has been high.

Informed by the lessons of their own history, the Jewish people condemn all forms of prejudice, racism and injustice and commit themselves to fighting it wherever and whenever it occurs.

The Geneva Jewish community truly rose to the occasion, arranging a fully equipped Welcome Centre for us at the entrance to the UN, where we had our caucus briefings and where we could buy kosher sandwiches and salads. We were welcomed with a smile and treated with the warmest hospitality



The author speaking with SA Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

Wendy Kahn is National Director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies. She was extensively involved in the UN Durban Review Conference, both prior and during the event, working closely with international Jewish organisations.

throughout.

Day One of the DRC on Monday, 20 April, started with a bang thanks to Ahmadinejad. As the only Head of State present, the privilege of delivering the first of the speeches by participating countries was his. His address featured all the extremist anti-Israel language and antisemitic sentiment that had made the 2001 event so problematic. Ahmadinejad had already acquired a well-deserved reputation as a Holocaust Denier, and now further confirmed it by accusing Israel of occupying Palestinian territories “on the pretext of Jewish suffering”. Amongst other incendiary statements, he further accused Israel of establishing a “cruel and repressive racist regime” over Palestinians.

It was gratifying indeed to see the massive walk-out that followed when Ahmadinejad began to demonise Israel and Zionists, resulting in a visibly empty hall. Representatives of most EU countries, as well as from Morocco, Jordan and even the Palestinian Authority (almost certainly for political reasons, given Iran’s support for the rival Hamas faction, rather than as a protest over the anti-Israel sentiment) took part. The Foreign Minister of Norway strongly rebuked the Ahmadinejad speech when it was his turn to speak and his condemnation was supported by South African Foreign Minister Dlamini Zuma in her remarks. Other delegates and officials in the course of the next few days similarly criticized Ahmadinejad. It should be noted, however, that while the walk out was effective; there were countries that applauded Ahmadinejad’s statements.

The IJC was incensed that a man representing a country inflicting such grotesque human rights violations (besides his Holocaust Denial and ‘wipe Israel off the map’ pronouncements) could be allowed to be one of the introductory speakers at a conference purporting to be further the causes of human rights and opposing racism. That a notorious Holocaust Denier had spoken on the very eve of Yom Hashoah compounded the outrage we all felt.

Encouraging from a South African point of view was Foreign Affairs Minister Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma’s support for the Norwegian Foreign Minister condemnation of the Ahmadinejad speech, with her comments that the forum was not a place for “hatred



The author and Marc Pozniak at the Yom Hashoah ceremony, Geneva, 2009.



and finger pointing” and her mention of the Shoah. Also interesting to us as South Africans was the reading of a message from Nelson Mandela about the values of anti-racism and the importance of this conference. I was pleased that a senior South African government representative attended the three-hour Yom Hashoah ceremony on the Monday night of the conference.

The Yom Hashoah ceremony, organised by the Geneva Jewish community, with thousands gathering in the square in front of the Palais de Nations (headquarters of the UN) for the occasion. Memorable moments were the magnificent Yizkor loudly proclaiming our grief outside the gates of the UN, the impassioned speeches by Eli Wiesel, Irwin Cotler and French philosopher Bernard Henri Levy and a children’s choir singing the Partisans’ Song as the crowd held up candles. It was an opportunity to focus on the real issues of human rights and to mourn a time when these were completely forgotten.

The conference document was formally adopted on Tuesday, Day Two of the DRC, and this was followed by submissions by all the countries present. The government submissions included a long string of condemnations of Ahmadinejad’s offensive address, mainly coming from Argentina, Ukraine, the UK, France, Sweden and Spain, as well as from Austria, Lithuania and the Holy See. The UN Secretary General and High Commissioner Pillay were also highly critical.

The last country to present their submission was Iran who, as anticipated, was quite unrepentant for its leader’s actions. Its representative heavily criticized Norway and other countries that had attacked Ahmadinejad, invoked ‘freedom of expression as a human right’ and called for countries



Members of the International Jewish Caucus team in action during the United Nations Durban Review Conference.

to cease from making ‘judgmental remarks’.

In the final Declaration eventually adopted by the conference, the reference to Antisemitism was retained (par. 12), and the reference to the Holocaust was actually strengthened by urging all states to implement the General Assembly resolutions calling for Holocaust commemoration and condemning Holocaust denial (par. 66). The controversial “Defamation of Religion” clause, which was intended by its sponsors as stifling criticism of Islam, was excluded. However, there was an indirect reference to Israel in a paragraph calling for the need to address the problems arising from ‘foreign occupation’ (par. 5), which is UN-speak for Gaza and the West Bank situation.

Marc and I had two outstanding meetings on Tuesday. First, we met with Advocate Tseliso Thipanyane, CEO of the SA Human Rights Commission, who was in Geneva to present the submission on behalf of similar Human Rights advocacy bodies from around the world. He spent considerable time briefing us on human rights and NGOs in South Africa, as well providing us with some fascinating insights on the DRC itself.

That evening, we met with the SA government delegation for a very warm and informative session. Beulah Naidoo, a senior member of the delegation and Chairperson at the Regional Preparatory meeting for the DRC in Abuja, gave us a full briefing on many issues and allowed us an opportunity to ask questions and receive clarification on issues of relevance to the IJC. We also had an opportunity to speak with Minister Dlamini Zuma and the SA Ambassador to the UN.

The Darfur protest rally, organized by the European Jewish students in tandem with Darfur victims, was one of the highlights of Day Two. Holding banners, wearing t-shirts and distributing materials, the protestors stood on the edge of the square in front of the Palais de Nations and communicated their messages to passing traffic and pedestrians. A lone anti-Israel protester sheepishly left after being confronted by the Darfuri participants.

I attended a symposium in a venue next to the Plenary Hall entitled “Antisemitism and Intolerance:

In the Here and Now”. Speakers included Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, Professor Alan Dershowitz, the renowned actor Jon Voight, Professor Steele, Father Patrick Desbois (who works with East European countries to find Jewish bodies that did not receive a suitable burial and seeks to remedy this) and Natan Sharansky. The venue was completely crammed, to the extent that people had to be turned away. I chatted with Dershowitz afterwards, telling him of the row his statements re Tutu had caused in SA and asking for clarification. He confirmed that he had called Tutu a “racist and a bigot” and that he fully stood by this.

Geneva woke up to Day Three of the DRC while South Africans were waking up to Election Day. Once again, there was great activity in the IJC caucus offices as we frantically set about preparing statements for the session. One of these was an NGO session with UN High Commissioner Navi Pillay, in which accredited NGOs would be asking questions. One of the questions was submitted on behalf of the SAJBD.

A number of interesting points came out of this session. It was notable that no overtly anti-Israel questions were posed, which would certainly not have been the case in 2001. A representative from a French African NGO asked a lengthily question in which he condemned pro-Palestinian groups for hijacking the conference and detracting from the voices of the real victims. Sitting opposite us (and doing exceptional networking at the conference) was a trio of Neturei Karta representatives sporting Palestinian flag badges. Thanks to UN regulations, they at least had to leave their trademark sandwich boards at home.

Following extensive debates (and some serious confusion) it was determined that approximately 150 NGOs would be making two-minute submissions at the Plenary stage. Thanks to our interaction with the SA delegation, we were able to assist the IJC with information enabling it to secure slots and four Jewish NGOs ultimately made submissions. One slot was used on behalf of the IJC, and this submission was presented by the co-Chair of the Jewish Human Rights Coalition (UK), Rosalind Preston.

Was the DRC like Durban 1?

When drafting its International Jewish Coalition statement, the IJC included the comment, “The World Conference Against Racism in 2001 is remembered for the antisemitism on the streets of Durban. The Durban Review in Geneva will be remembered for the antisemitism within the Assembly hall of the UN, as clearly spelt out by Iran’s President.” It must be remembered, however, that Ahmadinejad’s speech was followed by unequivocal condemnation by many countries, by the Secretary General of the UN and the HRC High Commissioner.

None of the violent and overt antisemitism as seen in Durban in 2001 was evident in Geneva. The event was monitored closely by the authorities, who showed a zero tolerance for any unruly behavior or violation of the rules. As for the anti-Israel or pro-

Iran rallies, these were dismally attended and were certainly in no way reminiscent of 2001.

The comments of Ronald Eissens from the Dutch Magenta Foundation are worth sharing:

People ask us all the time if this conference is like Durban. No, it's not. It is absolutely incomparable. Foremost, there is the question of size. Only 314 accredited NGOs are here, with 1073 NGO delegates, which is nothing like Durban, but the atmosphere is also very different. It is mostly a well-behaved affair, with only a few incidents. Stickers and some flyers were confiscated by the UN Police. A small number of side-events were cancelled because of content not in line with the DDPA and/or abuse language. A few NGO delegates and one journalist had their accreditation revoked. Kudos to the UN people at the Palais de Nations for doing a great job, and special kudos to the UN Police and security forces for keeping everybody on the straight and narrow and handling it all with utmost care and friendliness.

International Jewry was far better prepared for this conference. Preparation had started early last year, and it could be clearly seen how more effective the responses were. The coalition provided a coordinated front at the DRC. It was wonderful to see Jewish NGO's putting aside their egos and turf issues to work together for the common good. Our caucus office (situated in the World Jewish Congress suites near the UN) was a constant buzz of activity, and was run in a professional and efficient way.

I was able to leave Geneva feeling gratified that international Jewry played a significant role in preventing a repeat of 2001.

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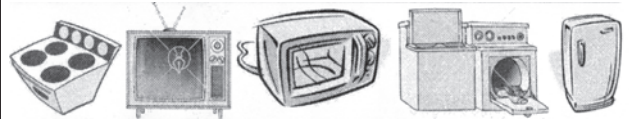
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SCARRED BY THE HOLOCAUST: A RHODESIAN CHILDHOOD WITH HANS TRIXER AND OTHER RELATIVES

*

Dorothy Kowen

My mother, the daughter of a rabbi in Germany, had escaped from Nazi Germany to Rhodesia and had married a Lithuanian Jew.

My mother and father did not communicate much, so the telephone became my mother's intimate friend. She would speak ad nauseam to Minny, Sylvia or Hilda about the latest bridge conventions and her children.

One still Sunday evening, the night hung like a dark blanket pierced by the brilliance of a round African moon. Suddenly, the shrill sound of the telephone rent the air. I was relieved by the intrusion into that too still night.

My mother lifted the receiver.

"Hello, hello, Thea! Is that you? How are you? *Ach*, this line is not very clear. Yes I'm fine. Salisbury is not Oldenberg – not as cultured, but I like it here. Tell me about yourself..."

I had not heard mention of any Thea before. I listened to my mother's voice from the adjoining bathroom. There was something different about this call. Usually, my mother would habitually become so excited over a phone call that she would gush. The following morning, there would be light spittle in the telephone cradle, a glistening testimony of the conversation of the previous night.

But this time, her voice sounded tight, as though somebody had put a fist around her throat. There was a harsh tonality in her voice that I had never heard before.

"*Ja*, Thea. So you have two sons... I have a son and three daughters. We *must* speak again. Let me write down your number. OK, we must terminate... I mean end... this conversation – Thea, this call is costing you too much. *Auf wiedersehen*. Thank you for calling".

The phone crashed unceremoniously onto the cradle.

"Mom, who was that?"

"Never mind", she said in her heavy German accent.

"No, I want to know. Was it somebody from Germany?"

"It's better forgotten".

Dorothy Kowen is a teacher of French language and classical literature and the author of a number of fictional works, including Bobba's little lies, A Gift of Gold (also translated into French and anthologized in a French textbook) and Nyama's Journey. The above article is an extract from The Rabbi's Daughter, a novel in progress.

"No, don't tell me ... let me guess. Was she at school with you and then her parents stopped you visiting because you were Jewish?"

"No. Her parents were always warm and accepting. She was my best friend... but I must cut her out. I must pretend Nazi Germany did not exist... You do understand, don't you?"

I did not.

Then there was her cousin, Hans Trixer, a magician of international repute. When I was about five or six, I thought he was so good looking and distinguished. He had thinning grey hair and a broad toothy smile, but his eyes – his eyes were sad and distant, like the eyes in pictures by the old masters.

I hated my birthday parties. I hated the smocked dresses and straw hats my mother made me wear. I did not like the children who came to celebrate my parties. I thought birthdays were sad. I had not asked to be born, and now I was supposed to be happy.

Uncle Hans did not enjoy my birthday parties either. He also did not come willingly. He was invited as the magician.

When he arrived in Rhodesia as a refugee from Nazi Germany, my Granny insisted that he perform magic tricks for the children at my parties. My Granny, Annie de Haas, had been a *rebbetzin* in Germany. No one said 'No' to her.

Rabbits popped out from Hans Trixer's sleeves, cakes appeared out of burning newspaper. We children watched the cakes, but he just watched the flames with a detached fascination. While he watched the flames, I watched him mesmerized. The children shrieked and clapped, egged on by my Granny.

"How did you do it? How did you do that trick, Hans Trixer?" hollered one of the children, jumping into his arms. He disentangled himself with distaste from the clinging child as though he were peeling off some sticky brown toffee. Clearly he did not like her, nor any of the other children for that matter.

Hans Trixer was not his real name. My mother told me that when he was five years old, he was given a magic set, a gift she thought far too sophisticated for a child of that age. She thought his parents, Walter and Gerde, spoilt him. Walter Elsbach, of Dortmund, Germany, was my Granny's brother. When he was not entertaining children at my parties, Hans ran Keayes Jewellers in Salisbury and made jewellery. I still have some of the pieces he gave me.

Years later, we learned his story. At the age of fourteen, this spoilt only child had worked in the kitchens at Auschwitz. The Gestapo heard about his talents as a magician and forced him to perform

before his tormentors. The penalty for failure to please was the gas chamber, the reward for success a slice of bread. He survived because of his magic, unlike his parents, his uncle (who had been brutally killed in a police station) and his friends.

After the war, Hans advertised in the paper trying to find family. My uncle, Joe de Haas, saw his name and went to Holland to find him. Uncle Joe and my father, Jack Lessem, brought Hans and his new wife Shelley out to Salisbury and found him a job.

Many years later, my 16-year-old daughter Danielle went on the March of the Living to visit the death camps at Auschwitz and Dachau. She returned no longer a child, but the grown daughter of a second generation Holocaust survivor. Soon afterwards, she went for a walk with "Uncle Hans" on Cape Town's Clifton Beach. After a long stroll, they watched the waves pounding on the beach. For hours he did not speak.

Danielle hoped he would ask her about her experiences. She hoped he would speak about the unspeakable. But he remained silent.

So many questions: What was going through his mind when my Granny insisted that he do a command performance for an audience of spoiled children who did not know or care about the numbers etched into his skin under his long sleeves? The numbers he hid. Even on the hottest summer days he would not wear a short sleeved shirt. What else was he hiding?

When the children yelled for more, what was he thinking? Was he reliving the pleasure he had given the Gestapo when he performed his magic for them? Was he hearing the laughter of the children of the off-duty Gestapo officers, who ruled the camp with such brutality? Did he envy the happiness in my friends' faces, the happiness of the "normal childhood" that had eluded him because of the atrocities of Nazi Germany? Why was he determined to have no children of his own?

And still more questions. Did he know that in my eyes, he was special and talented? But how did he see himself? Did he see himself just as a trickster, who had tricked the Gestapo into sparing his life? After the war, in another world, when he became famous for his tricks, did he ask himself who he might have become had he not been born in Nazi Germany? Did he get pleasure when he was made president of the Magic Circle of Los Angeles and when some of his card tricks, still named after him, entered into the magicians' repertoire? Even then, he ignored the praise. "When you steal one trick, they call it plagiarism", he would say, "When you steal many, they call it research". In the dark nights of his soul, did he ever ask himself why his magic wand had spared only him and not his loved ones?

My mother did not have the vitality of her cousin Hans. She wore her suffering like a cloak around her all the time. She felt that my brother, sisters and I had an idyllic childhood. After all, she had grown up in Nazi Germany, suffering humiliations at the hands of the Nazis. Many of her friends had died in the camps.

"I am feeling depressed", I once confided to her. "Depressed?" she said, "What do you know

about depression? Did you grow up in Nazi Germany?"

That was very much it. Living in Salisbury, we were not entitled to feel too much pain. Her suffering in Germany was so monumental that our suffering paled into insignificance.

I was discouraged from being too ambitious – life ended the same way for everyone. In my mother's words, "life was short and *beshissen* like a baby's napkin". Everything should be '*downspilled*', not '*upspilled*'. When a friend of mine told her she thought I was intelligent, my mother retorted, "*Ja*, in ze kingdom of ze blind, ze one-eyed is king".

Like Hans, she would not accept or give praise. We were taught not to be too enthusiastic about anything, or anybody for that matter. I would return from school with a new friend. When she had left, I would say to my mother, "Isn't she wonderful?" My mother would reply, "*Ja*, but *somesing*, somewhere..."

There was always "something, somewhere" for her to disapprove. She would look at all my friend with a jaundiced eye – projecting the darkness of Nazism onto the still unwritten narrative of their lives.

Another of her sayings, one I only appreciated once I entered adulthood, was:

"Don't envy people who seem to have a better life style than you. Life is lived in the valleys, not on the mountains. You only go up to the mountain to breathe."

My mother played a great deal of bridge. Her bridge allowed her to enter another world, a more regulated one, one over which she had some control. We children used to say that she "bridged over troubled waters." When she was playing bridge, she hated to be interrupted – especially if we were "*upspilling* our pain."

When I was a teenager, I wrote this poem:

I must have been seven, or was it eight?
When I returned home from a party late.
A motorcyclist who did not see me
Had knocked me to the ground.

When I came round
I ran home to blurt out my story.

My mother involved in a game of bridge
Welcomed me with the warmth of a fridge,
"Has blood been spilled?" she said.
"Is someone perhaps dead?"

"Go straight to your bedroom.
Don't speak of doom and gloom.
You have a cut and a graze,
Nothing time will not erase."

Her scars, you see, would always last.
She was a victim of the Holocaust.

The author hereby thanks Gwynne Schrire for her encouragement and assistance with this article.

AUGUST IN LATVIA

(for Maja Abramowitch)

*

Bernard Levinson

It is August in Latvia. The sun, echoing still the summer's heat, rises in a cloudless sky. There is still the soft woody scent of forests waking. The air is warm and soft. Families eat their meals on the patios in the warm afternoons.

The Daugava River is alive with early autumn's gold-flecked foliage. Trees, bridges and rows of wooden houses shimmer on the surface.

Lisa brushes my hair. Her hair is long and dark. She lets me braid her hair. I would love to brush my Papa's hair but he has so little hair. When I sit on his lap he nibbles my short, almost blond, hair on the back of my neck.

My Papa owns two shops on the main street. He teaches me French at night. Only a few words. We have visitors every night. My Mama and Papa speak so many languages. I can hear them talking French and German. Papa's always away in Paris. Mama loves all the health places in Germany. They leave me with Lisa.

The town of Daugavpils is almost asleep in the autumn heat. In the forest, the faintest blush of rust dances on the tips of the trees. The birds are singing. It is August and the birds are still singing. The crying – the silent underground crying – the endless dark shrieks of the dead have not begun. The birds will be the first to hear it. They will hear it all. It will silence their singing for ever.

My nanny's name is Petronella. I can't pronounce her name. I call her Lisa. Lisa sleeps with me. She's an old lady. I think she is 50 years old. I love Lisa. She knows everything about me. She calls me her baby. She knows I am afraid of storms. When there is thunder she holds me. She loves my little black dog Mushka. Mushka is mosquito in Russian. We only speak Russian. We go for long walks. Lisa, Mushka and I. Lisa always holds my hand. I think we live in a forest. There are trees everywhere. Behind our house there is a green space. I love lying on the grass, watching the birds float in the warm air.

The German invasion is lightning quick and brutal. The year is 1941. Overnight the Russians who annexed Latvia and became so strongly a part of their lives have vanished. One moment all of Latvia belongs to them, then there is nothing. The Germans are everywhere. All night the rumbling of heavy vehicles. The marching of men. The very core and fabric of Latvia is suddenly seeped in this German tide.

In Daugavpils there is a public hanging of a single young woman. An ominous warning. A clear message for the entire town.

Frauline Elsbeth is my German governess. She teaches me German. She talks to me while we walk in the forest. I don't like her. She stands so tall. She walks fast and I can't keep up. I see her twice a week. And twice a week Mr. Charmatz comes to our house. He teaches me English. He's a funny man. He only knows two things. One nursery rhyme and one book. Every time he comes I repeat 'There was a little girl who had a little curl right in the middle of her forehead....' The book he knows is about a Prince. He reads it to me. We do this again and again. I learn it by heart. We sit at the dining room table. He's a grubby little man. He dresses so badly. And he smells...

Within a day of the German occupation a notice appears: "All men from 16 to 60 must report to the town square immediately. They must bring shovels and pickaxes".

The rumor is that there is a need for work parties. There is much to clean up in Daugavpils...

My Mama teaches me to play the piano. She plays really well. I love sitting on the piano stool with her. Once a week I go with my cousin to Ballet school. It is run by Madam Mirceva. I'm afraid of her. Her hair is smoothed back into a tight ball. It pulls her eyes sideways. Sometimes she looks almost Chinese. She is very strict. My cousin and I are the dolls in the Ballet Coppelia. I love the costumes. Mama had them made especially for us. I am very small for my age. And thin. I think I look like a doll...

Bernard Levinson is a distinguished South African poet whose work has appeared in numerous scholarly publications and anthologies, including Jewish Affairs. Professionally, he is a psychiatrist based in Johannesburg.

We have the only double story brick house in our street. Mama, Papa and me, and of course Lisa, live upstairs. Papa's brother and his family live downstairs. I go to school with my cousin. She is exactly my age. I knock on the floor with the

broom handle to tell her that I am ready to leave and she meets me downstairs. We walk to school.

They say goodbye to Papa and his brother. They have one shovel and one pickaxe between them. They gather with all the men in the town square. They are broken up into small groups and taken to the railway park. They dig their own graves. They all get undressed before being shot.

The horse-drawn carts heavy with men's clothing are seen blocking the streets. Everyone now knows the truth.

It is Lisa who first sees our neighbour's house on fire. It is made of wood. All the houses are made of wood except our house. She shouts that we must leave immediately. Mama grabs what clothes she can find for us.

The buildings are blown up. They burn furiously. The Dougava River is burning. The entire town is in flames. Maja is standing in front of their stricken home. She is eleven years old. She is wearing a

chocolate brown fur coat and new shoes. Mushka is terrified and hides deep in the fur under her arms. Lisa envelops her with her own body. The groaning of burning walls drowns out their screams.

My wrist watch is on the window sill of my bedroom. It was given to me by Papa on my last birthday. How can I go without it?

The streets are deserted. The slow procession of women wind their way between the charred streets. They slowly walk to the Citadel Fortress to start the brief Ghetto stage before their final journey.

Three months later, in November, the real killings will begin. For the first time Jews will be brought into Latvia to fill the mass graves. It is bitterly cold on that first morning when the men and women are made to undress and stand before the open graves. The forest groans with the weight of the dead.

Now it is August. Late summer August. An August of dreams and innocence. All of Latvia holds its breath.

The Summer When I Was Ten

I sat on the creek bank
Watching the other kids swim
Splashing and laughing
They called me a chicken
But if I took my pants off
They'd see the bruises

John Yarbrough



The Lesson

The ghetto: dawn. A deathly light
Distempers, in the cobbled square,
The spindly scarecrows, stiff with fright,
Assembled at attention there.

A truck, usurped for Nazi use
Brings lumber, men who hammer, brace,
Upraise a gallows, hang a noose,
Depart. The *kapitän*, his face

A mask of granite, spits commands.
A stick man, limp, in rags attired
Is frog-marched to the gibbet, stands,
A flimsy puppet, tangle-wired

– “loaf, a life [the hands make mime]
Possess, in Warsaw, equal weight.
That contrabandage is a crime
Who dares to question shares *his* fate!”

The hangmen, by a finger cued
Upheave their victim, shoulder high;
Too flaccid, he's at last lassoed,
By strangulation left to die.

His neck, they could have broken first
(It's how they would have killed a hen),
The crowds as quickly have dispersed,
But where had been the lesson, then?

Peter Austin

What Will Happen to the World?

In future years,
We will spread tears,
because many animals have become extinct
The world changed after I blinked

What about wars,
when a rocket soars?
This causes pollution,
But is there a solution

Be careful with natural things
and all they bring.
Try to walk to school,
And keep the house cool.
Litter, pesticides and smoke, get rid!
And become an Eco-kid.

Laurie Reznik

(Ms. Reznik, aged 11, was the recipient of the 2008 Young Writer's Award for this poem, which appeared in the anthology The Big Green Machine: Verses from London and the Home Countries 2009)

A BRIEF JOURNEY THROUGH ITALIAN JEWISH HISTORY

*

Bernard Katz

The history of Italian Jewry (and more particularly Roman Jewry) is of unique interest as it spans over twenty centuries and more than half a dozen civilizations, namely the Roman Empire, the Papacy, the Renaissance, the Counter-Reformation, the medieval city republics, unified Italy, modern totalitarianism and the present era.

The Jewish historian Cecil Roth writes that Italy is the only European country which never knew a general persecution of the Jews, and in no other part of the world did such a feeling of friendliness prevail as in Italy between the people and the Jewish population.¹ He has also written that there was no other country in Europe where the Jewish contribution to cultural life was proportionately so great.

Rome's Jewish community is probably the oldest in the world.² Rome is the only city in the Western world in which Jewish settlement remained uninterrupted from remotest times to the present day.

The first recorded presence of Jews in Rome was in the year 161 BCE. After the Jews revolted against the Greeks, Judah Maccabee sent two ambassadors, Jason ben Eleazar and Eupolemos ben Johanan, on a mission to Rome to establish friendly relations. They appeared before the Senate and received written assurances of friendship and protection. These are the first Jews to be in Italy, or to visit Europe, who are known to us by name.³

In 63 BCE, the Roman general Pompey invaded and conquered Judah and renamed it Judea. Pompey entered the Holy of Holies, where the High Priest only entered on Yom Kippur, and was surprised by its emptiness, having expected to find the grandeur he was accustomed to in the Roman temples. In later years, the malicious rumour was spread that he had found there the central figure of Jewish adoration, an ass's head.⁴ Henceforth, Judea effectively became a province of the Roman Empire and the first contingents of Jewish slaves were sent to Rome.

The early Roman emperors became allies of the Jews and accorded them special privileges. Jews favoured Julius Caesar in the civil war against Pompey and Caesar returned the favour by permitting the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt, allowing Jews greater autonomy in their communal affairs and by not requiring Jews to worship the emperor as a deity as was required of Rome's other citizens.⁵ The Temple

of the Divine Julius houses the cremated remains of Julius Caesar, who went to considerable trouble to win the sympathy of the Jews. When he was assassinated in 44 BCE, Jews mourned his death more than any other section of the population.⁶

Julius Caesar's benevolent policy was continued by Augustus and Claudius. The only exception to this early trend was Caligula, the emperor who elevated his favourite horse to consul, and seriously believed in his own divinity. Shortly after Caligula's accession, he made an attempt to enforce the erection of his statue in synagogues and even the Temple. This caused serious concern in the Jewish world and resulted in a Jewish delegation headed by the Jewish philosopher Philo, being sent to Rome. Philo left a vivid account of his impressions of Caligula's court.

At the beginning of the Christian era it has been estimated, based on a medieval report of a census conducted by Emperor Claudius in 48 CE, that seven million Jews lived in the Roman Empire, including 2.5 million in Judea and a million each in Asia Minor, Egypt and Syria.⁷ This represented 10% of the population of the Roman Empire.

The Jewish revolt against Rome represented a clash between Jewish and Greek culture and with the adoption of hero worship, relations between the Jews and the Romans deteriorated swiftly. The historian Paul Johnson thinks that the revolt may have come during the reign of Caligula (37 - 41 CE) who sought to impose full blooded hero worship, had it not been for his assassination.⁸

The revolt of 66 CE was one of the most significant and horrifying events in Jewish history and is unfortunately badly recorded. Tacitus left a long account but only fragments survive. Virtually the only authority for the war is Josephus, and he is, in the words of Paul Johnson "tendentious, contradictory and thoroughly unreliable".⁹ The war in Judea was initially conducted by Vespasian, but in 69 CE he was made emperor and returned to Rome, leaving his son, Titus, in charge of the campaign for Jerusalem.

Alexander the Great had used 32 000 men to create his empire. Caesar had used fewer than 25 000 and Hannibal less than 50 000. Titus needed 80 000 soldiers and four years to subdue Jerusalem.¹⁰ At the war's end, Vespasian and Titus were so proud of their achievement that they minted coins with the inscription "*Judea Capta*" - Judea is in captivity. Further contingents of Jewish slaves followed the Roman Jewish war of 66 - 70 CE, where it has been stated that 97 000 Jewish slaves were brought back to Rome alone.¹¹

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The Bar Kochba revolt of 132 - 135 CE had its seeds in the decision by Emperor Hadrian to build over the ruins of Jerusalem a Roman city called Aelia Capitolina.¹² Its initial success was made possible by the fact that on this occasion the Jews, or at least their militant elements, were united under the leadership of a single strong personality, Shimon bar Kosiba (known as Bar Kochba). The Roman historian Dio says 580 000 Jews died in the fighting and nearly the entire land was laid waste.¹³ Of all the Roman conflicts against the Jews, the Bar Kochba revolt was the most costly to the Romans. Emperor Hadrian reporting to the Senate after the war omitted the customary ending "I and my army are well".¹⁴ After the Bar Kochba revolt there were so many Jewish slaves for sale that the price dropped to less than that of a horse.¹⁵

The two catastrophes, of 70 CE and 135 CE, effectively ended Jewish state history in antiquity.

It is recorded that many of these Jewish slaves did not remain slaves for long¹⁶ and were redeemed by other Jews. Jews did not make good slaves and were disliked by their owners, inter alia, because of their independent temperament, and more importantly, the fact that they would not work on the Sabbath and insisted on special food.¹⁷ The origin of Jewish settlement in Europe was not due entirely to the slave element; commerce was also a potent factor, and Jews were prominent in trade in the Mediterranean.¹⁸

The Romans conducted a liberal administration and it is to their credit that they did not permit the Judean war to involve a universal religious persecution even though the Jewish position must have been for some time highly uncomfortable.¹⁹ Even after the Jewish-Roman wars, Judaism continued to be tolerated²⁰ and in 112 CE Emperor Caracalla conferred full citizenship on the Jews.

Judaism became popular, particularly amongst the upper classes, and numerous persons discarded idolatry and began to observe some of the ceremonies including the Sabbath. Nero's empress, Poppaea, was one of them²¹ and Emperor Augustus, in a letter to Tiberius wrote, "Not even a Jew observes the Sabbath as faithfully as I do".²² Apparently, circumcision was a deterrent to proper conversion for adult men but, as a humorist observed, their sons became Jews in the fullest physical sense.²³

In 313 CE, Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion and enacted legislation prohibiting conversion to Judaism, Jews marrying Christian women and Jews owning Christian slaves.²⁴ The position of the Jews thus began changing for the worse²⁵ and this marked the transition from an era of tolerance to one of subjection.²⁶ Legend has it that on the eve of an important battle Emperor Constantine saw a cross of light in the heavens bearing the inscription "Conquer by this".²⁷ Contrary to popular belief, Constantine himself did not adopt Christianity.²⁸ He was also responsible for relocating the capital to Constantinople, named after him.

The Roman Empire declined and finally succumbed to repeated Barbarian invasions. Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410, the Vandals in

455 and in 476 the last emperor in the west, whose name ironically was Romulus, was deposed and the Roman Empire came to an end.

The Papacy was established in Rome in the 6th Century and treatment of the Jews varied from pope to pope. For the next 1400 years, Jewish history was in large measure determined by papal policy. Some popes safeguarded the Jews and even had Jewish financiers and physicians whereas others were bitterly antisemitic. Pope Gregory (590–604) set the example which was followed by many of his successors and remained the norm until the close of the Middle Ages. While it was not a completely favourable policy, there was a certain sufferance and Jews were protected with some minimal legal rights.²⁹ Jews were entitled to freedom of worship and to maintain their own synagogues but were not allowed to build new ones. Conversion was encouraged but through peaceable means, persecution was discouraged and Jewish physicians were prohibited from having Christian patients. But, as Cecil Roth writes, "Niceties of policy could hardly be appreciated by subordinate ecclesiastics".³⁰ The popes generally adhered to the principle of toleration and moderation and even the Crusades did not obtain a strong following in Italy ("Here religion was not taken quite so seriously").³¹

An interesting story from the 11th Century relates to a wealthy Jew named Baruch, who converted to Christianity and adopted the name Benedict. He married the daughter of a Roman noble and they called their son Leo. Leo's son entered the Church and became Pope Anacletus II in 1130 until his death in 1138.³²

The period of the Renaissance marked a high point for Jews in Italy. In Rome, the popes were strong and were more influenced by political and cultural interests than by religious pressure. Furthermore every pope had a Jewish physician in his employ.³³ Towards the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th Century, Italian Jewry embarked on a new sphere of economic activity as small scale moneylenders. The 14th and 15th Centuries saw the expansion of these activities, which resulted less in large fortunes for a few than in modest fortunes for many.³⁴ The Spanish expulsion of 1492 resulted in a large number of Jewish refugees arriving in Italy. The most important of these was Don Isaac Abravanel, who first settled in Naples before moving to Venice.

After Martin Luther nailed his famous Theses on the cathedral door at Wittenberg in 1517, the birth and dramatic growth of the Protestant movement resulted in Jewish life changing dramatically for the worse. The Catholic Church was threatened and began to put its house in order in a process known as the Counter-Reformation. No longer were enlightened popes elected; henceforth, popes were elected with the requirements of the church being paramount.³⁵ Hitherto the Papacy had generally acted as a protector of Jews,³⁶ but henceforth, though it never tolerated violence, it instigated the severest repression.

In 1555, Paul IV became pope, and issued the famous Bull starting with words "*Cum nimis*

absurdum". This addressed the 'absurdity' of allowing the then present state of affairs with regard to the Jews to continue and led to the confinement of Jews to the ghetto. Jews were allowed only one synagogue, ownership of real estate was outlawed, Jewish men were forced to wear a yellow hat and Jewish physicians were no longer permitted to treat Christian patients.³⁷ The ghetto spread across Italy and ushered in a dark period for Italian Jews, lasting for around 300 years.

Paul IV had been an unpopular pope, and as he lay dying in 1559 the mob dislodged a statue of him on Capitoline Hill, crowned its head with one of the yellow hats he had forced the Jews to wear and used it as a football in the streets.

Each ghetto had its own character. Some were overcrowded and unhealthy, as was Rome's. Others were more spacious and comfortable, as was Venice's. Cecil Roth wrote about conditions in the Rome ghetto:

Nowhere in the entire country – nowhere perhaps in all Europe – did the Jews live under worse conditions. The Ghetto was situated in the fetid, low-lying quarter on the left bank of the Tiber, frequently inundated by the overflowing of the river and heavily visited at time of plague...³⁸

It was necessary for the Jewish community to greet each new pope. This ceremony took place near the Arch of Titus. The Jewish community brought with them the Torah, which the pope returned to them. In the 17th Century, Pope Urban VIII added a new and hardly credible humiliation to the ceremony when he decreed that the Jews might no longer kiss the foot of the pope, but only the spot where it had stood.³⁹

In 1796, Napoleon Bonaparte commenced his victorious Italian campaign and was hailed by the Jews as their saviour. After liberating the ghettos, Napoleon proclaimed equality for the Jews and Pope Pius left Rome as a captive never to return. Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 was a disaster for democratic Italians and Jews; the popes were restored and the Jews were driven back into the ghetto.⁴⁰

The Risorgimento, or Reawakening, is the national liberation movement to which modern Italy owes its being. Under the political leadership of Mazzini and the military leadership of Garibaldi, its aim was to free Italy from papal and foreign domination. This process commenced in 1848 and was completed by 1870, with Rome becoming the capital of a united Italy. The rabbis supported the cause and preached recruitment sermons from the pulpit; Jews took part in this movement and paid a price out of all proportion to their numbers.⁴¹

Italian Jewry now became one of the best integrated Jewish communities in Europe. Roth wrote that twenty two years had sufficed to bring the emancipation of Jews in Italy to fruition. In 1848, there was no European country (except Spain, from where they were entirely excluded) where the restrictions placed upon them were more galling and

more humiliating, whereas after 1870, there was no land where conditions were better.⁴²

Benito Mussolini oscillated all his life between philo- and antisemitism.⁴³ When the Fascist movement was formed in 1919 it initially showed no trace of antisemitism. Jews were in fact among the original founders and were active in every branch of it. Mussolini came to power in 1922 and in 1929 observed that "The Jewish problem does not exist in Italy". In 1930, he publicly denounced antisemitism as "Unworthy of a European nation...stupid and barbarous".⁴⁴ In 1933, he called for the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine and in 1934 described himself as a "Zionist" in a talk with Nahum Goldmann.⁴⁵ It was only in 1938, with the formation of an alliance with Nazi Germany, that severe discriminatory laws modelled on the Nuremberg Laws were enacted in Italy. After the introduction of these laws, among those dismissed from their positions were no fewer than fifty high ranking naval officials; in the army, the process of elimination was no less drastic. Colonel Segre paraded his regiment and blew out his brains in their presence, while General Ascoli did the same, but in private.

On 25 July 1943, Mussolini was dismissed from office and on 8 September Italy surrendered to the Allies. However, the Germans reacted, and the greater part of the country, from Rome northwards fell under their control. Unfortunately for the Jews, over the past four and a half centuries Jewish life in Italy had shifted from the south to the north of the country; south of Rome, only a few hundred Jews lived.

Prior to this Mussolini, despite enormous pressure from Germany, refused to have anything to do with the Final Solution.⁴⁶ It was only now that Himmler was able to draw Italy into it. On 24 September 1943, he sent instructions to his SS boss in Rome, Herbert Kappler, that all Jews were to be rounded up and sent to Germany. But the German ambassador in Rome, whose Italian mistress was hiding a family of Jews in her home with his approval, gave no help and the military commander said he needed the Jews to build fortifications. Kappler used his order to blackmail the Jewish community and demanded fifty kilograms of gold within 36 hours otherwise 200 Jews would die. When the two leaders of the Jewish community asked to be allowed to pay in Lira, Kappler sneered, "I can print as much of that as I want". The gold was delivered within four days.⁴⁷

Immediately prior to World War II 35 000 Jews were living in Italy and roughly 80% survived the war⁴⁸ (which, in occupied Europe, is the highest percentage after Denmark).⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Italian Jewry suffered a crushing blow. In the words of Cecil Roth, "...Not only had the habit of Jewish life been interrupted, but in many places its setting had disappeared – the lovely old synagogues ruined, the artistic and literary treasures despoiled, the historic archives dispersed. Such a blow could not fail to leave a lasting impression".⁵⁰

Roth further notes that many Jews owed their lives to Christian neighbours and the active support of the Christian Church. A great, or perhaps greater

part, of the Italian people was unaffected by the unceasing torrent of propaganda.⁵¹

In recent times, considerable progress has been made in bettering Jewish-Catholic relations. In the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, at the 1965 Vatican Council II, Pope John XXIII officially condemned the accusation of deicide made against the Jewish people. In 1986, Pope John Paul II became the first pope to attend a synagogue service, taking turns with the chief rabbi to read psalms. Pope John Paul II told the congregation: "You are our dearly beloved brothers, and in a way you are our elder brothers".⁵²

Notable Italian Jews have included Luigi Luzzatti, who became Prime Minister in 1910, Camillo Olivetti, founder of Olivetti typewriters, the painter Amadeo Modigliani, and Primo Levi, whose account of the Holocaust has received international acclaim.

There are close to 70 synagogues in Italy dating from the Middle Ages to the 20th Century.⁵³ It is estimated that 35000 Jews live in Italy at present, of which 15000 live in Rome and 10 000 in Milan.

Ancient Rome, the area around the Roman Forum and Coliseum contains many sites of Jewish interest. The Arch of Titus was erected in 81 CE to celebrate the victory of Titus (and Vespasian) in Judea. It recalls the destruction of the Temple and depicts Roman soldiers carrying the seven branched menorah. Apparently, the base of this menorah differs from the dimensions set out in the Torah and hence it is argued that it cannot be the original from Solomon's Temple. Interestingly, Israel chose to use the same base for the menorah which is its national emblem. Jews refused to walk under the Arch of Titus until Israel was once again free, a condition which was fulfilled in 1948 with Israel's independence.⁵⁴ However, a barrier is present around the Arch of Titus, so while Jewish law now permits walking under the arch, Italian law prohibit it.

After Titus conquered Jerusalem, he went into the Holy of Holies, an act which so offended the Jews that Titus was placed forever in their gallery of most despised enemies.⁵⁵ Jewish tradition has it that Titus was punished through a mosquito flying into his nose and entering his ear, causing a buzzing sound. To this day, a medical condition which causes a buzzing sound in one's ear is named *Tinnitus*, after Titus. The famous Biblical commentator, Onkelos, was a nephew of Titus and it is recorded in the Talmud that when he was considering converting to Judaism he raised the spirit of Titus through necromancy.⁵⁶

Vespasian is also mentioned in the Talmud, which narrates that as Vespasian's advance on Jerusalem gained momentum, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai decided to seek him out in order to try negotiate a settlement with him. He had himself smuggled out of the city by his students in a coffin and on meeting Vespasian advised him that he was destined to be king. When soon afterwards a messenger arrived from Rome to inform Vespasian that Nero had died and that Vespasian was the new Caesar, Vespasian inquired of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai what he wanted. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai answered "Give me the town of Yavneh and its Sages".⁵⁷ This action

by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai is viewed by many as being responsible for the survival of the Jewish people.

Rome

At the top of Capitoline Hill, one of Rome's seven hills, stands a bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (161 - 180 CE). Marcus Aurelius is remembered as a philosopher who had a low opinion of the Jews but a high opinion of their patriarch Judah haNasi, and as having been a particularly ruthless persecutor of Christians.

The Forum of Peace housed the *Tzitz*, the golden plaque which adorned the head of the Kohen Gadol, after it was brought from the Temple. The *Tzitz* is referred to in the Talmud Yerushalmi, where the question is asked whether the words "*kadosh l'Hashem*" written on the *Tzitz* were written on one or two lines. Rabbi Eliezer ben Yose answered that he had seen the *Tzitz* while in Rome and could confirm that it was written on one line.⁵⁸

The Coliseum was built by Vespasian and completed in 80 CE. It is recorded that many Jewish slaves worked on its construction.⁵⁹

For the second half of the First Century CE, evidence exists that there were twelve different synagogues in Rome⁶⁰ although not contemporaneously. The ruins of one of these synagogues have been found at Ostia Antica, which is about 30 kilometres south-east of Rome. In ancient times, it served as Rome's port city for many centuries until the course of the Tiber River changed, leaving Ostia Antica "high and dry".⁶¹

Ostia Antica was home to a sizeable and wealthy Jewish community who built a synagogue in the middle of the First Century. The ruins of this synagogue, which was restored in the Fourth Century, were discovered in 1961.⁶² The Aron Kodesh, which faces Jerusalem, and a seven armed menorah chiselled in the stone, can be seen. Also visible are a prayer room, a women's section, a *mikveh* and a kitchen. The kitchen contains an oven and a marble counter.

The area where the Jewish Ghetto in Rome once was today contains the Great Synagogue, the Jewish Museum, Jewish schools and a number of kosher restaurants. The ghetto period in Rome lasted from 1555 until Passover night in 1846, when the ghetto was razed to the ground, never to be restored.⁶³ Sweeping changes have occurred in the ghetto. Today, only as few streets give an idea of its original appearance and only a few corners recall the old unsanitary conditions.⁶⁴ The building containing five synagogues at No 37 Piazza delle Cinque Scole was demolished in order to build the Great Synagogue.⁶⁵ The civic rules which prescribed that Jews could only have one synagogue had been circumvented by maintaining the five synagogues under one roof.⁶⁶

There are currently 13 synagogues in Rome most of which are Sephardi.⁶⁷ The Great Synagogue, a magnificent edifice, was officially opened in 1904. Legend has it that King Emmanuele had been reluctant to attend the opening and only agreed after being

assured that it was a Jewish church and there was no Jesus in this church. Apparently, after the unification of Italy in 1870 very little tolerance existed amongst its leadership for the popes and the church. The synagogue has an oriental style and its impressive dome stands out as a landmark on the skyline of Rome. The origins of Rome's Jewish community predates Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities and this section of the community sees itself as neither Ashkenazi or Sephardi and has developed its own customs and rituals.⁶⁸ The service in the synagogue follows *Nusach Italki* (Italian rite) and is difficult to follow. The building can accommodate 700 men and 500 women. After World War II the thirty chief families, the Scuola Tempio, could trace their ancestry back to the time of the Emperor Titus, 1900 years ago, when they were brought in chains after the destruction of the Temple.⁶⁹

After World War II, Israel Anton Zolli was reinstated as the chief rabbi of Rome, but this appointment sparked acrimonious controversy and opposition. Many accused him of collaboration and complicity with the Germans. In February 1945, he converted to Catholicism. Today, almost all synagogues in Italy are Orthodox; the Reform movement has had little impact, perhaps because Italian Orthodoxy was at no time as rigid as it was north of the Alps.

The Jewish Museum is located on the premises of the Great Synagogue. It houses a number of interesting exhibits, including a *parochet* which is supposedly worth Euro 2.5 million and Torah covers which are still used. One Torah cover was made from a dress of a Swedish princess who converted to Catholicism and was disowned by her family.

Authentic *cucina romana* also has its roots in Jewish cuisine, whose origins date back 400 years. These kosher restaurants are well known for Jewish and Roman artichokes. Jewish artichokes are open and deep fried until crisp – the petals are plucked off and eaten whereas Roman artichokes are boiled in vinegar and olive oil and are soft.

Campo de Fiori is one of Rome's prominent squares. It is recorded that on the Jewish New Year 1553 an auto de fe was held there during which an enormous number of Hebrew books were burnt.

Piazza Navona is perhaps Rome's most prominent square. From the 15th to 17th Centuries, it was a carnival sport and comic spectacle to force old Jewish men to eat a heavy meal and then, clothed only in a loin cloth, run in a carnival race around this square. This practice continued until 1668.⁷⁰

Michelangelo's Moses is housed in a church called San Pietro in Vincoli. This Moses has horns – apparently because of an error in translation from the Book of Exodus where the Hebrew word *keren* had been translated as horn instead of ray of light.

The Vatican museums contain items of Jewish interest. One exhibit comprises Jewish gravestones from the 1st to the 3rd Centuries CE. Many are engraved with menorahs and some have Hebrew writing, although most are in Greek. These gravestones were found in the catacombs, deep

subterranean tunnels which were the earliest burial places used by Roman Jews. Six Jewish catacombs have been found in Rome, mainly along the Appian Way, but it is difficult for the public to gain access to them.

The Sistine Chapel was commissioned by Pope Sixtus IV, after whom it is also named, and was built according to the exact dimensions of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.⁷¹ It was Pope Julius II who forced a reluctant Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, a task which took Michelangelo four and a half years to complete and which he finished in 1508. The panel depicting the "Creation of Adam" is the most famous part of the ceiling and one of the best known images in the world. The philosopher Goethe wrote about Michelangelo's effort, "Without having seen the Sistine Chapel one can form no appreciable idea of what one man is capable of achieving". Twenty-three years later, Michelangelo was back to paint the "Last Judgement" on the Sistine Chapel wall, a task which took him seven years to complete.

Rabbi Benjamin Blech and Roy Doliner recently published a controversial book called *The Sistine Secrets* in which they claim that Michelangelo embedded secret messages into his frescos. They refer to the fact that the ceiling does not contain even one figure from the New Testament and that all the images are from the Old Testament. Michelangelo, they say, was asking the church why Christianity had ignored its true roots and claim that he was preaching reconciliation between Christians and Jews. They also assert that Michelangelo had a deep understanding of Torah, Kabbalah, Talmud and Midrash and that many of his images were influenced by this knowledge.

There are a number of theories as to what happened to the *Menorah* taken from the Temple, including that it was thrown into the Tiber, was taken by the Barbarians to North Africa or is hidden somewhere in the Vatican.

Florence

Up until the reign of Cosimo de Medici, the Republic of Florence had barred Jews. Since the Church frowned upon usury, the Tuscan Christian banking families specialized in lending only to foreign royalty and international business concerns. This left the field wide open for Jews to lend to the common people. When Cosimo came to power he invited the Jews to Florence. It seems that the Jewish community of Florence originated in 1437, when some Jewish bankers began lending money there.⁷²

Jewish life in Florence was tied to the Medicis. When the latter were driven out of town, the Jews left as well. When they returned, the Jews returned with them.

The ghetto was established in 1570 by Cosimo I, who was anxious to obtain the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany from Pope Pius V.⁷³ It existed until 1848, a period of 278 years, when it was erased completely. In the view of Cecil Rot, this was an "irreparable loss

of the city”.⁷⁴ The ghetto was situated in the area around what is today Piazza della Repubblica and a plaque in this piazza reads “The old centre of the city was restored to new life after centuries of squalor”.

The Florence Synagogue (which is Sephardi) is one of the most beautiful in Europe. Money was donated by David Levi to build a synagogue “worthy of Florence”. It was completed in 1882, and is of Moorish design. Its central dome is sheathed in copper, which has since turned green. The doors of the ark still bear the scars inflicted by Fascist bayonets. Unlike in Rome, the Jewish community in Florence decided to locate the synagogue away from the area where the ghetto existed. The synagogue has an interesting South African connection. In 1944, servicemen Leon Dison and Hymie Bloch were instructed to check the building as it was feared that it had been booby trapped by the Nazis. Bloch lived in Durban and passed away in 2004. As of last year Leon Dison, aged 87, was living in Johannesburg.⁷⁵

Michelangelo’s David is housed in the Accademia Gallery. Given that Michelangelo was supposedly so well versed in Judaism, it is an interesting question as to why David is uncircumcised. *The Sistine Secrets* claims that the simplest reason is that Michelangelo had never seen a circumcised organ. The other reason it puts forward is that the Inquisition was still strong and Michelangelo did not want to be accused of Judaizing.⁷⁶

The Church of Santa Croce displays a prominent Magen David on its exterior. The façade was designed by a Jewish architect who, according to the *The Sistine Secrets*, was told that his name would not appear on the church, so insisted that a large Magen David be placed prominently on its front.⁷⁷ Jews were forced to fulfil quotas to listen to sermons in this church, with the preacher’s fee having to be paid by the Jewish community.⁷⁸

The Jewish community of Florence today numbers around 900.

Venice

Venice was for a long time intolerant of Jews, who were considered dangerous rivals in trade, but this was more from commercial jealousy than religious zeal. No concrete proof of a Jewish presence in Venice can be traced prior to the 14th Century, although many Jewish merchants and moneylenders visited and worked in the city from the 10th Century onwards. In 1298, the rate of interest charged by the local Christian usurers had become so severe that Jewish moneylenders were permitted. The prejudice was so strong, however, that initially Jews had to conduct business from Mestre, the nearest point on the mainland. In the end, three loan banks were permitted to open in the city.⁷⁹ A *condotta*, which regulated this arrangement, was periodically renewed and at times cancelled.

Over time, the number and importance of the Jews increased. In 1516, agitation for the expulsion of the Jews ultimately led to a decision to segregate the entire community. The place which was chosen

was where a cannon foundry had been present. Venice was the first city in the world to force Jews to live in a ghetto and indeed is the city that gave the world that word. The word ghetto most probably derives from the Italian word *geto*, which means foundry.⁸⁰ The ghetto had high walls and two gates manned by four Christian guards, six other guards manned two patrol boats to prevent nocturnal violations, and all ten had to be paid by the Jewish community. Although ostracized, Jews were safe in Venice. In the 17th Century, its golden age, 5000 Jews lived in the ghetto. Jewish scholarship and commerce flourished, with Jews controlling most of Venice’s foreign trade. According to a Jewish writer in the 17th century, the Venetians were “more pleasing and kindly with the Jews than any other in the world”.⁸¹ Rabbis frequently complained about the luxury and worldliness of ghetto life, and the preference for Italian over Hebrew. Many of them would have liked the ghetto walls to be higher.⁸² The Venice ghetto was a relatively large quarter, and is one of the few that have survived in their original form.

The birth of Hebrew publishing in Venice took place contemporaneously with the birth of the ghetto. Hebrew publishing was important for its quantity and especially the quality of its output.⁸³ The gates of the ghetto were pulled down after the Napoleonic invasion in 1797.

There are five synagogues in the ghetto, two Ashkenazi (for German, and French Jews), one for Italian rites and two Sephardi (for Spanish and Turkish Jews). These all date back to the 16th Century. Only two are still actively used, the Spanish synagogue between Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, as it is cool, and the Turkish synagogue between Rosh Hashanah and Pesach, as it has heating. The Spanish synagogue has been described as the most immense and imposing of the Venetian synagogues⁸⁴ and may be the only synagogue in the world that has held services continuously from 1550 to the present day.⁸⁵

Shabbat meals are available at the Gam Gam restaurant, which is hosted by Chabad Rabbi Schachar Banin and his wife Ramy. Rabbi Banin was born in Italy of Yemenite extraction and has been living in Venice for seventeen years.

The Rialto commercial district was the setting for Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, and it depended on Jewish merchants and moneylenders. Paul Johnson, in his *History of the Jews*, writes that it was plausible in having Jessica say that her father Shylock’s house was full of treasures. Successful Jewish moneylenders often accumulated quantities of unredeemed pledges, especially jewels.⁸⁶

The Jewish population of Venice is less than 500, and of these, very few live in the ghetto.

NOTES

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TRUTH-TELLING IN MEDICAL PRACTICE: ETHICAL DILEMMAS FOR JEWISH DOCTORS AND PATIENTS

*

Maurice Silbert

To tell or not to tell, particularly when it applies to breaking news to a patient regarding an illness feared to be serious or life threatening, has always been a controversial issue in medical practice and society at large, and raises numerous ethical issues. Moreover, there are distinct differences in the approach to this topic amongst various religious and cultural groups. This article attempts to define the Jewish approach, and hopefully to create better understanding of the subject amongst doctors and all health-care providers.

Although there has been a universal shift towards the right to know, in keeping with the culture of the open society, there is still a tendency to withhold the whole truth of the ultimate prognosis of the illness. Reasons for this include “perceived lack of training [of doctors and other health care providers], no time to attend to the patient’s [on-going] emotional needs, fear of negative impact on the patient, uncertainty about prognostications, requests from family members to withhold information, and a feeling of hopelessness regarding further curative treatment”.¹ The traditional view amongst doctors is that most patients do not want to know of the terminal nature of the illness, and have difficulty in coping with the emotional trauma of such disclosures. Alternatively, it is felt that the whole truth, and the way it is often disclosed by doctors, can be insensitive or even brutal, as such lacking compassion on the part of the doctor, and thus being morally indefensible. The implication is that withholding some of the truth can be justified.

In a discourse on contemporary medical practice Rabbi Immanuel Jacobovits, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and noted bio-ethicist, stated in the context of imparting bad news, ‘...we are opposed to divulging the whole truth if there is the slightest suspicion that by doing so, we may cause a physical or mental setback to the patient...peace of mind takes priority over truth, and if necessary, we may play down and suppress the truth...[and] hope is not ultimately removed from the patient...’.² Within the ethos of Judaism, it fulfils the Jewish recognition that the sanctity of life is paramount - very fraction of every second of life being of infinite value. Psalm 71, states ‘...when my strength faileth, forsake me not...but as for me, I will hope continually...’.³

Providing hope is not unique to Judaism. Eastern religions and Christianity profess their own particular approaches to providing hope. Relief of pain and suffering, for instance, provide the patient and family with hope and meaning from which they gain strength in the face of fear. Moreover, in the medical context it is realistic to provide hope in view of the vast improvement in the management and prognoses of malignant diseases.

Providing hope is, therefore, universally seen to be a central force between recovery, and belief in recovery. Withholding the truth in order to provide such hope is, however, fraught with problems and dilemmas for the doctor since ‘well-intentioned practices of withholding information may have detrimental consequences for patients, their families and friends, and the health-care team’.⁴ There is a distinct possibility that the patient may lose trust in the doctor when ultimately, and inevitably, s/he becomes aware of the true nature of the illness and its ultimate prognosis. Consequently s/he may also disbelieve what s/he is told thereafter, and this may seriously infringe on the doctor-patient relationship.

It may also be regarded as paternalism on the part of the doctor, who takes it upon him/herself to decide what, and how much, the patient ought to know, thereby failing to recognize the autonomy of the patient. There is a strong emphasis on patient autonomy and the right to know, which constitutes one of the most important ethical reasons for truthful disclosure. Patient autonomy is recognized by the South African Medical Association as an important ethic in doctor-patient relationship, and has incorporated it in the Association’s credo and code of conduct. The right to know enables the patient to share in decision-making about treatment, and in effect about his/her own life and destiny. Awareness of the diagnosis and its prognosis also provides opportunities for the patient to discuss his/her uncertainties and fears, and share feelings such as depression, anxiety, and isolation - not only with the doctor but also with family members, friends and other significant individuals who can provide support. Research has also found that being honest with patients rather than adopting an avoidance approach is a way of fostering hope.⁵ From a temporal perspective, patients may want to attend to more practical matters such as business or domestic affairs, and come to terms with personal relationships with family and friends. A large cross-cultural study endorses the fact that patients can discuss the topic without it having a negative impact on them.⁶

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How then can the Jewish doctor resolve the dilemma between our moral obligations to show compassion, in accordance with the aforementioned Rabbinical injunctions, while at the same time fulfilling ethical commitment to disclosing the truth?

Awareness by the doctor of the coping or defense mechanisms of the patient, and the psychological stages which patients diagnosed with serious or life-threatening illness experience, provide a model or basis for an approach by the doctor. In her widely acclaimed, groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross⁷ describes the stages of denial, anger, depression, and ultimate acceptance. Denial is the strongest human defense, and during this stage there is disbelief of the seriousness of illness. By way of example, patients may want to block out the fact that they have cancer and often it would be appropriate for the doctor initially to use terminology such as 'growth' or 'tumor'. By informing the patient of the diagnosis the doctor is fulfilling his/her commitment to telling the truth. By initially withholding information about possible serious implications or prognosis of the illness, the doctor allows the patient time to gather him/herself: by so doing, he/she respects the patient's defenses of denial and shows compassion towards the patient.

In the course of time, the patient's defenses of denial gradually diminish and there is acceptance of the true nature of the illness. The general principle of the doctor's approach, therefore, is that it is *usually* possible to temporise, and impart the news in stages in keeping with the patient's defenses, withholding some of the truth when necessary, and allowing the patient time to set his/her own pace and mobilize less radical defenses as s/he becomes adjusted to the seriousness of the illness. The social worker Margaret Abeles states that Rabbinic law says, "...one should not divulge the truth". She adds, however, "...there are also sources that teach us that if the patient is so disturbed by knowing it is permissible to tell him/her, as the knowledge will be a source of relief. Therefore, it seems that Jewish law says that we must be guided by our patients".⁸ Rabbi Jacobovits puts the Jewish approach succinctly: "...the patient should be allowed to buy time, gather himself and mobilize his resources..." This demonstrates compassion and is in keeping with Jewish humanistic philosophy.

The principles embodied in the above not only facilitate doctors' communication with their patients, but also help to resolve many of the moral, ethical, and religious dilemmas facing them.

End of Life Decision-Making

Doctors' undergraduate training emphasizes the importance of making diagnoses and curing illness, be it heart attack, pneumonia, or for that matter any illness, ailment, or injury. When cure is no longer possible, such as in chronic refractory or terminal illness, and ultimately in the dying process, relief of pain and suffering become preeminent. The adage coined by John Fry, a veritable doyen of family practice, to "cure sometimes, relieve often, and

comfort always", becomes singularly appropriate. Caring for our patients' medical problems and caring about them as human beings, a paradigm for all doctors in all disciplines of medicine, becomes the defined role and elevates the role of curing to that of healing.

In the case of Jewish patients, there is the added responsibility for the doctor to have insight and sensitive to religious practices and *Halachic* imperatives, particularly so in terminal illness, and where life and death decisions present difficult dilemmas. Two cases are here presented which illustrate the role the doctor can play in resolving such problems.

Case no.1

Mike, aged 76, suffered severe head injuries for which he was hospitalized and subjected to brain surgery. Following the surgery, he remained deeply unconscious and had to be supported by artificial ventilation. The family who gathered around him on a daily basis suffered unendurable stress at observing their beloved Mike in so heart-rending a situation. In the company of their Rabbi, who was a close family friend, they would sit praying at Mike's bedside. After two days, it was quite apparent that Mike's comatose state was irreversible and he would not survive. The family's agony had now reached breaking point and they were consulted about terminating life-support. This provoked a serious dilemma in view of the *Halachic* constraints expressed by their friend, the Rabbi.

The doctor consulted with the Rabbi, who with sublime generosity, insight and humanity, agreed to distance and recuse himself from any decision-making, while the same time reassuring the doctor that he would accord Mike a traditional Orthodox burial whatever decision would be taken by the doctor and family. The doctor visited the family and comforted them by relating the Rabbi's sentiments, and advised them that the recommendation of terminating life support rested on the doctor's shoulders, and that the Rabbi could not be expected to participate in such decision-making. The family agreed to the medical advice and the painful decision to turn off the ventilation was made. Within six minutes of doing so their beloved Mike's life terminated. The family left Mike's bedside and returned home in the comfort of their togetherness.

Termination of life and euthanasia are anathema to Judaism. The debate on termination of life in the terminally ill has prevailed over centuries and as far back as the Talmud which states that to hasten the death of a dying person is prohibited. More recent Rabbinic literature of the treatment of the terminally ill is that of Rabbi Feinstein,⁹ a noted bioethicist, who stated that for a patient with pain and suffering who *cannot be cured and cannot live much longer*, it is not obligatory for physicians to administer medication to prolong life and suffering, and nature may be allowed to its course. Therefore, although it is prohibited to administer medication to hasten death,

it is not obligatory for doctors to administer medication to prolong life and suffering. In the case of Mike, the artificial ventilation with oxygen can justifiably be construed as administering medication to prolong life of a patient who cannot be cured and cannot live much longer. Withdrawal of life support would therefore be justified, not only on humanitarian grounds but also within the context of Rabbi Feinstein's injunction.

Case no. 2

Sarah and her husband, Sam, had immigrated to South Africa from Germany in the mid-1930s. After some years, Sarah contracted a malignant illness to which she ultimately succumbed. She had stipulated in her will that she wished to be cremated – an anathema to Orthodox Judaism. Her family, who practiced Orthodox Judaism, expressed extreme discomfort about her request and insisted on a traditional burial. This was reinforced by the fact that Sarah's father had been an Orthodox Rabbi. However, the request of an individual stipulated in a will is regarded as sacrosanct and should be respected.

The doctor counseled the family at great length, ultimately drawing their attention to the fact that many of Sarah's acquaintances and family members had perished in the crematoria of the Nazi death camps, and that she was manifesting what was referred to as 'survivor guilt', and desired the same fate. The family gained insight into this dynamic and agreed to the cremation that was then to be conducted by an alternative congregation.

The term 'survivor guilt' has been documented by Holocaust commentators, such as Andy Douillard in 2005 in a lecture course on 'interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Holocaust'. The dynamic which operates in such cases was verbalized in these words... "why am I still alive when others have perished...?" Survivor guilt is also connected to an unconscious feeling of powerlessness in the face of atrocities perpetrated against loved ones.

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A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

*

Charlotte Cohen

The conversation was intelligent and stimulating. Spoken quite casually, and despite the fact that I had never heard it used in a sentence before, one word seemed to fit perfectly. The word was ‘anthropomorphic.’

Upon asking what it meant, the explanation I was given was that, in that context, it was: “when God is described as a human being”. The dictionary confirmed the explanation: “attributing human form or personality to God”.

I wondered whether I would ever have occasion to use such a word. The opportunity arose at a conference, when I used it to introduce two favorite stories to illustrate the topic of the day.

The first story concerns an old man who pleads in his prayers every day: “Please God, let me win the lottery! Please God! Please! Let me win the lottery!”

This continues day in and day out for ages and eventually one of the angels goes to God and says: “Why don’t let him win the lottery? After all, he’s been praying like this for years, and he’s already 87 years old; and really, how much longer has he got to go?”

“Look,” says God, “I’d *like* him to win it. In fact, I *want* him to win it. But he never buys a ticket!”

The second story finds us at the scene of a flood - a man is standing chest deep in water.

Someone floats by on a log. “Take my hand” he says to the man, “I’ll pull you onto the log.”

“No,” says the man, “I have faith. God will save me.”

When the water is up to his shoulders, a small boat sails past.

“We’re throwing you a life-belt!” shouts someone from the boat, “Swim towards it and we’ll pull you up on to the boat!”

“No” says the man, “I have faith in God. He will save me.”

With the water already up to his chin, a helicopter flies by: “We’re lowering a rope-ladder! Grab it and we’ll haul you up!”

“No!” gurgles the man, “I have faith! God will save me!”

Eventually the water rises over his head and he drowns.

“I don’t understand” he complains bitterly to God, “I led an exemplary life. I obeyed all Your commandments. Why didn’t You save me? Why did

You let me drown?

“What’s the matter with you?” says God, “I sent you a log *and* a boat *and* a helicopter!”

What these stories illustrate is that, besides the fact that we often don’t *make* the opportunity; we don’t even *take* it when it presents itself. Furthermore, many of us fail to even *see* the opportunity. However, what is worse, even when actually presented with the opportunity, we do not trouble to make use of it.

A large sign in that conference room read: “We are all faced with great opportunities – often disguised as impossible situations or hard work.”

They say some people *make* things happen, some people *watch* things happen and some people wonder what on earth happened. Success stories repeat themselves constantly: Luck is where preparation and opportunity meet.

An opportunity suggests something better in the future, but needing some sort of immediate change. To *make* an opportunity requires vision and ingenuity; to *take* one, needs courage and hard work. Sometimes, even while recognising the opportunity, we are too frightened to take advantage of it – scared of failing or making fools of ourselves..

Many of us are inclined to think of opportunity as a rare occurrence, a chance in a million, a ‘once in a lifetime’. We miss the fact that every single day is, in itself, a miniature lifetime in which we are presented with countless opportunities – to make a friend, find a new interest, gain a new perspective, experience something which will enhance our life or discover something which will add dimension to it. Or to right a wrong

In an ‘anthropomorphic’ sense, opportunities are like receiving personalised gifts from God. How would you feel if you gave someone a really valuable gift and it was never used (our talents also appear on that list of gifts)? How would you feel if your gift were never even acknowledged? Or the wrapping not even removed to see what was inside? A diamond ring does not always come in an elegant little box. It can also be wrapped in old newspaper.

We know for certain that the Jewish religious calendar gives us, with faithful regularity, a very special opportunity every single year. Every Jewish New Year allows us another opportunity to re-connect with our past, re-affirm and re-evaluate our present and re-assess our future. It provides us with the opportunity to reposition ourselves and to renew our values. It gives us an opportunity for introspection between the New Year and the Day of Atonement - to think things through, to hold out a hand of reconciliation and to put right mistakes of the past.

It gives us the golden opportunity to apologise for

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things we may have done (inadvertently or not) which may have hurt someone; to show contrition for being over-critical or judgmental; and to make peace with ourselves, our fellow-man and with God.

The only thing we do *not* know is whether this opportunity will be the last we will have.

There is a philosophy that truth is only perception. If, for example, I stand in front of a sculpture of a head and you stand behind it, I will see a nose, eyes and mouth, while you will see the only the back of the head. Were each of us to describe exactly what we had seen, it would be hard to believe that we had been looking at the same object!

Given different backgrounds, influences and experiences, we reach conciliation when we try to see things from another standpoint – instead of insisting that our view is absolute.

Used by many spiritual and motivational groups as part of their credo, are the words: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.”

It takes more than a little courage to admit one was wrong, to apologise, or simply even to make the first move. One risks a rebuff. Some people who hold on to old resentments feel empowered by continuing to ‘punish’ those who, wittingly or not, caused them any pain or embarrassment.

In fact, putting the boot on the other foot, it may be *you* who has held fast to an old resentment resisting any overtures.

From a prayer-book comes the line: “Don’t ask God for forgiveness until you yourself have forgiven your neighbor.”

And then there is a third foot (as there is no boot for it, but given that there are three feet in a yard, let us use that as a yardstick.): If you have already made an approach, if you have *tried* to reconcile, and the response has been unrelenting, remember “to accept that which you cannot change” with equanimity. At least, you had the guts to try!

But if you have *not* tried, now is the golden opportunity to do so. Now is the time to break the ice; to express what you are feeling; to hold out a conciliatory hand

The results might exceed your expectations!

If God is “sitting in judgment” deciding whether you should be “inscribed in the Book of Life”, you will surely be given a gold star for having made use of this precious opportunity! If you do not wish to look at it as anthropomorphic, give yourself the star! Whatever the outcome, your endeavor deserves it.

This is the time when the words *Carpe Diem* (seize the day!) become even more meaningful.

This is the time to translate them into the magic words: “Go ahead, *make* that call!”

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WHO GOES TO HEAVEN?

*

Barry Sidelsky

David had just arrived home and parked his car outside their apartment building along the Marine Drive in Summerstrand, Port Elizabeth. He was in a good mood. The last two lessons he had taught that day were in the class of the girls preparing for their Bat Mitzvah, and this was his favorite class at the Theodor Herzl School.

"Hi David. Did you have a good day?" Yael was just putting glasses of orange juice and biscuits on the small table in the kitchen and beckoned to her husband to join her. He sat and looked through the window towards the beach. The wind was blowing almost at gale force - typical of the "Windy City".

"Yes, *Baruch Hashem*. It was a great day. My pupils paid attention during the lessons and participated in all the work and activities with enthusiasm. What about you? What can you tell me?"

"Do you recall I told you that I have a new little boy in my nursery school class - Alan Fink, the son of Mark and Dawn? She converted about a year ago - just before we came to live in Port Elizabeth. Today, when Dawn came to fetch Bruce after school, she asked me a very strange question: 'Is it true that Jewish wives don't go to heaven?'"

David was astounded: "What did you answer?"

Somewhat amused, Yael replied, "I told her to speak to you. After all, you're the Rabbi and I am only the *Rebbetzin*".

Suddenly, David recalled the story *Domestic Idyll* by Yitzchak Leib Peretz. It was all about Hayim the porter and his loving wife Hannah. At the Shabbat meal, we are told that they look so lovingly and with such devotion into one another's eyes that one would think that they had just stepped from under the *chuppah*. After his Shabbat nap, Hayim goes to the Bet Midrash to listen to the *melamed's shiur* to the simple people. After one of these *shiurim*, in a quavering voice, he asks the *melamed*: "Rebbe, could you be so kind as to advise me what I should do in order to be worthy of the World to Come?"

"Devote yourself to the study of Torah, my son," the other counseled him.

"But I don't know how".

"Then study the commentaries, the *Aggadot*, or, at least, *Pirkei Avot*".

"I don't know even how to do that".

"Recite the Psalms, in that case".

"I can't spend the time to do so".

"Pray with fervor and ardor then".

"But I don't understand the words of the prayers!"

The *melamed* regards him with loving kindness and asks: "What is your trade? What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a porter".

"In that case, you can be of service to Talmudic scholars".

"How?"

"Well, for one thing you could carry a few pails of water to the Shul every afternoon for the scholars to drink".

Hayim beams with joy, but then asks, "But what about my wife, Rebbe?"

"If the husband finds a seat in *Gan Eden*, his wife becomes his footstool".

When Hayim came home to chant *Havdalah*, and found his wife reciting the prayer 'God of Abraham', he was stirred to the depths.

"Hannah, I won't stand for you being my footstool!" he exclaimed as he embraced her, "I shall raise you up and take you alongside of me. We will sit together, like equals, as we do now. It is so good to have you near me - do you hear, Hannah? You must sit right alongside of me. The Lord of the Universe will simply have to sanction it".

David, still in his reverie, now saw his grandfather's shul, the Shul of Grodno, and imagined that it was there that Hayim had gone to the *shiur* of the *melamed* on that Shabbat afternoon - that beautiful old shul made of wooden beams and its triple-tiered roof with its octagonal copula of wooden slats, whose vaulting inside was supported by the four pillars surrounding the *bimah*, with its ornate lattice-work above. He imagined the *aron kodesh*, also so grand and ornate with three beautiful decorative frames on each side of it, the magnificent rendition of the Ten Commandments above it, with its two decorative frames on either side, above that, the illustration of the two hands of the Cohen, blessing the congregation and with the whole surmounted by two sculptured lions. On the one side of the shul below the *eprat nashim* - the women's gallery - was a little corner with a table and chairs. There, surely, the simple folk had sat to listen to the *shiur* of the *melamed*.

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When she was at school, Dawn had attended the Holy Rosary Convent. One day during the catechism class, she said to the Mother Superior: "May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, my daughter", the Mother Superior replied, looking at her with a sweet smile.

Dawn opened her Bible and read from Deuteronomy, Chapter 13:

If there should rise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and give thee a sign or a wonder. And the sign or wonder come to pass, of which he spoke unto thee saying. Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them: Thou shalt not hearken to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God puts you to the proof, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him and obey his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.

"Mother", Dawn proclaimed loudly and confidently, "I don't understand - if these are the words of God, our Father in heaven, how could our so-called 'Messiah' come and revoke most of the commandments of the Old Testament? According to the words of God in Deuteronomy, he must have been a false prophet".

"You apostate, you heathen! Get out!"

Dawn did get out. She never returned to the convent and never stepped into a church again. From that day onwards, she was engrossed in studying the 'Old Testament', and a few weeks later she began attending services at the Glendinningvale Synagogue. That was the beginning of her learning Judaism, and she was soon befriended by other congregants. She found the sermons of the Rabbi inspiring and she also went to *shiurim* on *Tanach*. After two years of applying herself assiduously to Torah study she finally, with the Rabbi's recommendation, appeared before the Beth Din in Johannesburg. It was a long process, but after going to the Beth Din twice more, she finally went through the process of *Giur* - conversion to Judaism.

Shortly after that, Dawn and Mark started dating. He was a regular attendee at shul, and she had seen him in there and at *shiurim*. Dawn soon found out that Mark was a loving and caring man, and when he finally proposed to her, she felt that her new *emunah* (faith) in Hashem and her fulfillment of the *Mitzvot* had brought her the biggest *brachah* that any Jewish woman could wish for... and that was the way she always felt, from the time of their *Chuppah* and when Alan, their son, was born.

What had triggered off Dawn's question to the Rebbetzin? That morning, after dropping Alan off at the Theodor Herzl Nursery School, she had gone to the Walmer library, where she worked as a librarian. In the middle of the morning, she suddenly saw a nun standing at the reception desk. It was Sister Margaret, who had been her class teacher in the 11th Grade. She

recognized her immediately in her black habit and black and white veil. Sister Margaret, after Dawn had greeted her and written down the books she was taking in the library register, suddenly showed a sign of recognition.

"My goodness Dawn, we haven't seen you in church for a long time!"

"That's true, sister. I haven't been to church for a very long time - not since I converted to Judaism".

"Oh, my dear! Don't you know that Jewish wives don't have a place in heaven?"

Dawn suddenly felt dizzy and sat down, traumatized. Later, when she had calmed down and gotten over her shock somewhat, she asked two of her colleagues if they, too, had heard that Jewish wives had no place in heaven.

Winifred, the senior librarian, immediately responded: "Of course sweetie. That's why Jewish husbands treat their wives so well - I guess they feel sorry for them". Adding further to Dawn's upset was that other Christian colleagues and friends confirmed what Sister Margaret and Winifred had said.

It was 1.00 p.m. As Dawn entered Alan's classroom at the nursery school, Alan came running to meet her and gave her a big hug. She then approached Yael, who said, "You have such a wonderful little boy. Alan has been helping me to tidy up".

"I have a question to ask you", said Dawn, with obvious anxiety on her face.

"Go ahead. How can I help you?"

"Yael, is it true that Jewish wives don't go to heaven?"

Yael was taken aback.

"How can you ask such a thing? Of course it's not true! Who told you so?"

"Do you think you could explain this to me - perhaps give me the source...?"

Yael smiled warmly.

"You know what? Speak to my husband, Rabbi David, and ask him to explain this to you. After all, he is the Rabbi and I am just the Rebbetzin".

That night, Dawn called Rabbi David, who invited her to come over the following afternoon. Yael opened the front door and welcomed her. Then Rabbi David entered the room, holding a *Tanach* and a *Chumash* with commentaries.

"Come and sit at the dining room table and then I can show you the sources relating to your question".

Before he could begin his explanations, Yael had already come with a tray with coffee and cake.

"I hope you don't mind, but I am also curious to find out the answer to your question" she said.

"Well ladies, you will be delighted to know that in relation to Dawn's question, the Rabbis of the first Mishnah of Chapter 10 of Tractate Sanhedrin said the following: 'All Israel have a share in the world to come, as it is said: (Isaiah 60:21) Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever; [in other words, in this world and the next] they are a plant of my own, the work of my hands, wherein I may glory'. The words 'All of Israel' obviously refers both to men and women".

“But Rabbi, is there a Biblical source which indicates that women have a part in the world to come and therefore go to heaven?” (Dawn was thinking to herself, “I must show my Christian friends a proof from the ‘Old Testament’ that their assumptions and presumptions about Jewish women are unfounded and wrong”).

“There certainly is - not just one source, but even two. It is striking that both sources also form part of the *Haftarahs* on the two days of Rosh Hashanah. In the first Book of Samuel, Chapters One and Two, we read that when *Chanah* came to the sanctuary of the Lord in Shiloh, bringing her little son Samuel, she addressed Eli the priest and said, ‘I prayed for this boy, and the Lord has granted me what I asked’. Then she prayed to the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord causes death and bestows life, He lowers to the grave and brings up’. Thus we learn from *Chanah* that Hashem resurrects the dead, and of course that includes all of Israel, both men and women”.

“In the *Haftarah* of the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read from Jeremiah, Chapter 31, ‘Thus said the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah - lamentation, bitter weeping; it is Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for they are away. Thus says the Lord: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from tears; your work shall have its reward, says the Lord; they shall return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, says the Lord; the children shall return to their own land’. What better proof is there that Jewish women have a place in Heaven? Here the *Tanach* records that many, many years after Rachel died and was buried in Efrat, her spirit revived and she wept for the Jewish people who were going into exile in Babylon”.

“Oh Rabbi, how grateful I am!” exclaimed Dawn, “I am so proud to have become one of *Am Yisrael*, and today you have strengthened my faith. I feel now what Ruth spoke to Naomi: ‘Your people are my people and your God is my God’”.

MR. THOMAS SAID

*

John Yarbrough

Mr. Thomas said it was ok if I sat in the corner of his neighborhood grocery and read comic books as long as I was careful not to bend the pages so they looked used. Miss Wison who worked the cash register said an eight-year-old boy shouldn't be out running the streets unsupervised all summer even if he did have a dog which I did name Pokey who sat outside the store until I came out no matter how long that was. Mr. Thomas said he would rather have a kid reading comics and not bothering anyone than one who came in running and breaking things and looking to steal candy bars. Miss Wilson said none of the kids had to steal anything on account of Mr. Thomas letting us sell him coupons from the newspaper at one-half their value. Mr. Thomas said he only bought coupons for items he carried in stock so what was the harm. Freda Walker who had finished paying for a half gallon of milk and some potatoes said she would come back and sit with me but first she had to take the

groceries home because the milk needed to be put in the ice box. Miss Wilson said its funny how kids call refrigerators ice boxes when they never even saw an ice box. Mr. Thomas said it's just language kids pick up from their parents and grand-parents and that one time Freda's dad asked where were the goobers and it took a minute to remember that is what old people used to call peanuts. Freda came back and said my dog was still sitting outside the store which I already knew. She said when I was alone looking at Lulu she would like to see it and she sat down and folded her knees under her dress and started reading Nancy.

Mr. Thomas said we could have a soda pop if we promised to both bring in a coupon worth at least ten cents because pops cost five cents each. Freda said we would and she drank a Mission Orange. I had a Nehi Grape. Miss Wilson said don't spill your drinks on the comic books and if your hands get sticky the reading is over for the day. Freda said we had read long enough anyway, and I should walk her home because that's what a gentleman would do. Mr. Thomas said come back and don't forget about those coupons.

John Yarbrough is an award-winning poet and short story writer and a frequent contributor to Jewish Affairs.



TWO NEW COLLECTIONS OF OLD ARCADIAN MEMORIES

*

David Saks

The South African Jewish Orphanage, better known as Arcadia after the premises it occupied in Parktown for most of its existence, has been a vital part of the Jewish communal fabric for over a century. By the time it celebrated its centenary in 2006, the institution could claim to have taken care of over 3000 children in residence and assisted an even greater number who were never in residence. It is estimated that at least one Jewish South African out of twenty would have a direct connection with Arcadia, whether this be that they, their parents or grandparents had lived there or received help from it. It is also estimated that at one time, 50% of South African Jewish families would have been financial members of Arcadia.

In 2006, some of the stories of ex-Arcadians were told in *100 Years of Arc Memories: Arcadia – South African Jewish Orphanage 1906-2006*. A hefty volume of essays, reminiscences and photographs, it was compiled by ex-Arcadian David Sandler (a resident at the home from the age of four until seventeen). Its publication resulted in such a flood of reminiscences from other ex-Arcadians that a mere two years later, Sandler has been able to bring out an equally comprehensive sequel, entitled *More Arc Memories: South African Jewish Orphanage 1899-1908*.

Sandler, who has been living in Perth for the past 25 years, is currently working on yet a third volume. This one will focus on the so-called “Ochberg Orphans”, who were brought to South Africa from the war-torn Ukraine in the early 1920s and of whom more than half ended up in Arcadia. *More Arc Memories* includes a significant section on this subject (which has previously been featured in the Pesach 2007 and Pesach 2009 issues of *Jewish Affairs* and is dealt with at some further length in Veronica Belling’s article in this current issue).

The two books amount to a great deal more than the history of a single communal institution, and indeed can be seen as “people’s history” in the best

sense of the term. Collectively amounting to well over a thousand pages, the books include the stories of some 250 individuals. Their enduring value lies in their being compelling repositories of oral history, comprising as they do the memories of a wide array of members of the Jewish community at a formative stage of its development. Some of the contributors went on to considerable fame and fortune while others led relatively quieter lives, but their respective stories are accorded equal status.

Within SA Jewish historiography, there has been a move away from writing what might be termed “*Macher History*”, that is history focusing exclusively on individuals who achieved a certain level of prominence during their lives, towards a historiography of inclusivity. The two *Arc Memories* volumes may not be telling the story of SA Jewry per se, but those reading the multiple individual testimonies they contain will gain a very real and immediate sense of what growing up as a Jewish South African (albeit those of a particular social background) was like at various times over the last hundred years.

A second area in which the books make a valuable contribution is that of the growing field of Jewish genealogical research. They are naturally replete with names of family members, whether of spouses, descendants, cousins or relatives by marriage, and also provide information on where such people now live (a very relevant feature of the South African Jewish story, given how dispersed around the globe its members are today).

The books have been printed and paid for by Ex-Arcadians and are on sale in Canada, the US, UK, New Zealand and Israel, where many Old Arcs and their descendants now live. The full proceeds of the sales will go to Arcadia. Information on the books and how to purchase them can be accessed at www.arcadia.ca.com.au.

100 Years of Arc Memories: Arcadia – South African Jewish Orphanage 1906-2006 (2006, 524pp) and *More Arc Memories: South African Jewish Orphanage 1899-1908* (2009, 588pp with index for both volumes), compiled and edited by David Solly Sandler.

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

RISING TIDE : HOW FREEDOM WITH RESPONSIBILITY UPLIFTS EVERYONE

*

David Saks

Over the past two decades Jack Bloom, a senior member of the DA caucus in the Gauteng Legislature, has acquired for himself a well-founded reputation as an astute, incisive thinker, one whose views are taken as seriously by his political opponents as they are within his party. The high profile he enjoys in the media is unusual for a regional-level politician, particularly for one in opposition, and is testimony to the effort he makes to bring the matters he deals with to the public's attention. His latest book, *Rising Tide – How freedom with responsibility uplifts everyone*, is the record of a working politician who cares about issues, and who wants others to care as well. As such, it is an antidote to the political apathy that characterises all too much of South African society, particularly within the white minority.

Rising Tide consists of 46 essays, comprising a year's worth of Bloom's thoughts on a wide range of relevant contemporary issues. These range from critiques of South African democracy to bread and butter matters such as public transport, health care and job creation. They were originally sent out as a weekly e-mail column to senior media people and key opinion-formers, and a number were subsequently published in the mainstream press (mainly in *The Citizen*, for which Bloom now writes a regular column). Several sparked off lively public debate over the airwaves, as well as generating extensive email correspondence.

The book contains a thoughtful foreword by Professor Seepe, President of the SA Institute of Race Relations, who commends Bloom for his energy

and initiative in stimulating much needed public debate. For his part Radio 702's John Robbie, quoted on the back cover, describes Bloom as "a perfect example of what politicians should be".

What makes the essays easy to read, even when the subject matter might not be to a particular individual's taste, is Bloom's lucid style of writing, combined with the skilful manner in which each essay is structured. The author begins by introducing a problem or question and then proceeds to answer it, marshalling a series of facts and logical argument and elegantly rounding the whole off at the end. A brief item of interest – usually the author's sardonic comments on some of the more bizarre statements by public figures – is appended to each essay. It certainly helps that Bloom, while arguing strongly against those trends and ideas he opposes, never resorts to personal attacks or crude invective.

The book's subtitle can be seen as Bloom's credo as a convinced liberal who nevertheless believes that true liberalism does not mean evading responsibility. As he writes in the introduction, "I believe in individual freedom, but I have come to appreciate that it can only endure when there is a degree of self control, which is the capacity to defer instinctual gratification". This theme – freedom with responsibility – recurs throughout the collection.

Rising Tide – How freedom with responsibility uplifts everyone by Jack Bloom, Johannesburg, 2009, 138pp. Copies can be obtained from the author at JBloom@jpl.gov.za.

OUTWITTING HISTORY

*

Robert Schwarz

From time to time, the media have been warning the public of the peril of losing a number of animal species which had not even been on the endangered list for any length of time. It seems that modern *homo sapiens* begins to worry about the extinction of organic life when it is, as it were, five minutes to midnight.

What is true for approaching the inevitable and

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irrevocable moment when the last polar bear, the last tiger, the last feral African wild dog, is gone forever is also true of such treasures as languages, culture patterns, and even whole tribes. We wake up when it is too late.

I am referring in particular to the real threat that Yiddish, as a spoken or printed tongue, is in danger of being a victim of the proverb "Use it or lose it", unless people who care find a way of preventing its demise.

What *Outwitting History* is all about is a splendidly written account of a team of dedicated Jewish young

men and women whose objective in life is to rescue as many Yiddish books as possible from death by neglect. They find their purpose in life by the noble project of collecting volumes of Yiddish works by literally going from house to house and apartment to apartment in Jewish neighbourhoods. There they request permission to load their rented truck with tomes by famous authors, regardless of the condition of their booty. Often, these books had been rotting in attics or basements for years, uncared for and mouldy, ready for the dumpster.

Occasionally, these young people would come upon real prizes: books by Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, I.L. Peretz, and other celebrated Jewish writers. Such 'finds' made the arduous work doubly worthwhile.

According to Viktor Frankel and other philosophers, having a worthwhile goal in life is one of the most important ingredients of living a moral existence. Such existentialists as Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre and Paul Tillich emphasize that the 'commitment' or 'project' is paramount in choosing the *summum bonum*. In fact, the atheist wing of existentialism considers the choice of a project the only salvation open to man in an indifferent world. Thoughts of this kind come to mind as one reads the pages of this wonderful book.

Nor does the reader have to be Jewish to appreciate this inspiring tale. Just as it is not necessary to be Jewish to like "gefilte fish" or to be Italian to care for

pasta, so it is of no importance to be of the Jewish persuasion to find value and great humour in *Outwitting History*. Yes, humour: for many of the visits this team of cultural heroes paid to Jewish homes are not only moving but also highly amusing because of the receptions they frequently experienced. The dialogue between the collectors and the donors of the books, more often than not held in Yiddish, is almost always funny. In such cases, it must be admitted, some knowledge of the Yiddish language, with its hilarious jargon, is of course advantageous.

The claims made in favour of the book on the pages preceding the Foreword are justifiably impressive. The reader will find them neither extravagant nor prodigal - on the contrary. The adventure the team undertook is both praiseworthy and heart-warming. Readers with a sentimental feeling for the Yiddish language will not only applaud the cause behind the venture but also the priceless style of the author. This reviewer favours public recognition of the young people who gave their energy and time to the effort of salvaging a cultural treasure. No wonder the Israeli leadership, which at first sought to discourage Yiddish as allegedly competing with Hebrew, has begun to have second thoughts.

Aaron Lansky, *Outwitting History*, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005, 245pp.

ON THE CONTRARY - LEADING THE OPPOSITION IN A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

*

Ralph Zulman

At a launch of this book in Johannesburg, the author Tony Leon said that, if nothing else, it would prove useful for throwing at an intruder. *On the Contrary - Leading the Opposition in a Democratic South Africa* is indeed a very bulky tome, running to some 766 pages divided into five distinct parts, together with an introduction, appendix, notes, numerous photographs and an index. It is, however, certainly much more useful than simply as a bulky object to throw at a would-be intruder.

On the Contrary provides a fascinating insight into the very active career of Tony Leon, leader of the Official Opposition in South Africa for eight years. Destined from early life as the son of a High Court Judge to make a major impact as an ironclad liberal, he has confronted the challenges of change head-on, leaving the political arena strewn with defeated

adversaries and of old-style conservatives content to let human rights slip for the sake of an easy life.

Nelson Mandela described Leon's contribution to democracy as being enormous, writing to him: "...you have far more support for all you have done than you might ever read about". When Leon retired from Parliament in February 2009, fellow MP, Ryan Coetzee commented that history would remember him for his singular achievement in coming very close to being indispensable in the creation of a critical opposition in South Africa.

In the introduction, headed "On Golden Notebooks", the author states that the title of the book came to him as he pondered why it was that he had spent all his political life in opposition, as it were, and that the book consisted of "a pulling together of my personal threads, background experiences, political impulses, and my rather definite views on South Africa and the wider world it shares, after my 22 years in public life."

Part One, headed "The Path to Leadership", is

Mr. Justice Ralph Zulman is a long-serving member of the editorial board of and contributor to Jewish Affairs.

divided into five chapters (incidentally, each chapter of the book commences with an appropriate quotation from such well-known figures as Winston Churchill, Saul Bellow, Albert Camus, Karl M. Theodore Roosevelt and Chief Justice Ismail Mahomed). In the first, Leon describes his origins and background. Himself a third generation South African, his roots are firmly Litvak. Most of his forebears can trace their origins to the Pale of Settlement, created in 1791 by Catherine the Great. His maternal grandfather, Samuel Herman (Sam), was one of nine children born in Kovno, Lithuania. He arrived in Cape Town in 1912. Shortly after the First World War, the Hermans moved to Johannesburg. Sam and his brother-in-law, Louis Traub, established a successful firm of wholesale wool merchants, Herman & Traub. The family first lived in Saratoga Avenue in Doornfontein, a suburb which at the time attracted many Jewish immigrants. In 1923, Sam married Rachel Kowarsky, whose family had immigrated to South Africa from Vilnius, Lithuania. In 1929 Leon's mother, Sheila Jean, was born. She married Leon's father, Ramon (Ray), in March 1954. Ray, then an advocate, was later to become a judge in Natal. His forebears were not dissimilar in origin to those on Leon's maternal side. Leon's parents divorced in 1965. His mother was married three times and his father twice. Leon married Michal, a divorcee, in 2000.

Leon attended King David High School, Linksfield, for a short time. Previous to this, he had been exposed in Natal to a completely secular education. He had learned his barmitzvah portion by heart using a tape recorder and, on High Holidays attended, largely unwillingly, the Durban synagogue. He says that he identified later in life with a famous British politician Lord Keith Joseph who, on being asked about what sort of Jew he was, responded, "...minimally practising but maximally acknowledging". Leon certainly responded maximally as a Jew, vigorously defending Jewish causes and fighting strongly against antisemitism wherever he encountered it. He was a frequent speaker at functions organised by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, amongst many other Jewish organisations.

In Chapter Two, entitled "Dancing with Dialectics", Leon describes his close on twenty-year involvement with the University of the Witwatersrand and the rebuff of his attempts to become president of the Student's Representative Council. He deals with his brief entry into the practicing legal profession as an articled clerk, his interaction with leading members of the Bar and his time in the South African army and navy.

Chapter Three begins with the author's entry into politics. This commenced with his victory in a February 1986 by-election for the Johannesburg City Council. He stood against another Jew, Sam Bloomberg (National Party), and succeeded by a mere 39 votes in a poll of 31%. His career in municipal politics culminated with his victory, again over another Jew, M Rosen, in October 1989, by an overall majority of 1599 and his subsequent election

as leader of the Progressive Federal Party in the Council. The chapter also deals with Leon's clashes with the veteran, and greatly admired, Jewish politician, Harry Schwarz.

Chapter Five chronicles some of the author's activities, flowing from what he describes as the "the Battle of Houghton" and ends with his unopposed election, with acclamation, as the single leader of the Democratic Party. He won the nomination to represent the Houghton constituency despite opposition from the late Helen Suzman. The latter had occupied the seat for many years and favoured Irene Menel for the nomination. Suzman complained that "Mr Leon's lobbying effort to achieve nomination made Tammany Hall look like a teddy bears' picnic". She repeated the remark in the 1994 update of her memoirs. Leon never responded in public, but regarded her comment as "grossly unfair, inflated and unjustified". Although 1989 propelled him into national and parliamentary politics, Leon continued to immerse himself in his civic leadership role.

Part Two of the book deals succinctly, in two chapters respectively headed "New South Africa, New Leader" and "Constitutional Palimpsest". In Part Three, the reader is treated to the author's incisive and detailed discussion of the following topics: Zimbabwe, corrosion in the corridors of parliament, the judges, the media and "the Lady" (Winnie Madikizela-Mandela). Part Four describes Leon's role as Leader of the Opposition and his eventual handover to Helen Zille.

In the final part of the book, Leon presents his views on the future. His comments on Jacob Zuma (bearing in that the book was written before the charges against Zuma were withdrawn in April 2009) are of particular interest. He writes: "In the event of Zuma being prosecuted successfully, even his death-defying political skills may well not be sufficient to ensure his presidential candidacy in 2009. Should Zuma prevail, most South Africans have no clear idea where he will lead the country. For some, the words 'President Zuma' are an unnerving prospect".

It would be most interesting to hear Leon's views upon the withdrawal of the charges.

The author concludes the book with the following prophetic words:

Whatever shape South Africa's new leadership takes, immense challenges have to be met. Do we want to be nostalgically remembered as a fading footnote in world history, commemorated for one big thing we got right in 1994 - but with a sense of aching possibility about opportunities lost, dreams deferred and goals missed since then? Or will we become, perhaps, against expectation, a success story of renewal, taking our place in the front row of winning nations, applying thoughtful policies and best practices with equal measures of good governance and self-restraint, transcending the divisions and iniquities of our history? ...The future is imperfect, but it is ours to make.

Despite its length, *On the Contrary* makes easy, indeed ideal, bedside reading. Written in a clear and concise style, it is unquestionably a monumental work of great significance and contains a mine of useful information. The book sheds a new light on many figures, some of whom have become household names in this country and who, together with Tony

Leon have helped to shape modern South Africa. I have no hesitation in commending it to anyone interested in South African politics and history.

A J Leon, *On the Contrary - Leading the Opposition in a Democratic South Africa*, Jonathan Ball, 2009, 766pp.

ICON OF EVIL: HITLER'S MUFTI AND THE RISE OF RADICAL ISLAM

*

Gary Selikow

This revealing book outlines the life and career of Mufti Haj Al Hussein, a close collaborator of Hitler and a violent hater of Jews and Zionism. It explores his legacy of hate and terror that permeates the Islamic jihad's profound hatred of Jews and Israel up to and including today.

The extent of the Mufti's role in genocide against Jews and his collaboration with Nazi Germany has long been suppressed but is now being exposed by books such as this one as well as Chuck Morse's *The Nazi Connection to Islamic Terrorism: Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husseini*.

Amin Al Hussein was born in 1895. His hatred of Jews was nurtured at the Sheik Rashid Rida Islamic School in Cairo. Reading *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which was being distributed by British officers among themselves and to the Arabs of Palestine, was a great influence in his ideological development.

Al-Husseini took it upon himself to raise the banner of jihad against the Jews. In April 1920, he organised the pogrom that took place against the Jews in Jerusalem. Posters were displayed across the city with the slogan: "Kill the Jews, there is no punishment for killing Jews". Jews were attacked and killed and Jewish women raped. This was known among the Arabs as the First Intifada and can effectively be used the date of the beginning of the Arab jihad against Jews in the Land of Israel (rather than the War of Independence 28 years later).

As the author explains: "The riots were the first of many violent Islamic uprisings against the Jews in Palestine that would take place over the next eight and more decades, throughout the Twentieth Century and into the 21st. In personally inciting the violent intifada of 1920, al-Husseini established a precedent, for the use of violence and terror that future generations of radical Islam would emulate in their future wars against the Jews and the West".

After further Arab pogroms against Jews in Jaffa,

in which 47 Jews were murdered and hundreds more injured, the British blamed the attacks on what they termed Arab anger over Jewish immigration. Immigration of Jews into Palestine was suspended, which convinced the Mufti that terror paid.

The 1929 pogroms in Jerusalem, Safed and Hebron were also a result of the Mufti's perfidious propaganda, including allegations that the Jews were about to take control of the Temple Mount and the wide dissemination of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

The so-called "Arab Revolt" (or Third Intifada) of 1936-1939 resulted in numerous attacks on Jewish homes and farms, and the killing of hundreds of Jewish men, women and children. Despite this, anti-Israel propagandists accuse the Zionists of terror against the Arabs during this period.

In 1941, the Mufti assisted in a Nazi-backed plot to overthrow the British government in Iraq. When the plot failed, he fled to Iran and then to Nazi Germany, where he formed a close friendship with Adolph Hitler and attended Nazi rallies as his honored guest. At his meeting with Hitler, the Mufti pledged the allegiance of the Arabs to and cooperation with Germany, and thanked the latter for its support of the Palestinian Arab cause. He further assured Hitler that the Arabs were Germany's natural friends as they shared the same enemies, the Jews and the British. Hitler responded in strong and unequivocal terms, reiterating his violently anti-Jewish stand and unflinching support for the radical Arab cause. He pledged to liquidate the Jews of Palestine once the annihilation of the Jews in Europe had been completed.

al-Husseini personally visited Nazi death camps, including Auschwitz, and urged the Nazis to speed up their Final Solution. In 1943, he personally influenced Reich Foreign Minister Ribbentrop to prevent four thousand Jewish children being sent to Israel, instead diverting them to Hitler's death camps where they perished. He formed close alliances with several Nazi leaders and was promised by Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim Von Ribbentrop that no Jew would be allowed to enter Palestine. Heinrich

Gary Selikow is a researcher and media activist. His reviews of books of Jewish and Middle East interest appear regularly online and elsewhere.

Himmler was the Nazi leader who the Mufti most closely worked with, and together they planned the extermination of Palestinian Jewry once the Axis forces had captured the Middle East.

Himmler set forward the essence of their mutual objectives in a telegram sent to the Mufti on 2 November 1943, pledging Nazi Germany's support for the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs to rid Palestine of the Jews and set up an Arab state there. Such objectives have since been echoed by Yasser Arafat and the PLO, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Khamenei/Ahmadinejad regime in Iran and their sundry allies and supporters. The Mufti also organized the SS Hanjar unit, made up of Bosnian Muslims, which was responsible for the liquidation of 90% of Bosnians Jews as well as thousands of Jews in Hungary.

After the war, the Mufti escaped to France and then Egypt, and for insidious reasons was not stopped by the British and French authorities. It was he who led 'Palestinian' Arab forces against the fledgling Jewish state, and who mentored and taught his nephew, later to be PLO leader Yasser Arafat, for whom Al Hussein was a much admired and beloved figure.

Due to Al Hussein's unceasing efforts, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* would be published in Arabic many times and enjoy best-selling status across the Islamic world. As the author shows Hamas, which evolved from the Muslim Brotherhood which the Mufti had promoted enthusiastically since its inception, invokes the Protocols in various Articles of its Charter, such as stating that the ongoing conspiratorial conduct of world Zionism, Israel and the Jewish people "is the best proof of what is said [in the Protocols]". Spokesmen of the government of Iran, from the era of Ayatollah Khomeini to the present, have embraced the forgery. (For example, it was made available in English at the Iranian exhibition booth at the 2005 Frankfurt book fair).

Not far behind in popularity in the Islamic world is Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, which has achieved bestseller status throughout the Arab world. After the Six Day War, Israeli soldiers discovered that thousands of Egyptian prisoners had small paperback copies of the book, translated into Arabic by the Arab information center in Cairo. *Mein Kampf* was published in Arafat's Palestinian Authority in 2001. Meanwhile, the film *Schindler's List*, which depicts

the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust, is banned in most Arab countries.

The blood libel accusing Jews of using the blood of gentile children in their Passover rituals is also popular today in the Arab world, appearing regularly in state-sponsored media in Egypt, Syria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan and invoked by, among others, Arafat, Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlall (in his 1984 book entitled *The Matzah of Zion*) and in programmes and films that have appeared on Egyptian, Syrian and Palestinian TV.

Meanwhile, Holocaust denial is rife across the Arab and Islamic world. In December 2005, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared his determination to "wipe Israel off the map", while stating: "We do not accept the claim that Hitler killed millions of Jews in furnaces". This, according to Ahmadinejad, is a 'fairytale' and "legend to protect Israel". Ahmadinejad further expressed Iran's full support for the leader of the Hamas terrorist organization, Khaled Meshaal. In December 2005, he hosted a Holocaust Denial conference, attended by Jew-haters from across the world, including Neo-Nazis and radical pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel activists.

Comments the author, "For Ahmadinejad and his cohorts, the Mufti's infamous call to genocide: 'Kill the Jews...this pleases God, history and religion', has remained an inescapably relevant and enduring message that they were dedicated to transmitting to a new generation". In creating Hamas, Palestinian arch-terrorist Achmed Yassin, a devoted admirer of Al-Husseini, espoused the concept of the Holy Land becoming the central battlefield between Islamic jihad and the West, and a war of bloodshed to violently destroy Israel and exterminate her Jews, building in its place a purely Arab 'Palestine'.

The author concludes that "From the Mufti's All-Palestine government to the Hamas government in Gaza of today, it is clear that the aims and goals of radical Islam have remained consistent throughout the years".

David G. Dalin, *Icon of Evil: Hitler's Mufti and the Rise of Radical Islam*, Random House, 2008, 240pp.

READERS' LETTERS

*

How often I come across copies of *Jewish Affairs*, which indeed is always such a pleasure to read. It is so nostalgic for me because, as it happens, I worked at L E Joseph, at the time a prominent printing firm in Fordsburg, as a letterpress Machine Minder in the 1945–1953 period. I was instrumental in printing *Jewish Affairs*, which I so vividly remember, hand feeding the sheets of paper on the big 'Optimus' machine (if my memory serves me right).

The magazine then was a more condensed version, more like the 'Readers' Digest' copy. Nowadays, it is on a much larger scale, but remains an interesting, innovative and compelling book to read. You have lasted a long time. In these tough times it must be rather pressing economically, but I sincerely trust and hope that *JA* will survive and continue serving the community as it has done for nearly 70 years.

Below is a brief memoir of my early childhood spent in the great *Medina* of Bertrams, which I hope you will consider publishing.

I vividly remember the watering hole at the local hotel where, mainly on week-ends, the guys would relax, and partake or a pint or two and enjoy a game of snooker. At the time, there was the popular Quinn's bakery next door to Ellis Park, where you could buy a loaf of bread for 6d and a day-old bread for 3d. What about the price of a burger? Two shillings. A newspaper cost you 2d. Those way-back prices were absolutely peanuts compared to today's staggering figures.

A very popular pastime was playing football at the Fuller Park soccer field. Unfortunately, our games were often marred by a gang of young African hoodlums who used to terrorise the locals, and rob them of their sweets and petty cash. I myself was often the victim of their misdemeanors, and had a few of my own soccer balls stolen from me when those guys invaded the pitch. Nevertheless, criminals in those far-off days were a far cry from the modern day bunch of hardened gangsters and cutthroats.

A well known spot in Bertrams was Joe's Tearoom, corner of Derby and Bertrams Roads, which was very popular with the local inhabitants and where you could buy bread, sweets, cold drinks and general items. Another famous landmark was the Ginsberg's Hall, a popular venue for socials and wedding receptions.

Our parents, being immigrants from Russia and having to start out a new life in a foreign land, battled in the early days to eke out a living. Nevertheless, life was less stressful and undemanding, unlike the maddening pressures and turbulence of modern-day living.

As I drive through Bertrams these days, it is with a tinge of sadness as I observe the decline and deterioration of this once lively and colorful suburb. Nevertheless, the fond memories from that memorable era long gone by still linger within me.

Barney Segal
Johannesburg

Securing our Jewish Future

The work of the SAJBD is made possible through the support of the United Communal Fund.

The UCF ensures the continuance of Jewish life and values in South Africa and simultaneously provides security and protection for the local Jewish community.

With the help of our generous supporters and contributors, the UCF continually endeavors to protect our local Jewish future and that of our children. The UCF campaign is run by a committed lay leadership and a dedicated professional staff.

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The UCF is committed to helping its beneficiaries, and although they may vary from province to province, the main beneficiaries are:

The SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD)

The SAJBD protects the civil rights of the Jewish community, monitoring and responding to antisemitism and building relationships with the SA government and media.

Community Security Organisation (CSO)

Empowers the community and secures its future by protecting all Jewish institutions against any threat and offers emergency medical response through Ezra.

South African Jewish Students Union (SAJJS)

Supports the needs of Jewish students and promotes their Jewish identity and fights antisemitism on the campuses.

It is vital for these organizations to be maintained within the community so that it can grow and be secure.

The UCF is linked administratively to the Israel United Appeal (IUA) which is instrumental in "saving Jewish Lives" wherever and whenever the need arises.



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