



A Lost
World

The Destruction
of the Jewish
Communities

"UNTO EVERY PERSON THERE IS A NAME"

Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2024



נשיא המדינה
رئيس الدولة
THE PRESIDENT

Jerusalem, January 16, 2024

Dear Friends,

As we prepare solemnly for Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day, *Yom Hazikaron LaShoah*, this year, the sacred duties of memory take on new significance in a world that feels fundamentally changed.

Like every year, organizations across the world are gathering their communities around "Upon Every Person a Name" ceremonies to honor the memory of the victims of the Holocaust. But this year, our vigilance in recalling the searing lessons of the past needs no prodding or prompting.

The reality of massive atrocities against Jews on October 7th, and of pervasive global antisemitism, including in bastions of enlightenment ideals and free thought, has peeled back the degrees of separation naturally imposed upon the horrific past. Even though the Holocaust stands alone in the scope of horror and destruction, our reality since October 7th has nonetheless made crystal clear: the lessons of the Holocaust do not belong to an elsewhere. They belong to every society of men, where hatred and prejudice are allowed to reign free. Never again, we have learned, is now.

This year's name-reading ceremonies, which, as always, symbolically counteract the brutal erasure of the individual by the Nazi monster, are centered on the theme of the loss of Jewish communal life. In fact, the rich life of Jewish communities across the globe, were the base, the *terra firma*, beneath the feet of the Jewish nation for millennia, the ground upon which Jewish existence organically flourished.

Recognizing and naming the loss of community highlights a critical dimension of the overwhelming destruction of the Holocaust: each individual loss, each loss of a whole and complete world, was also part of the disintegration of the broader whole, the magnificent and multi-faceted organ that was Jewish community.

This year, as we meet a reality of overwhelming loss and tragedy, the Jewish People as a collective is reading new meaning into the significance of our peoplehood as a meta structure of belonging and purpose, not unlike its function within the destroyed communities of Europe. For so many, recognizing the deep infrastructure of our connectivity has been transformative.

And, indeed, in a season of darkness and pain, we have shown up for each other in remarkable ways, both within Israel and beyond. For many, this reclamation of belonging within a broader story has not come to diminish the significance of each individual, but to empower it, much like the individuals we 'reclaim' in our naming ceremonies, and call back into the arms of our people through our intentioned acts of memory.

Friends, I thank you for your commitment to the sacred cause of memory, and to its application in our present. Only through honestly confronting the perils of hatred and prejudice can we help build a world of fraternity and peace.

Sincerely,



Isaac Herzog
President of the State of Israel



Unto Every Person There Is A Name
Public Recitation of Names of Holocaust Victims in Israel and Abroad
on Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day

"Unto every person there is a name, given to him by God and by his parents", wrote the Israeli poetess Zelda. Every single victim of the Holocaust – men, women and children - had a name. A first name, given by their parents, and a surname, carrying on the familial heritage. The vast number of Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust – some six million men, women and children - is beyond human comprehension, and we are liable to lose sight of the fact that each and every victim was an entire world. Each Jew murdered carried within them part of something larger, of a family and a community that disintegrated with the loss of the individuals who made it up.

The annual recitation of names of victims on Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day is one way of posthumously restoring the victims' names, of commemorating them as individuals, human beings and members of families and communities. By reciting the names of Holocaust victims, we aim to pay tribute to their memory, and to commemorate those who have no living relatives. The act of name recitation serves to illustrate the enormity of the tragedy, to combat Holocaust distortion and denial, and help the younger generations connect to the Shoah.

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the global Shoah memorial initiative "Unto Every Person There Is A Name", held annually under the auspices of the President of the State of Israel. The project aims to reach out to as many communities and institutions as possible, in Israel and elsewhere. In Israel the main events take place in the Knesset and in Yad Vashem's Hall of Remembrance. Name recitation ceremonies are also held schools and universities, youth movements and IDF bases, commemorative institutions and workplaces. The Unto Every Person There Is A Name project is conducted around the world through the efforts of B'nai B'rith International, Nativ, the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization. The project is coordinated by Yad Vashem in consultation with the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The theme of this year's observances is: **A Lost World: The Destruction of the Jewish Communities**

Thousands of prewar Jewish communities had served as a fundamental and critical framework in the lives of the Jewish people. The destruction of the communities during the Holocaust is a deep wound inflicted upon the body and soul of the Jewish people. Alongside the rupture that typifies many Jewish communities during the Shoah, it is important to note the attempts made to maintain communal life and structures, and to combat the destruction. Endeavors at continuity were expressed in the effort to maintain welfare, educational, cultural and religious organizations. The battle against disintegration often manifested itself in the creation of "alternative communities", such as resistance movements, and clandestine cultural endeavors that aspired to maintain physical and spiritual existence.



After the liberation, many Jews returned to discover that they were the sole survivors of their families, and often, of their communities. In the attached materials, you will see examples of the intense yearning for a world that was and is no more, as well as a determination to commemorate their beloved communities.

For over 70 years, Yad Vashem has been dedicated to the sacred mission to collect the names of Holocaust victims. To date more than 4,900,000 names of Holocaust victims have been recorded in Yad Vashem's online Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, with over 2,817,000 names registered on Pages of Testimony. They represent each and every individual lost, but viewed more collectively, they represent the families and communities that were obliterated.

You can assist in our ongoing names collection campaign by downloading and distributing Pages of Testimony, or by submitting them online through our website: www.yadvashem.org.

Sadly, the generation of Shoah survivors is dwindling rapidly. As the bearers of their legacy, we must do everything possible to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust's victims. By reciting their names, ages and places of death, we keep their memory alive, and remind ourselves that each man, woman and child was, and is, an entire world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Dani Dayan'.

Dani Dayan
Yad Vashem Chairman

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YOM HASHOAH | HOLOCAUST MARTYRS' AND HEROES' REMEMBRANCE DAY
6 MAY 2024 | 28 NISSAN 5784

Letter from the International Committee "Unto Every Person There Is A Name"

Introduction

The worldwide Holocaust memorial project "Unto Every Person There is a Name", now in its 35th consecutive year, is a unique project designed to perpetuate the memory of the Six Million - among them one-and-a-half million Jewish children – murdered while the world remained silent. The project offers the opportunity to memorialize them not only as a collective, but as individuals – one at a time - through the recitation of their names on Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day. You can help to restore the identity and dignity of the victims of the Holocaust by organizing a name-recitation ceremony on Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day – 6 May 2024 – 28 Nissan. Links to lists of names taken from Yad Vashem's Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, and planning recommendations are included below.

The Unto Every Person There Is A Name project focuses attention on the urgent need to retrieve additional names of Holocaust victims, before they recede into oblivion.

The "Unto Every Person There Is A Name" project is conducted around the world through the efforts of four major Jewish organizations: B'nai B'rith International, Nativ, the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization.

The project is coordinated by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, in consultation with the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and enjoys the official auspices of President of the State of Israel, the Hon. Isaac Herzog.

Personalizing the Holocaust

The most fundamental feature of the Shoah is the systematic murder of six million innocent Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators for the sole reason that they were Jewish. Each of their deaths was a separate, distinct tragedy that together has caused indelible lasting trauma to the Jewish people. As time passes and fewer witnesses remain, it is imperative to create a personal link between the Jewish people today and those who were murdered under the Nazi genocidal regime. Recitation of names of Holocaust victims - together with such information as their age, place of birth and place of murder - personalizes the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Emphasis is thus put on the millions of individuals – men, women and children - who were lost to the Jewish people, and not solely on the cold intangibility embodied in the term "The Six Million".

"Unto Every Person There is a Name" rests on the success of Yad Vashem's Shoah Victims' Names Recovery Project that to date has identified more than 4.9 million names of Shoah victims and that continues its [quest to recover all the six million names](#).

The Central Theme for Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2024:

A LOST WORLD: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES

The Jewish community, a unique, autonomous social unit that characterized Jewish existence in the Diaspora through the ages, was dealt a fatal blow by the Holocaust. Thousands of prewar Jewish communities had served as a fundamental and critical framework in the lives of the Jewish people. The systematic murder campaign waged against the Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators inflicted utter devastation upon thousands of communities in the German-occupied areas of Europe and North Africa; entire communities were decimated, and in many cases were totally obliterated. The legacy of the Jewish community is one of the most magnificent and cherished treasures that Jewish history has bequeathed to us. The destruction of the communities during the Holocaust is a deep wound inflicted upon the body and soul of the Jewish people.

Scroll down to see the complete rationale and a collection of texts and readings for your use.

In addition to this collection of texts and readings, Yad Vashem has created several Ready2Print exhibitions on a range of subjects that can be printed locally, free of charge.

For more information about the different exhibitions available, and to order the exhibition files, [click here](#).

Yad Vashem's extensive collection of [video testimonies by Holocaust survivors](#) is also available for your use.

Recover Names of Shoah Victims

"Unto Every Person There is a Name" events provide a unique opportunity to gather heretofore unknown names of all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Since its inception, one of Yad Vashem's central missions has been the recovery of the names and personal stories of all victims of the Shoah. While the Nazis sought not only to physically destroy the Jews but also to obliterate any memory of them, The Shoah Victims' Names Recovery Project realizes our moral imperative to memorialize each victim as a human being, and not merely a single collective number. (To learn more about the project [click here](#))

The relentless endeavor has to date identified more than four million nine hundred thousand names of Shoah victims, documented in the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names online at: www.yadvashem.org with over 2,817,000 names registered on "[Pages of Testimony](#)" submitted by relatives and others who knew of the victims. The remainder of the victims' names in the database were derived from various archival sources and postwar commemoration projects. The outstanding universal value of the Pages of Testimony Memorial Collection has been recognized by UNESCO, which in 2013 inscribed it in its prestigious Memory of the World Register.

The Names Database, uploaded to the Internet in 2004, marked a pioneering use of technology in the service of memory, documenting and commemorating nearly three million names of Holocaust victims. To continue to meet the needs of an expanding worldwide community of users, Yad Vashem has upgraded and re-designed the database, making use of an innovative platform that allows the accessibility of online information in a fast and user-friendly format.

Names recitations may be utilized to call upon members of your community to complete a "Page of Testimony" for each unregistered victim, or to volunteer to assist others with this urgent task.

Important links



Lists of names



Pages of Testimony



Video testimonies

The official opening ceremony at Yad Vashem marking the commencement of Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2024 will take place on Sunday, 5 May at 20:00 (8 PM) Israel time.

The ceremony will be broadcast on Israel's television and radio channels accessible via the internet, Yad Vashem's website and in seven languages on Yad Vashem's youtube channels.

We are available to answer any questions that might arise and provide additional material as necessary.

Sincerely,

Members of the "Unto Every Person There Is A Name" International Committee: **Inbal Kvity-Ben Dov**, **Dr. Alexander Avram** (Yad Vashem); **Alan Schneider** (B'nai B'rith International); World Jewish Congress; **Sarit Handknopf** (World Zionist Organization); **Ms. Ruth Cohen-Dar** (Israel Foreign Ministry); **Masha Novikov** (Nativ).

Project Initiator: **Haim Roet**

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A Lost World

The Destruction of the Jewish Communities

The Central Theme for
Holocaust Martyrs' and
Heroes' Remembrance Day
2024

The Jewish community, a unique, autonomous social unit that characterized Jewish existence in the Diaspora through the ages, was dealt a fatal blow by the Holocaust. Thousands of prewar Jewish communities had served as a fundamental and critical framework in the lives of the Jewish people.

The Rabbinic adage, "All Jews are responsible for one another" was not a mere recommendation, but rather a practical axiom according to which traditional Jewish communities shaped their institutions and by which their leaders abided. A community's authority encompassed all aspects of life and mandated the complete allegiance of its members. From the moment of their birth until their final breath, in joy and in sorrow, Jews were affiliated with their communal institutions, which provided them with an identity, and a social, educational, religious and economic network via such established organizations as synagogues, courts of law, *Mikvaot* (ritual baths), and shelters for the sick and the impoverished. Community figures represented their members vis-à-vis the authorities and served as a conduit of information from those authorities back to the community. Despite the singularity of each Jewish community in Christian Europe and the Islamic countries, there were marked similarities in the structure and operation of the various communities.

The modern era brought with it dramatic changes in the characteristics and behavioral patterns of the Jewish community, due to the forces of modernization and the intervention of governmental authorities. In many parts of Europe and the Mediterranean basin, a new form of Jewish community emerged: a "congregation of ritual observance", focused primarily upon the accommodation of its members' religious requirements, alongside provision of their social and economic needs. This shift strengthened the status of the Rabbi, and the importance of synagogues and *Batei Midrash* (houses of learning), which became the principal communal institutions.

Alongside such religious communities, there evolved, from the end of the 18th century and henceforth, alternatives to the traditional community. In Eastern Europe, Hasidic courts arose and regional *Yeshivot* (Talmudic academies) were established, the first of which opened in Volozhin in 1803. At the same time, figures from the "Jewish Enlightenment" movement labored to provide reformed social networks to the Jewish community. These communities did not require official recognition by the authorities, as their strength derived from the traditional connection between religious faith and social structure.

From the mid-19th century, a diverse ideological, political and national consciousness was awakened amongst the Jews, giving rise to a new sense of collective identity. This consciousness influenced the nature of the Jewish community and was expressed in the creation of new voluntary social frameworks that served as a modern, secular alternative to religious communal existence, in effect creating a civic society.

On the eve of World War II, the Jewish communities in the shtetls, mellahs, villages, towns and cities in the East and West were replete with philanthropic institutions, political parties, welfare and mutual assistance frameworks, representative bodies that liaised with the authorities and non-Jewish society, Jewish trade unions and immigrant organizations. These in turn facilitated the proliferation of educational and cultural institutions, youth movements, sports clubs, libraries, newspapers, theaters, orchestras and choirs. This abundance existed alongside the traditional Jewish institutions: synagogues, religious courts, *Mikvaot*, educational frameworks such as the *Heder* (Hebrew school), *Talmud Torah* (elementary school) and *Beit Midrash*, charitable institutions and the *Hevra Kaddisha* (burial society).

With the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, and subsequently upon the establishment of German hegemony over most of Europe and large parts of North Africa, Jewish society was forcibly plunged into an extreme reality. Faced with persecution and daily terror, the Jews fought tenaciously to preserve their physical and spiritual existence. Their sense of shared destiny, mutual responsibility and solidarity persisted as the cornerstones of Jewish communal life, even during the Holocaust.

The establishment of the ghettos in Eastern Europe, as a consequence of Germany's policy of segregation and isolation of the Jews, turned each Jewish community into a distinct, closed administrative unit, cut-off one from the other communities and from their surroundings. Throughout the conquered lands, many veteran Jewish leaderships ceased functioning, and were replaced by new communal administrations, imposed by the Germans. From then on, community leaders were forced to implement the orders of the German Nazi regime, and were made responsible for a wide range of functions that had routinely been handled by governmental and municipal institutions: food supply, employment, housing, health and sanitation, and even spheres that had previously been antithetical to the Diaspora Jewish heritage, such as the police and prisons. At the same time, the community continued to bear its previous responsibilities of accommodating religious needs, and providing education, welfare and burial services.

The systematic murder campaign waged against the Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators inflicted utter devastation upon thousands of communities in the German-occupied areas of Europe and North Africa; entire communities were decimated, and in many cases were totally obliterated.

The post-Holocaust Jewish world found itself in a jarringly harsh new reality: millions of Jews had been murdered, and with them, an array of venerable communal institutions and a wealth of Jewish civilization had been obliterated. In many locations, survivors attempted, as best they could, to reconstitute and renew their communities. In Israel and other countries to which survivors immigrated, many formed *Landsmannschaften*, associations of survivors from specific places that served as communities of remembrance for many years after most of their original members had been murdered, their institutions destroyed and their survivors dispersed all over the world.

Hundreds of destroyed communities were commemorated in *Yizkor* (memorial) books. This was a monumental enterprise initiated by Holocaust survivors, together with community members who had left Europe before World War II in order to commemorate a glorious chapter of Jewish history: the Diaspora community.

The legacy of the Jewish community is one of the most magnificent and cherished treasures that Jewish history has bequeathed to us. The destruction of the communities during the Holocaust is a deep wound inflicted upon the body and soul of the Jewish people. Delving into the history of the Jewish community and studying its destruction helps to illustrate the enormity of the calamity and the catastrophic loss suffered by the Jewish people during and following the Shoah.



The official poster marking Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2024
Design: Ira Ginzburg



Exterior view of the Rama Synagogue, Kraków, Poland

"Nobody will ever give us
back what we have lost"

Yearning for the Lost Jewish World



Jewish funeral procession, Utena, Lithuania



*Nobody will ever give us back what we have lost.
An entire beautiful Jewish world had ceased to exist.
You can no longer see in Lithuania a bearded Jew.
Gone are our fathers and our mothers who sustained
the fine and pure Jewish life upon their shoulders!
A Jewish world is forever gone!*

Lyuba Brik, Kovno

"After So Much Pain and Anguish: First Letters after Liberation"

Yad Vashem, 2016

(Lyuba and Hirsch Brik (Barak) are the parents of Former President of the Israeli Supreme Court, Prof. Aharon Barak)



When I think of my childhood years, I thank fate for making me part of a warm Jewish home—one that inspired me. It was a home that was certainly not rich in terms of money but rather in terms of high moral values and culture, a home full of books that dealt with the humanism and the romanticism of the post-World War I era. From early childhood, we were used to reading and listening to beautiful music.

My mother played the piano, and we would occasionally join her in singing her favorite opera passages.

All three of her sons took piano lessons and even though no one achieved virtuosity, we learned to love classical music, and that love has stayed with us throughout our lives. Our source of more worldly matters, such as etiquette, politics, and sports was, of course, our father. He had grown up in a house where the patriarchic influence was strong. He sincerely believed that society had to be hierarchically structured and he made no compromises. He raised us in accordance with this belief and established clear boundaries for us. For instance, it was particularly important that we should respect our elders, both men and women. In the street, we had to greet the members of the Jewish community, using the old bourgeois greeting that meant, “I kiss your hand.” On Saturday, of course, we had to use the “Good Shabbes” greeting. Some people in the community were so punctilious about being greeted properly that one of them demanded that we do so, even if we were walking on the other side of the street, twenty meters away. He used to shout at us, the children, if we did not greet him. I remember once being so fed up with him that I crossed the street and said repeatedly to him, “Good Shabbes, good Shabbes, good Shabbes... Now leave me alone for a whole month.” The people of Holič would remind me of this incident every time they had a chance.



Raya Globotzenskaya playing the piano, Bratslav, Ukraine. Raya was murdered in the Pechora camp in 1942/3

”

*The synagogue was an exquisite building built of brick and mortar. The entrance was a magnificent hall lined with stained-glass windows with a staircase on either side of the door. Both sides of the stairs were decorated with musical instruments made from chiseled wood and painted in gold and white so they looked like shiny metal. At the top of the staircases, there was a series of separate prayer rooms called **shtieblach**, where different groups and professional guilds would pray. At the end of the hall was a gallery for women, who sat separately from men during services.*

*The main sanctuary was enormous, with a ceiling almost forty feet high and a magnificent chandelier hanging in the middle. The ceiling was painted the color of the sky, with clouds and a glowing sun that seemed to give light by day and night. There were also stars and flying angels painted in blue, green, purple, and gold. Candelabras hung between the **bima** (raised platform) and the **Aron Hakodesh** (Holy Ark) and, on either side of the Holy Ark, there were sculptures of two lions holding tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments. The **Torah Scrolls** (the books of the Old Testament) inside the Holy Ark were wrapped in mantles made of velvet and silk. These mantles had beautiful designs of holiday scenes embroidered in silver and gold by women from the community. As a child, I spent many hours daydreaming in the midst of this beauty.*

Today, all of it is gone.



Synagogue in Marburg, Germany, prewar

Danna J. Azrieli, "One Step Ahead: David J. Azrieli (Azrylewicz), Memoirs: 1939-1950"
Yad Vashem, 2022



The Levy family in front of the *sukkah*, Affaltrach, Germany

"An Unmitigated Joy"

Shabbat and Jewish Holidays



Family photo around the *seder* table, Latvia, Riga, prewar



*We children lived a happy and sheltered life. Our home was beautiful and full of love. The best time was always Friday night. After my mother lit the candles and my father came back from **shul** (the synagogue), we sat down at the table for dinner. Somehow the room looked different. It was always beautiful, but on Friday evenings you could feel a radiance, an aura enveloping the room. This time was special for the family. We youngsters never accepted invitations to go out that evening. We talked, sang, and listened to the wisdom of our beloved parents... Every Saturday, when my father returned from synagogue, he brought a guest for lunch, called an **oreah**, a Jewish man who was either needy or a stranger from out of town. It was also customary for the students at a local yeshiva, under the auspices of the Rabbi of Radomsk, to eat their lunch in different Jewish homes during the week. One of these students ate in our home on Fridays. Our parents told us that we could speak to the boy before or after the meal, but that we should not go into the room while he was eating. Maybe, they said, he was hungry and would be ashamed to eat a lot if he felt that we were watching him....*

Hadassah Rosensaft, "Yesterday: My Story", Yad Vashem and The Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project, 2005



A Jew on Shabbat eve, USSR, prewar



*On Shabbat eve, if Father bought fish, then mother would cook fish, soup and **kiegel**. Mother didn't bake the **kiegel** at home, but at the bakery, where she would also bake bread. The Shabbat table was festive, a white tablecloth with candlesticks, a beautiful tray with **challot**. Before the Shabbat started, Father would polish all our shoes. We had to sweep the house and the outside; Father always said that the outside had to be as clean as the house. It was nice..... [on Shabbat] Mother went to synagogue and I stayed at home with the children. Afterwards, they came home, Father made **Kiddush**, then they went to the bakery again to bring the **kiegel** and the **cholent**. We sang lots of **zemirot**, and in the afternoon we went to friends, or would meet up in the garden.*

Ahuva Schechter, Munkacs, Czechoslovakia

Yad Vashem Archives

Chaya Tzipa Slep (née Chaskel)
lighting Shabbat candles, Dusetos,
Lithuania



*I guess I learned the Shabbat songs at home, because my father would sing **zemirot**. We also had a **melamed** who would come to our home, and we learned to read Hebrew... We learned to say the prayer "**Modeh Ani**". There was a lovely, Jewish atmosphere at home; we observed all the holidays and Mother lit candles... Every Friday she would prepare a meal, for our neighbors too, because he was our **melamed** and they had many children. Mother prepared a wonderful Shabbat meal for them and for the whole family... Mother would call me... she would send me and say: "Idsel, take this basket with everything"... She made soup, **gefilte fish**, she made her own **challa** and cakes for the Shabbat, wonderful things, and a roast, of course... "Bring this to the Adler family, and don't make a big deal out of it, don't say anything to them. Put it on the table, tell them that Mother sends Shabbat greetings, and play there with the children..."*

Yehudit Yagerman, Karlsbad, Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia

Yad Vashem Archives



*The Sabbath stands out in my childhood as an unmitigated joy. It was the day of rest and, therefore, Papa was home the entire day and so were all our relatives and friends. There was no work or any kind of business performed on the Sabbath. All Jewish families were in a festive, relaxed mood. As the poet of our Sabbath eve prayer states, the “Sabbath of Peace is welcomed as a groom welcomes his bride and a queen is welcomed by her adoring subjects,” or at least as a favorite invited guest. The highlight of the weekly Sabbath was attendance at the inspiring synagogue service that included a topical and scholarly sermon derived from the Torah portion of that week. At the end of the service, families, couples and individuals, dressed in their finest, congregated in front of the synagogue to greet and socialize with family and friends, and then, shortly after, they slowly broke away from the crowd to begin the delightful **shpatzier** (stroll) home. We lived about two kilometers away. At noon, we had the festive Sabbath meal and then the whole afternoon was spent playing with my cousins. There could be NO homework and there were NO “interrogations” by Mama about school. It was the Sabbath! For me, the fact that Papa was home was the paramount embellishment of the day.*

*In the late Sabbath afternoon, Mother would call us in from the backyard for the traditional **Seudah Shelishit** (third meal) of the Sabbath, eaten before sunset. My cousin Ervin, the eldest and leader of our playgroup, would shout at me with a condescending tone that my mother always called us in too early, just when we were beginning to have fun. It was the usual understanding among the aunts that we were fed in whichever aunt’s yard we happened to be playing; everybody fed everybody’s children, and if we wanted to, we could stay until bedtime.*

Thursday was the day for the Sabbath preparations. Whereas the main cooking for the Sabbath was done on Friday, all dairy and fresh-baked goods for the Sabbath, as well as for the rest of the week, were made on Thursday. Seeing that Thursday was a “dairy day,” it presented a smaller possibility of conflict regarding the Jewish kosher dietary laws, which forbid the commingling of meat and dairy foods.

*The Sabbath meals, beginning on Friday night and continuing on Saturday, always started with the appropriate benedictions that were followed by an appetizer of either **gefilte** (ground and poached) fish or jellied carp.*

*Customarily, fish was always eaten before meat and the two were never cooked, served or eaten together. Since the next course was a plate of chopped grilled liver, eggs, fried onions and seasoning, Papa would take some brandy in order to make the customary Jewish symbolic separation between fish and meat. The serving of the soup signaled the end of the appetizers and the beginning of the main course. Chicken soup with **kneidlach** (matzoh balls) or **lukshon** (noodles) was the standard fare. The chicken or meat was served with a salad of cucumbers and onions, and a **kugel** (a potato, carrot, noodle or vegetable pudding) and **tzimmes** (a sweet carrot, honey and raisin stew) would complete our delectable plate. In the winter, it was **chulent** and **kishka** (a casserole that was simmered or baked overnight, containing*

beef and beef bones, preferably with bone marrow, beans, barley and potatoes, fat and spices and stuffed derma).

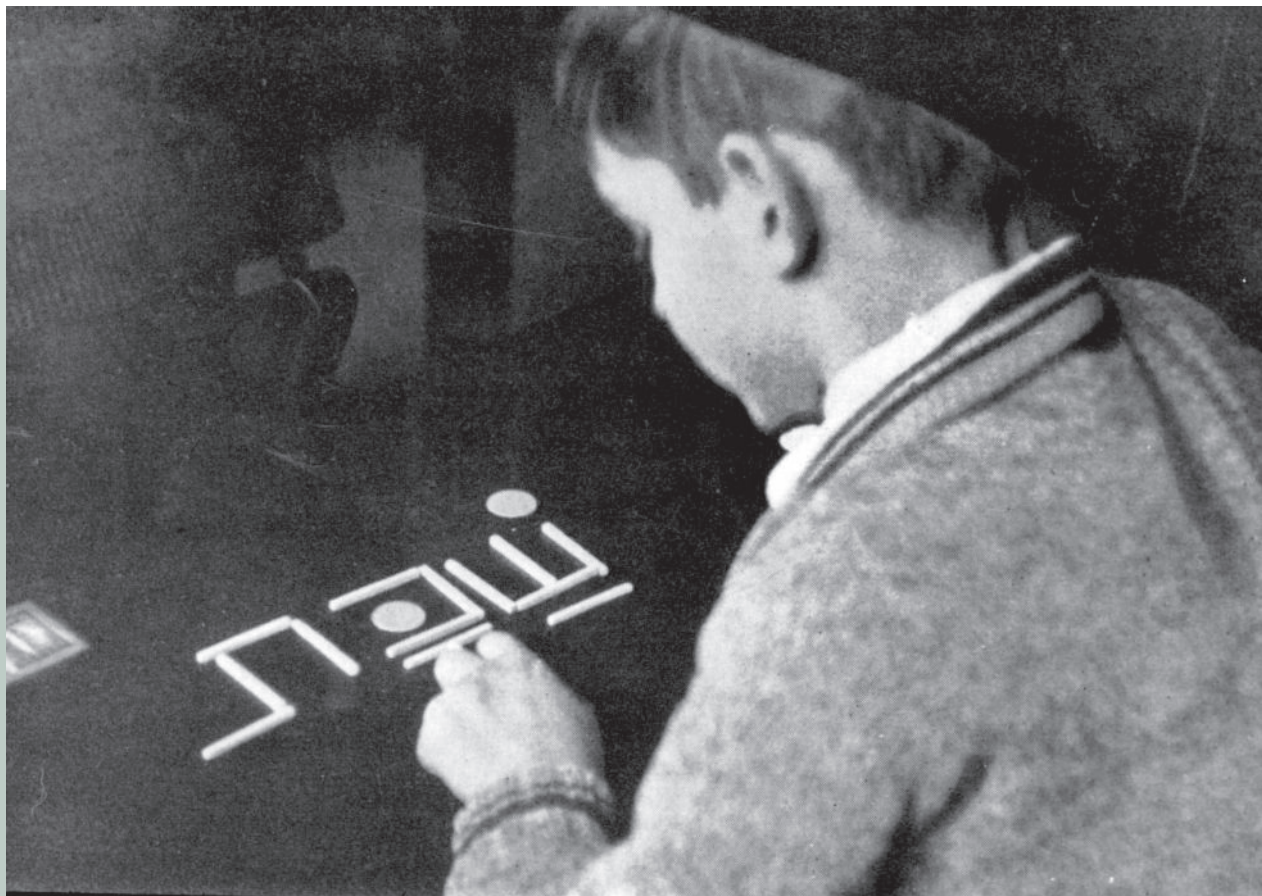
It is interesting to note that, if one lived in the upper echelons of society, as our family did, the butcher would give us "nice fat stuff" — "fat" was synonymous with "good" in those days. I recall that if somebody back home said, "Oh, he looks so well," that meant he was fat. People who were scrawny were considered either hungry or sick, or at the very least, as looking unwell.

Before condemning that way of life, one must consider the fact that we lived in a harsh, cold climate and the average man worked hard and long hours, burning many calories. It was a different world then.

Andrew Burian, "A Boy from Buština: A Son. A Survivor. A Witness.", Yad Vashem, 2016

A Jewish boy learns his first Hebrew letters at *Talmud Torah*, Hamburg, Germany

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*I loved the holiday of Hanukkah. The family would gather each evening at one of our homes to light candles. The **Hanukiah** (nine-branched candelabra) would be set on a windowsill so that all would know that we were celebrating the Festival of Lights. We ate crisp potato fritters called *latkes* and jam-filled donuts, and we spun a *dreidel*, a top, which was made of tin, and then waited impatiently to receive **Hanukkah gelt**, coins.*

Uri Chanoch, Judith Chanoch, "The Story I Never Told: From Kovno and Dachau to a New Life", Yad Vashem, 2020



Candle-lighting in the synagogue, Frankfurt, Germany, Hanukkah 1936



Children playing *dreidel* next to the Hanukkah *menorah*, Berlin, Germany, Hanukkah 1930s

© Juedisches Museum Berlin



Sukkah in the Jewish Quarter, Berlin, Germany, 1933

© Bundesarchiv



*I remember Simhat Torah. I would receive lots of candies, so many that I would come from home with a large tin box hung with a ribbon on my stomach, and I would gather all my candies there. Afterwards, we would get a candy every evening, together with the fish oil, to sweeten the pill. After **Purim**, if we still had lots of candies, we would get two, because they had to be finished before Passover.... Jews in the Netherlands did not dance with the Torah scroll, it wasn't the custom. There were **hakafot** inside the synagogue, and people walked in a line, and the children stood at the side and received candies from all the grownups.*

*I remember Sukkot, when we would go and visit different booths. And there are all kinds of stories about the rain that would fall, and we would have to lower the cover quickly, there was almost no time to make the blessings and recite **Kiddush**. We would receive warm clothes before Sukkot. Some people had heaters inside the **sukkah**. We would collect colored papers and make paper chains and hang them in the **sukkah**.*

*On Passover, there were two seder nights. One time, we surprised Grandpa. On the second seder night we snuck home while grandpa was having his afternoon nap... Our aunt hid us in a little room in the attic... When grandpa said "**ho lach mo anya...**" we knocked on the door and came in.... and he was so happy. And then we stole the **afikoman**.... We put the matzo under the seat cushion of one of the guests, and he sat down and the matzo disintegrated. Eventually, when we had to bring the matzo to grandpa, we brought him crumbs. He laughed until the tears rolled down his face.... Before that he cried over the bitter herbs. He used to say that it was a special **mitzva** to cry over the bitter herbs.*

Shimon Dassberg, Haarlem, the Netherlands

Yad Vashem Archives



*When Shabbat started, all the Jews would wear their **kapotas** and their **shtreimels** to synagogue. Even the wagon driver with his wagon would stop and read.... Passover was a major holiday, and the preparations began early, a month in advance, already on Purim people would buy raisins and soak them in water to prepare them for the festival. That was our kiddush wine, because raisins kept well. As the festival approached, father would bring us all shoes, and all sorts of sweets. We would buy the **matzot** at the bakery. There was a large white sheet – they would put the **matzot** inside the sheet and watch over it so that God forbid a single drop of water wouldn't spoil them. All this was done with the accompaniment of the rabbi. It was a really big ritual. On Passover eve, I remember that we would pump the water, so that God forbid a crumb of **hametz** wouldn't fall inside.*

*Simhat Torah was a joyful holiday. I remember that we would go from house to house with **kiegel**, and eat together.*

*I studied at a **heder** and grandma used to pay the **melamed** – not with money, because we didn't have any money, but she would put a few eggs inside her apron, and would go with them to the **melamed** and reward him for investing in us, his pupils.*

Shmuel Davidowicz, Salista, Romania

Yad Vashem Archives

Synagogue exterior, Seta, Lithuania, prewar





The Gotkin family around the *seder* table, Latvia

”

*At home, the laws and rules about observing Kashrut were really..... For milky [food] there were milky [implements], and for meaty [food] there were meaty [implements].... We received an orthodox education, according to the rules.... We also lay **tefillin** (phylacteries) in the morning... We observed Shabbat very meticulously, and of course, we wore yarmulkas.... **tzitzit**.... On Shabbat we were usually invited to Grandma and Grandpa's home, they had an open house.... Any person on the street who was in need and asked to join our meal was invited, no questions asked, to sit at the table.*

*I remember that Grandpa would sit at the head of the table and pray... I also especially remember Passover. On Passover too, the preparations at home, the cleaning of course, the preparations, the meticulousness not to miss a crumb of hametz, it was quite extreme... My mother was the type to do things to the utmost.... At the **seder**, the whole family would gather, everyone with the children, the grandchildren. Of course, everyone sang, joined in the prayers and asked the "**Mah Nishtana**" – and all in accordance with the **Haggadah** story, according to the rules... no compromising, no deviating, everything to the utmost... To adhere to the clear, meticulous tradition was one of their goals in life. Without that, life had no meaning for them.*

Aryeh Pinika, Antwerp, Belgium

Yad Vashem Archives



I loved Simhat Torah. I loved it that my father would dance holding the Torah scroll, his eyes raised heavenwards. He would dance with his friends and sing – this left such a wonderful impression on me, such a beautiful memory... He would use a handkerchief because he sweated so much... I have such joy in my heart recollecting this... The children had flags, there were apples and they ate honey. The flags were illustrated so beautifully....

Yehudit Yagerman, Karlsbad, Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia

Yad Vashem Archives



Torah scroll dedication ceremony, Papa, Hungary, prewar



Preparing matzos for distribution to the needy, Vienna, Austria, 1921

© Joint Archive



*On Passover, we baked everything. First of all the cleaning, we cleaned everything. My mother z"l even took the clothes out of the closets and washed them by hand. There was no machine. She would boil a big pot and put the clothes on a rope, everything that was in the cupboard... Everything was clean, sparkling closets... we would scrub everything with iron [wire wool]... And we would make all the food for Passover, we would prepare **Haroset**, we organized the cupboards so that everything would be ready. Everything was prepared and beautiful. For Passover, we would make a pot and put everything into the pot, and the boys would tidy up, and afterwards we would go to synagogue and come back, and start reciting **Kiddush**...*

Rachel Levy (Tishova), Benghazi, Libya

Yad Vashem Archives



The holidays were my favorite days and it seemed to me that we lived from one holiday to another. They measured time as they marked the seasons. Truly, the holidays were an absolute joy. The most favorite of all was Pesach (Passover), followed by Succoth (Tabernacles). The whole aura of the preparations for the next holiday seemed to begin at the conclusion of the previous one, giving every holiday an ongoing importance and anticipation.

Getting dressed up and going to the synagogue with my parents and brother Tibi was a cherished occasion. As we walked up the road, uncles and cousins joined us. The synagogue was about one kilometer away, situated across the street from the old Brandstein house in the Dorf section of town. The whole experience was an absolute delight. I loved the smell of burned candles and the mahogany pews. The prayers were according to the Eastern European Hasidic custom (Nusah Sfarad) instead of the Ashkenazi order of prayers (as practiced by the majority of Jews in the United States), but not the Sfaradi custom of the eastern Jews.

As we returned home from the synagogue following the evening prayers, I was aware of a certain special, positively charged atmosphere. Everyone was dressed in his or her best. The sky seemed to me like a canopy of stars over our heads and the moon appeared within reach. Our entire extended family and friends were together as we left the synagogue and walked down the main road. Since we lived the furthest from the synagogue, we exchanged Sabbath or holiday greetings with everyone as they turned off the road toward their homes.

On Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) our dark, perhaps somewhat dingy, synagogue was transformed with the solemnity of these holidays that was the highlight of the year. It was an unbelievable sight to witness everyone in white kittels (long cotton robes) and prayer shawls. It seemed to me that my paternal grandpa and Papa looked angelic. During these holidays I could feel the presence of our Maker. The holiday atmosphere, the setting of the table with burning holiday candles and the dinners contributed to the aura that turned the holidays into holy days.

On these occasions, the synagogue candles in front of the ark were made of beeswax. The flickering of the flames and the aroma of the burning beeswax remain in my mind and nostrils. It was an awe-inspiring experience.



Members of a charity committee, Lodz, Poland, 1939

"No one Went Hungry"

Charity and Support



Group photograph on the "Matanot Le'evyonim" (gifts to the poor) Society's first anniversary, Thessaloniki, Greece



I was born into a family of five children, 2 boys and 3 girls. My father had a haberdashery store, and we wanted for nothing. There were all sorts of nationalities in Bitola: Greeks, Vlachs who spoke Romanian, Serbs, Macedonians and Jews. The Jews in Bitola were members of the intelligentsia, but they helped one another.

There was the "Malbish Arumim" (lit. clothe the naked) organization. Twice a year, several people would get together, and would give the schoolchildren clothes, shoes and socks. Most of the Jews were impoverished. There was another organization that took care of food for the children. It was a Jewish school but the teachers were Serb. There was a kosher kitchen; in the morning, they would give the children a cheese sandwich before they entered their classrooms, and they would give them food at lunchtime too. These two organizations took very good care of the children.

There was also a women's WIZO organization... they would also collect money for the Jewish National Fund. They made sure that girls from good families whose parents didn't have money, would go to school, and then to vocational school... They would go via Gaili Betino's house; she would make them a bowl with fish oil and a roll with something inside, so that they wouldn't feel hard done by when everyone ate lunch.

Dora Russo, Bitola

Yad Vashem Archives



Charitable organization before World War II, Stakliskes, Lithuania

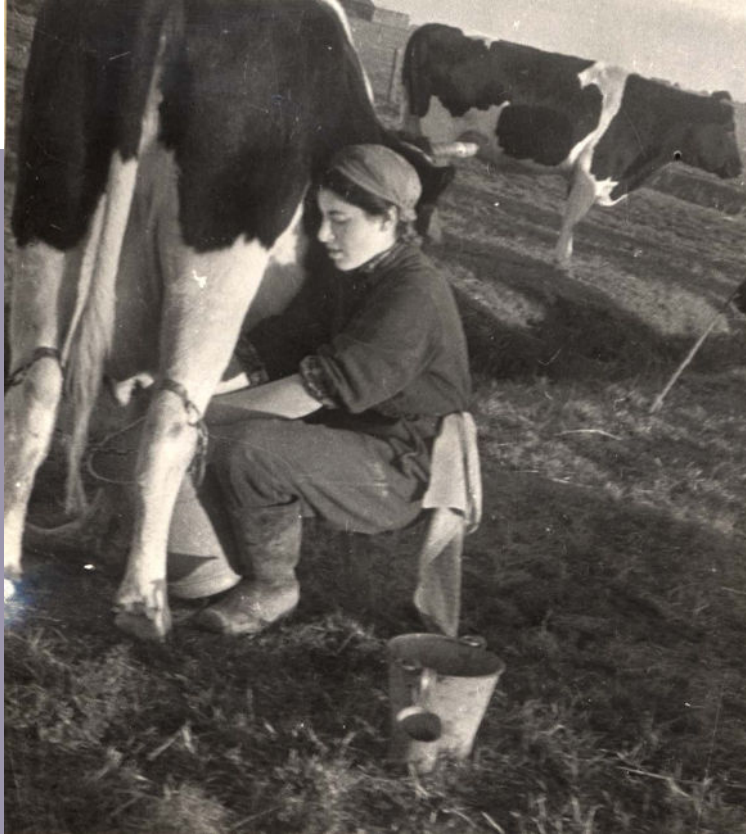


A small table stood at the front door. There were always some coins for the poor under an embroidered napkin. In Kovno, needy people would go from house to house to collect handouts. Perhaps it was easier than begging on the street, where they would feel ashamed if people they knew saw them. One day, I wanted some candy. Mother was out, but I knew where to find some money. I lifted the napkin, but did not take all the coins, just two. I put them in my pocket and went to "Toter's" kiosk in the city square near our home...

I do not know how Mother discovered what I had done, but when she came home, she asked me why I had taken the coins intended for the poor. She sat me down beside her and explained how difficult it is to be poor and to have to accept handouts to survive.

Therefore, she said that, if you are able, you should always help people, and give rather than take. I was so ashamed of depriving the poor by buying candy that, to this day, I cannot turn away a person who asks for help.

Uri Chanoch, Judith Chanoch, "The Story I Never Told: From Kovno and Dachau to a New Life", Yad Vashem, 2020



Young girl milking a cow at a Jewish youth movement *hachshara* (pioneer training) farm, prewar. Wieringen, the Netherlands



Our family owned a large dairy farm. The whole family worked there in milk production. In those days, the only medicine people were familiar with was milk, so the dairy farm was very successful.

My grandfather would help the impoverished by giving them free milk. Destitute people would come with jars, plates, glasses, mugs – everyone had his own cup or receptacle (on which they wrote their name) and everyone would help themselves to milk. My grandfather was careful to provide this charity anonymously, so as to receive the merit of having done a good deed.

In our home, we had the blue Jewish National Fund box, with the Star of David on a chain. Every Jew would donate money; even the poorest among them would put money into the box, saying, "This is for the Jews in Palestine".

Hanan Avraham Albert, Thessaloniki

Yad Vashem Archives



Children's feeding center run by the TOZ (Society for the Protection of Jewish Health in Poland), Warsaw, Poland



The Jewish community in Gabes was very close-knit. All the Jews helped one another: widows, the blind, they were supported by the community. There was no such thing as National Insurance. Things were run like one big family, but closed. No National Insurance, no government, and we managed.

The community took care of everything. 5-10 well-respected citizens, wealthy Jews of means cooperated with the Chief Rabbi. He was also a liaison for financial matters – what to distribute, what to pay, everything together. The community ran itself like a mini-government. It would impose taxes, take from one place to give to another. The community leader was elected, and after a few years, someone new was elected. There was a turnover, it wasn't a lifelong position. In this way, the Jews who were professionals who made a good living, or had an independent business, managed, but there were also those impoverished people who couldn't make it alone, so the community helped them.

We lived in harmony, and no one went hungry. On Fridays, it was customary for everyone to bake bread. Some baked at home, and others at the bakery. The Synagogue gabbai (beadle) would distribute bread to families who didn't have any....

It wasn't an accepted practice to give people money. Those who gave, gave clothes, food or other extras. It was a very organized community.

Zvi Hadad, Gabes, Tunisia

Yad Vashem Archives



I guess I learned shabbat songs at home, because my father would sing zemirot. We also had a melamed who would come to our home, and we learned to read Hebrew... We learned to say the prayer "Modeh Ani". There was a lovely, Jewish atmosphere at home; we observed all the holidays and Mother lit candles... Every Friday she would prepare a meal, for our neighbors too, because he was our melamed and they had many children. Mother prepared a wonderful shabbat meal for them and for the whole family... Mother would call me... she would send me and say: "Idsel, take this basket with everything"... She made soup, gefilte fish, she made her own challa and cakes for shabbat, wonderful things, and a roast, of course... "Bring this to the Adler family, and don't make a big deal out of it, don't say anything to them. Put it on the table, tell them that Mother sends Shabbat greetings, and play there with the children..."

Yehudit Yagerman, Carlsbad, Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia

Yad Vashem Archives



Jewish soup kitchen, Czechoslovakia



Jewish refugee children from Germany being fed, Naarden, the Netherlands, 1938



*There were destitute people in Benghazi, and I remember that my grandfather, my father's father, had sacks of flour, semolina and rice in his house to distribute to the poor... We would go from house to house... I also did it. It's a **mitzva** (good deed). My cousin and I. I remember.*

Rachel Levy (Tishova), Benghazi, Libya

Yad Vashem Archives



Many of the Jewish inhabitants of Nitra, particularly those who lived on Párovská Street, were very poor and lived in wretched conditions in small, crowded apartments. Once, before the fast of the 17th day of Tammuz, Mother had a repairman from Párovská Street come to fix one of the kitchen cabinets.

"Are you going to fast?" she asked him.

"Doctor," he answered drily, "we fast a lot more than on the fast days marked on the calendar, simply because we don't always have anything to eat."

Mother was embarrassed and supplemented his pay.

When poor Jews came to them, my parents did not ask for payment for medical care. Mother recounted that sometimes Father would take almost-new suits out of his closet and give them to the poor.

*Nitra had many Jewish charitable institutions and aid organizations for those in need. The will of the Engels, a wealthy childless couple from Nitra, offers an insight into Nitra's charitable associations and their purposes. The Engels established a primary religious school (**Talmud Torah**) and set aside 4,000 crowns for it, the interest to be used to help its needy students. The chief rabbi of the Nitra community was asked to see to it that the memorial prayer (Hebrew: **kaddish**) was said for them on remembrance days, and the Jewish burial society (**Chevra Kadisha**) also received a sum of money intended to cover prayers and kaddish on the anniversary of their deaths. The Engels not only bequeathed significant sums to their brothers and nephews, but they also provided funding to a wide variety of institutions and causes.*

Hani Kedar-Kehat, "My Nitra: A Family's Struggle to Survive in Slovakia", Yad Vashem, 2015

Children being cared for at a Jewish children's home. Auguststr., Berlin, Germany, 1933

© Juedisches Museum Berlin





There were three flagrant examples of poverty of which I, as a child, was aware. One of them was the widow Shaina Rivka and her many children.

Shaina Rivka seemed to me an obese old lady with grotesquely swollen legs and feet, who spent her days from sunup until sundown minding her fruit stand that stood diagonally opposite Grandfather Brandstein's mansion in the town center. Selling fruit in a town where it grew in everybody's backyard was not a very lucrative undertaking. She was dependent upon those who were strangers in town and on some folks, including my mother, who purchased from her as an indirect act of charity.

The second was Ruven Chaim who lived with his wife and nine children in the Dorf section of town. He was an extremely pious man and for whatever reason, perpetually unemployed. It was said that Ruven Chaim was so poor that, amongst his children, there were only two pairs of shoes, which they all shared in the winter. Only two children at a time could leave the house with shoes, the others had to wait for their turn.

*The third was the widow **Blinde Mima** (Blind Aunt) who was totally dependent on charity. My mother had more or less made Blinde Mima's needs her personal responsibility. I was often the messenger of Mother's charity and was always eager to carry cooked and baked goods to her and thereby be the recipient of her blessings.*

Andrew Burian, "A Boy from Buština: A Son. A Survivor. A Witness.", Yad Vashem, 2016



Making care packages for the needy, Berlin, 1930s
© Juedisches Museum Berlin



Group photograph with Herzl's portrait and a map of Eretz Israel, Lithuania, 1910

"A Home for the Jewish People"

Zionism



Herzl's *The Jewish State*, first published in 1896, brought shining hope to the drab, monotonous life of the Diaspora and constituted a watershed of sorts. Anyone who has not experienced the *Zeitgeist* of our little world in Galicia at the time cannot imagine the truly messianic mood that pervaded the atmosphere. Many were certain that soon we would all depart for the Land of Israel.

A Zionist committee composed of the most respected citizens was quickly formed... Large public meetings were held, and the "Zion" society was established. "Zion" immediately became the focal point for everything happening in the Jewish community. People spent their days and nights in Mosche Shapiro's hall, reading the books and newspapers that lay open there; they listened to lectures and took part in discussions.... The Jewish community was caught up in a messianic frenzy, anxiously awaiting each day the signal for departure to the Land of Israel.

Jehoschua Gertner, Danek Gertner, "Home Is No More: The Destruction of the Jews of Kosow and Zabie", Yad Vashem, 2000



Members of the Zionist Committee with schoolchildren, Breznica, Poland, 1920



Registration of immigration applications at the Eretz Israel Office, Berlin, Germany, 1935



Because of the growing antisemitism—now noticeable everywhere—and as a response to the “benevolent” exhortation of “Jews go home to Palestine,” I decided to actually immigrate to Mandatory Palestine, then under British Mandate. So, in 1933, when I was sixteen years old, I signed up to work for six months in a Zionist forestry company in Topliță,³ a small mountainous locality some 150 kilometers east of Gherla, where young men like me were being prepared for immigration to Mandatory Palestine.

*Aside from the nationalist issues that existed, other important social unrests and measures affected the population. Training in this forestry company in Topliță, I saw workers' strikes being answered with cruel repression. It was there where I realized the miseries of the working class, including insufficient wages for a decent living and a fundamental lack of work safety, and I was deeply moved by these aspects of life. Meanwhile, from time to time, a person would come and speak to us about Zionism, trying to arm us with the volunteer ideology of **halutz**, which encouraged us to immigrate and rebuild the Holy Land—Mandatory Palestine—as a home for the Jewish people.*

Zoltán Roth, "Inherited Words: A Testimony of Resilience", Yad Vashem, 2023



Jewish sportsmen from the "Hapoel" movement, Hamburg, Germany, prewar



Most of all, I loved the books about Eretz Israel. I devoured the historical novels of Abraham Mapu. Although Mapu lived in Kovno and never visited Eretz Israel, he picturesquely depicted ancient Judea.

I imagined the tigers and lions living in the Jordan River Valley and the lofty mountains of Jerusalem, seeing them in my imagination, as if watching a movie. I spent only six years studying at the Schwabe Hebrew Gymnasium, but my years of schooling remain a beautiful childhood memory.

Uri Chanoch, Judith Chanoch, "The Story I Never Told: From Kovno and Dachau to a New Life", Yad Vashem, 2020



The Jewish community in Holič comprised 100 families. Even though there were not many children, a Jewish group called the Jüdischer Jugendbund (Young Jewish Fellowship) was formed. I joined it when I was ten, and one of the first tasks assigned to me was to do a presentation about the Jewish philosopher Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927) and the Hebrew writer Joseph Haim Brenner (1881–1921). Although I wrote only five or six pages, each one containing no more than five or six long lines, I remember being proud of delivering a real lecture.



Members of the Jewish National Fund, Grojec, Poland, prewar

We were already very much aware of Zionism at the time and would sing songs about our homeland with great passion when we gathered every Saturday in the community meeting hall that was attached to our house. We promoted the Hamaccabi organization's motto of a "healthy mind, healthy body," and added the word "Maccabi" to the name of our group. From that time on, we included physical activities in our meetings.

Two years later, in 1928 or 1929, an emissary came to the club. He had been sent by members of a new youth movement founded by Hamaccabi youth who not only believed in the idea of a healthy body, but had also taken upon themselves the realization of the Zionist Hehalutz ideal in Eretz Israel. By adding scouting to its activities, the movement intended to attract more youngsters. We were incorporated into the Hamaccabi Hatza'ir youth movement and, soon after, all the clubs in the regional movements, half of them in Slovakia, the other half in Moravia, participated in exchange programs. The clubs in Moravia were larger and the movement was stronger there and had a higher Zionist consciousness. Their members wore uniforms that were representative of the movement, whereas we did not wear a uniform in our region.



Three couples in the street, Marienbad, Czechoslovakia, 1936

"Relative Harmony"

Relations with the Local Population



Market square, Utena, Lithuania, prewar



*Life in Kovno was peaceful and pleasant. After lunch, I would do my homework, and then play basketball or football with friends. All my friends were Jewish—it was as if we lived in a pleasant bubble, surrounded by Jewish relatives and acquaintances. We occasionally bumped into a gang of young thugs, who called us **Zydas** (Jews) and cursed us, but these incidents were quite rare, since the law in Lithuania forbade displays of antisemitism. I presume that because of this law, we were unaware of the hatred that was seething below the surface.*

Uri Chanoch, Judith Chanoch, "The Story I Never Told: From Kovno and Dachau to a New Life", Yad Vashem, 2020



*It is important to note that good relations existed between some Christian and Jewish families. This was evident on holy days or during special religious events when both sides were invited to each other's homes. For instance, they would invite us to see their Christmas tree and would serve us large quantities of homemade sweets. On Purim, we would bring them **mishloah manot** (gifts of confections) in the form of special cookies called hamantaschen. They liked receiving **matzot** from us during Passover. At Easter, they would send us colorfully painted, hard-boiled eggs. I emphatically hold dear the memory of the Evangelist community, a minority Christian group who felt closeto the Jews and empathized with our plight. They never joined the boys on the street in their roguish antisemitic acts. One of my best friends, who later became a priest, was a member of the Evangelist community.*

Peretz Révész, "Standing Up To Evil: A Zionist's Underground Rescue Activities in Hungary", Yad Vashem, 2019

Street scene in the Old City, Nürnberg, Germany, 1935

© International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House





Market, Mogielnica, Poland, prewar



From the early Middle Ages, the town of Maków flourished as a thriving business city with an active commercial market located in the central square. Every Tuesday and Friday, farmers and artisans from the surrounding areas would bring their goods for trade. The success of the market was also due, in part, to the town's proximity to the Orzyc River, which provided easy access to Warsaw. The total population of Maków was approximately 12,000, of whom about 6,500 were Jewish and the remainder Catholic. Geographically, the town was divided between the Jewish and Catholic communities. The Jewish section was dominated by a large synagogue, and the Polish section by a grand Gothic cathedral. The communities lived in relative harmony with each other despite the obvious separation. Jewish and Polish children attended separate schools, and adults rarely met, except for trading and other official business.

Danna J. Azrieli, "One Step Ahead: David J. Azrieli (Azrylewicz), Memoirs: 1939 - 1950", Yad Vashem, 2022



*I was born in 1917, the fourth child and the first son in a family of a modest craftsman, a ropemaker, in Gherla,¹ a little town some 45 kilometers from Cluj,² the capital of Transylvania. Besides the Romanian majority in my town, Hungarians, Germans, Armenians, Gypsies, and Jews also lived there. The children of the town all grew up together, and we were friends. I did not notice any discrimination between the adults and even less between the children. After an uneventful childhood and finishing my elementary school education, I was enrolled in **școala medie**, the local middle school.*

In the late 1920s, large nationalist demonstrations were occurring in all the major student centers, and their echoes were also felt in our little school in Gherla, where a youth organization—part of the fascist Iron Guard—had developed. I had daily conflicts with schoolmates, both younger and older than me, sometimes ending in fights and always accompanied by insults like “Jews go to Palestine,” amplified by the good acoustics of the classrooms and corridors of our old school building... This spirit not only infected the youths but the adults too. One day, a teacher asked me to recite a Hebrew prayer in front of the class as a form of humiliation. For me, the best thing to do was to leave school, which I did the following day, without any regrets and despite having only three years of middle school under my belt. I could not learn in such an environment, infected by nationalism and antisemitism.

Zoltán Roth, "Inherited Words: A Testimony of Resilience", Yad Vashem, 2023

Street scene, Oswiecim, Poland, 1933





A boy in a ghetto street, Kraków, Poland

"An entire world
had been obliterated"

Returning Home after the War



*Then, filled with memories both beautiful and terrible, I went to my beloved place of birth, the village of Zabie... I asked with keen interest how many Jews lived in Zabie now. "Three," I was told, "but one, Mr. Wiener," died not long ago. The two others were Funt, a photographer, and Eplboim... Funt intended to emigrate to Israel right after our visit that year, and Eplboim by that point was interested mainly in Odessa. To wit: Zabie is, as the Nazis liked to put it, **Judenrein**.*

Jehoschua Gertner, Danek Gertner, "Home Is No More: The Destruction of the Jews of Kosow and Zabie", Yad Vashem, 2000

Mass grave after liberation, Brajłów, Ukraine, 1944





Ruins of the Warsaw ghetto, Poland, 1945



That year, November 14, 1945, was a cool day, and the wind was blowing. I got off at Baița. The bridge over the River Someș had been destroyed, but after coming so far, this would not stop me from getting to Gherla. I crossed the makeshift bridge made of planks and reached the middle of the river quite easily. I looked down, and when I saw the water I was overwhelmed with fear. I began to shiver. Maybe it was from the cold that had entered my bones. Maybe it was my fear of what I would find on the other side. Whatever the reason, I could not go forward, and I sat astride the planks, unable to move.

Like a film, my entire life passed in front of me. My unlived youth, the military, the labor companies in Ukraine, the concentration camps in fascist Germany, and the irony of my fate now. After going through what I had been through, was I going to end my life at the gates of my city? With the help of a soldier who gave me a hand, I just about reached the opposite shore. After a year and a half away, I set foot once again in the city from which I had been banished.

I covered the distance to our house through the park, not wanting to meet anyone. I would not have been able to stop and tell my story. I arrived at our house. The gate was open, the rooms were empty, and everything had been stolen. There were cracks in the walls, apparently due to strong explosions at the railway station. In the yard and in my father's workshop, pits and excavations had been dug by jackals seeking prey. What disappointment those beasts must have felt when, instead of wealth, they found a box full of my dear books.

I entered the house and went from room to room. Thousands of memories flashed before my eyes. In a pile of trash, I found a family photo album, which I still have. I spent about an hour in the house. It was an hour of silence and recollection, an hour spent in memory of loved ones, of my family, killed along with 6 million other souls, guilty of nothing except for being born Jewish.



Sidewalk paved with Jewish gravestones, Thessaloniki, Greece, postwar



What stunned me most was the new soccer field in what used to be the Jewish cemetery. A stone path led to the field but, if you looked closely, you saw that they were not ordinary cobblestones but Jewish tombstones. I could see Hebrew letters and the occasional Star of David facing upward. Once again, I was overwhelmed with anger. My father's family had lived in Maków for hundreds of years. My great great-grandparents had been buried in this cemetery and I had hoped to find a gravestone with a familiar name. Every trace of the Jewish community I had known had been destroyed by the Nazis.

Danna J. Azrieli, "One Step Ahead: David J. Azrieli (Azrylewicz), Memoirs: 1939-1950", Yad Vashem, 2022



We then traveled to Zosle. The railway station looked exactly as it had fifty years earlier, as if nothing had changed there since then. The antique wooden bench, the waiting room, and the big fireplace, whose sides were covered with ceramic tiles that had once been blue and were now faded. At the cashier's window, which was barred by a metal grille, the grandfatherly head of the cashier peeped out, as if he had not moved from his place since our last visit to Zosle. Only grandmother was missing, no longer waiting outside in the cart with the pair of horses and the blanket in which she wrapped us up with warmth and love. The large, rectangular square was empty. The small village houses, which at one time were all occupied by my relatives and other Litvaks, still bordered the square. The houses looked the same as they had then, although the colors had faded over the years. We knocked on two or three doors, but no one opened them. Where was grandmother's house? There was only an empty plot where it once stood. A young man came out of the adjacent house, Uncle Abraham's house, and asked us in English if he could help us. We told him that we were looking for our grandmother's house.

"I am a newcomer to the village. It has only been a few years, but I heard that the house next door had burned down many years ago. Now I grow vegetables there." He introduced himself as an artist and invited us into Uncle Abraham's house. The painter had refurbished it and the house looked different. He showed us his paintings of scenic views of the village and the nearby lakes, hoping, perhaps, that we would be tempted to buy one, out of nostalgia. "Who did you buy the house from?" I asked. "From the government and, what is more, I paid 10,000 euro for it. I heard from my neighbors, who have lived here for many years, that they were given their homes for nothing after the Jews left." "Left?" "Yes, the Germans told them to leave, so they did." From there, we walked to the old cemetery of the village, hoping to find the graves of relatives who had died before the war. Most of the graves were open, because the slabs of marble that covered them and the headstones had been removed. An old man, who was passing nearby, said that peasants had taken the marble gravestones to their cemetery or for the floors in their houses. "Since the Jews were all dead already, what did they need a cemetery for?" he explained. Near one of the open graves, we saw a skull with its teeth bared. I felt a chill run down my spine. The sight was unbearable. We hurried away.... We spent ten days in Lithuania, soaking up the sights and the views. It was an emotionally rocky journey of sadness and nostalgia. We gradually remembered words in Lithuanian. We tasted the local dishes wherever we went. Only teiglach, that sweet, gingery delicacy, boiled in honey or golden syrup, which Aunt Leah would prepare, was not to be found in Lithuania, since so few Jews remained there. Today, who else knows what teiglach is?



Memorial ceremony for the murdered Jews of Vilna, Ponary, 9 Av 1945

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When I visited Vilna, if I was not too tired after a day of meetings, I sometimes would stroll along the lanes of the Old City. The Lithuanians understood the tourist value of the Jewish Quarter. They renovated the houses a little and restored the original names of some of the streets. There are small cafés in the courtyards of the renovated houses that serve dishes with Jewish names—herring and borscht, lokshen (noodle) soup and stuffed cabbage. One Friday, after a long and exhausting meeting, I went outside for a breath of fresh air in the streets that were once part of the Vilna ghetto and sat in the café in the yard of one of the houses. It was a beautiful twilight, and the sun's last rays illuminated the windows of the houses surrounding the yard that were once inhabited only by Jews. I suddenly remembered that it was Friday, almost Shabbat. What was I doing here, why wasn't I at home, in my comfortable house, waiting for my children to arrive for dinner? The yard seemed to have come to life then, as it would have at this time of the day when the Jews still lived there. Before Shabbat, women would light the candles in the apartments, whose windows I was looking at, while the men and the children, in festive dress, would cross the yard, hurrying to the synagogue. From a window of one of the houses, a violin could be heard. A sad melody, a Jewish tune? All around, happy people sat, enjoying the summer evening in a café, and I thought of the lives that had been lost. I felt my heart break as I held back my tears.

Uri Chanoch, Judith Chanoch, "The Story I Never Told: From Kovno and Dachau to a New Life", Yad Vashem, 2020



In the winter of 1944 we were liberated by the Red Army. From the Polish partisan base at Panska Dolina I hurried to my hometown of Luck. I wore myself out walking through the streets, hoping to find a Jew. Luck had become a Jewish town devoid of Jews.

Why had I stayed alive? I recall a particularly hard moment, when, crossing the bridge over the River Styr, I started running amok in an attempt to overcome the death wish that gripped me.

*I found my sister hiding in a Polish family's attic, wearing a cross around her neck. The first thing she whispered to me was: "Shmilik!" – I was 14 – "I have remained Jewish", as she pulled out a page from the **Rosh Hashana** (Jewish new year) prayers:*

"Hear our voice, oh Lord our G-d, have mercy upon us!"

"We must flee from this country", she whispered, "There is nothing for us here. We will go to Eretz Israel."

Shmuel Shilo (Excerpt from his address on behalf of Holocaust survivors, Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2008)

Vasily Grossman, during his service as a military correspondent with the Red Army, Germany





Market square, Kovno, Lithuania, 1936



I went back to Kovno, the city of my birth, only to discover a city almost empty of Jews. The streets, which had bustled with Jews for hundreds of years, were solitary. The Hebrew Gymnasium, the synagogues, the theatre and cultural buildings stood silent. Yiddish and Hebrew would not be heard there again, and the aroma of Sabbath cooking did not waft from the windows of the houses. An entire world had been obliterated.

Roza Bloch (Excerpt from her address on behalf of Holocaust survivors, Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2021)

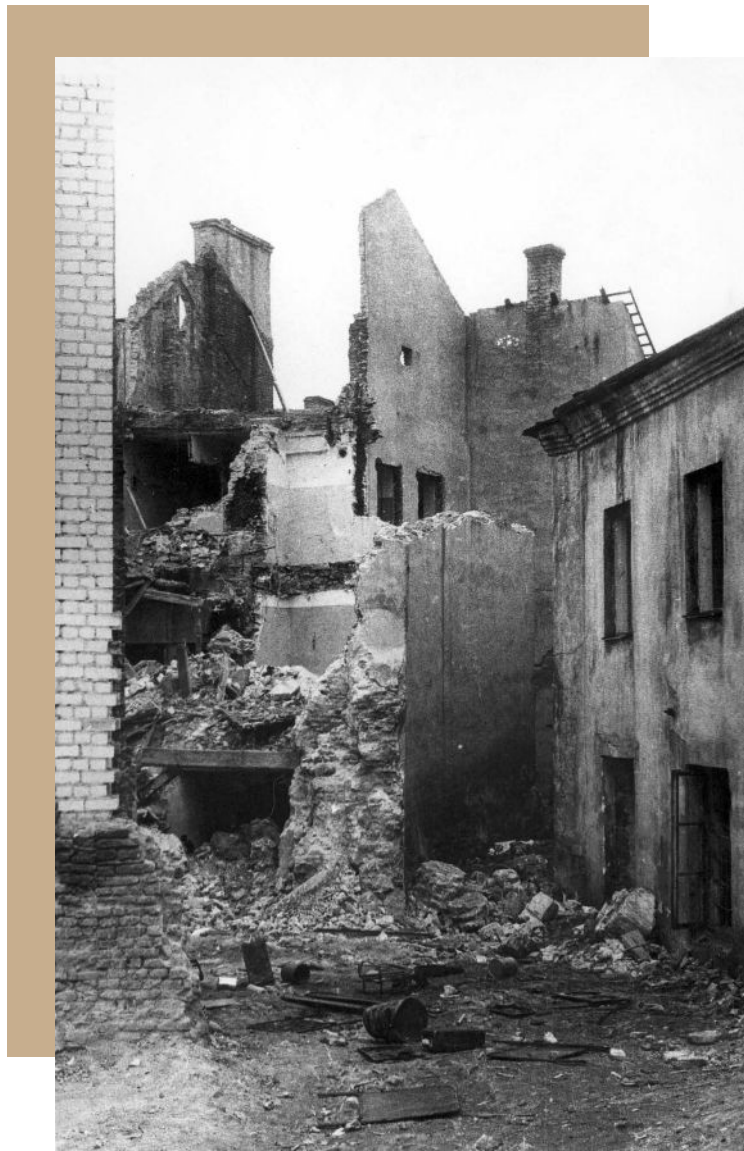


15.10.44

Yes, only Sonya and I have survived, none of our other relatives remain. Do you understand the whole horror of the situation when you walk down the streets of your native city and recall how in this very place, in such and such circumstances, you used to meet your daughter, and there – your father, mother, sisters, in-laws, friends and acquaintances – none of whom is any longer in this world. It would be enough to tell you that of the 75,000 people who comprised the Jewish population of Vilna there are only about 1,500 alive today, and even so, half of them are not [originally] from Vilna. The best people perished. All those who were the pride of Vilna and who were well known around the whole world are gone.

Zeev Kulbis, Vilna

"After So Much Pain and Anguish: First Letters after Liberation", Yad Vashem, 2016



Ruins of a courtyard in Glezerz (Glaziers) Street, site of the Vilna ghetto, Poland, postwar



Jewish homes looted during the "Hunger Winter", Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 1944-1945



4.10.45

In Amsterdam, I had a small mental breakdown but I have now more or less recovered. Here, for the first time you realize what is missing. Nobody of my family has come back. My father's family is totally wiped out. Of my mother's relatives no one came back except for Uncle Ben in Paris and Loes van Amerongen. And my brother-in-law, les Polak, is still with us...

Nearly all the Jews are in turmoil. Many flee the country; those who do not flee, search for new ways [to settle down]. Everything is still in turmoil. I too have not yet straightened everything out, or I [should perhaps say] have nothing straightened out. This I have in common with nearly all the young people. The Jewish community does not offer very much, is organized along the same conventional lines. The Zionists are active again. There are 25000 Jews [remaining], including those who are baptized or married to gentiles; it is a small number and surely [cannot form] a high class [community]. So the future is Palestine.

Avraham Sarlouis, Amsterdam

"After So Much Pain and Anguish: First Letters after Liberation", Yad Vashem, 2016



13.10.45

After many detours through Germany, Russia, Poland, Hungary – Slovakia, I arrived in Brno in May. The horror grabbed me – an utterly devastated city – I walked through the streets that were so dear and precious to me – and cried my heart out – the parents dead, Max dead, my brothers somewhere on the globe – the friends dead – nothing remained – only the two small houses – Franciscans.

Syme Zosim Rysavy, Brno

"After So Much Pain and Anguish: First Letters after Liberation", Yad Vashem, 2016

Ruins of a synagogue in Brno, Czechoslovakia, postwar



EACH OF US HAS A NAME

Zelda

*Each of us has a name
given by God
and given by our parents*

*Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear*

*Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls*

*Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors*

*Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing*

*Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love*

*Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work*

*Each of us has a name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness*

*Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by
our death.*

The Spectacular Difference: Selected Poems of Zelda, translated, edited and introduced by Marcia Falk, (Hebrew Union College Press, 2004).

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