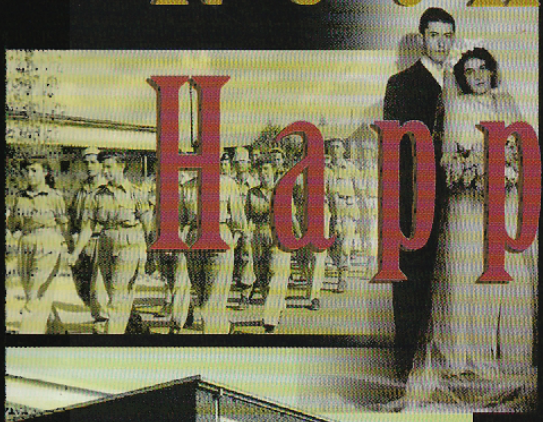
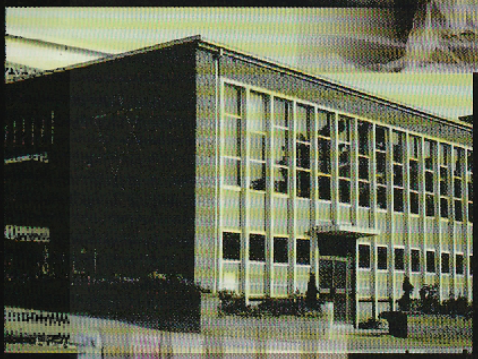
Nothing Happens Haphazardly









Rabbi Joseph J. Fogel

NOTHING HAPPENS HAPHAZARDLY

Rabbi Joseph Fogel

Sponsored by The Green & Sea Point Hebrew Congregation
Cape Town, South Africa

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"Life can only be understood backwards,
but it must be lived forwards."

Soeren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After publishing "My Guide" for *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* - "the first fruits" of my retirement to Israel in 1986 (First Edition - published Johannesburg, 1990, Second Edition - Jerusalem, 1992) - I sat down to write this my memoir.

I am most grateful to my very capable editor, Mr. Harold Blumberg, for guiding me through the process, for helping me understand exactly what kind of book I was trying to write, and for making sure that I wrote it.

My special word of thanks to my dear wife Judy, and to our children, Shula, Nachi and Ilan, whose constant encouragement kept me going even when my own optimism faltered.

I wish to record my grateful thanks to Mr. Eric Beare, for proofreading the manuscript and for his valuable corrections.

To my generous sponsors, who enabled me to dedicate the income from this publication to charity and *gemilat chesed*, I would herewith express my heartfelt thanks.

And I offer praise to Almighty G-d for having given me life, strength and opportunity to be in His service.

Joseph J. Fogel

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* in blessed memory of and tribute to my beloved husband, the late Abe Margolis, Past President and Trustee of the Green & Sea Point Hebrew Congregation, Cape Town, South Africa
** in blessed memory of the late Issy Sachar
*** in blessed memory of the late Dr. Sonny Walt

NOTHING HAPPENS HAPHAZARDLY

Rabbi E.J. Duschinsky, my good friend and colleague, formerly *Av Beth Din* of Cape Town, South Africa, was an expert in *Gematria* and *Rashei Teivot* (initials of Hebrew words). One day, he called me from Jerusalem: "Yossi, have you at hand paper and pen?" "Yes, I have!" "Please make a note of this. We recite daily during the Morning Service:

'קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו'

('Holy, holy, holy is the L-rd of Hosts,
the whole earth is full of His glory.')

"What is the meaning of the word 'M'lo?'

"מלא = מזמינם לפונדק אחד"

"He brings people together to the same lodging place." Sometimes, somewhere, you meet with a person hitherto unknown to you. As a result of this meeting, something important happens to you later in life. Don't think that this happened to you haphazardly! No! This is G-d's way of accomplishing things.

'... the whole earth is full of His glory.'

It is He who causes people to meet at the same place."

IN SACRED MEMORY OF
THE MARTYRS OF OUR FAMILIES ה"י

Menachem Mendel Fogel (1872-1940)
Pessel Fogel (nee Lebovits (1881-1944)

Menachem Mendel Zelmanovics (1900-1945)
Sosya Serena Zelmanovics (nee Sicherman) (1899-1944)
Yaacov Tzvi Zelmanovics (1933-1944)
Meir Zelmanovics (1933-1944)

Yitta Yolan Weber (nee Fogel) (1905-1944)
Shamai Weber (1903-1944)
Malka Marta Weber (1934-1944)
Etya Judit Weber (1936-1944)
Leah Lenke Fogel (nee Singer) (1905-1944)
Tzvi Aharon Fogel (1935-1944)
Etya Fogel (1937-1944)
Sholom Shmuel Fogel (1939-1944)
Mindel Fogel (1940-1944)
Moshe Aryeh Fogel (1915-1944)

among the Six Million Martyrs of the European Holocaust.

יזכרם אלוהינו לטובה עם שאר צדיקי עולם

May our G-d remember them for good with the other righteous of the world.

To my beloved wife
Judy

our children
Shula and Cyril Meyerowitz
Michele and Menachem Fogel
Ilan Meir Fogel

our grandchildren
Talya and Aviva Meyerowitz
Chanan Yishai , Na'ama Pessil
and Shlomit Fogel

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FOREWORD

In 1918, at the end of the First World War, my parents fled westwards from Svaljava in the Carpathian district of Uzhgorod, to escape the Bolsheviks. Morally and physically exhausted, hungry and destitute after some 250 km in search of food and shelter, they reached the little village of Kralik in the district of Tornala (Tornalja) in Slovakia.

In Kralik, they found refuge for their family of eight; my father, Menahem Mendel Fogel, my mother, Pessel, their three sons and five daughters; Yoel Pinchas (Eugen-Jeno), Gittel (Gizella, Gussie), Yitta (Yolan), Yitzchak, Feiga (Fanny), Moshe, the twins, Miryam (Marcsa) and Ciporah (Cecilia).

I was born on December 13th, 1920 (3 *Teveth*, 5682) in Kralik. Even now, seventy-five years later, I am reluctant to record the story of my life. But in searching for their roots, my children have urged me to tell them about my family, my childhood, my youth, what I experienced in the years of Nazi tyranny, the war in Europe and its concomitant, the savage war on the Jewish people, and how I escaped the fate of six million Jews (including my mother and two of her children) and survived the Holocaust.

Encouraged by *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem, by colleagues and congregants from the years when I served in the *Rabbinate* in South Africa, and by fellow survivors who, like me, have been saved by the grace of G-d, I am telling my tale in modesty and gratitude to the Source of Life for all His individual care which He has shown me from the day of my birth to this very day.

"I will extol Thee, Hashem, for Thou hast lifted me up and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me ....

I cried unto Thee, Hashem and unto Hashem I made supplication: What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy truth? Hear, Hashem, and have mercy upon me; Hashem, be Thou my helper. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness to the end, that I may sing glorious praise to Thee, and not be silent ... Hashem, my G-d, I shall be grateful to Thee forever."

(Psalm 30, selected verses)

1

THE HOVEL

"מקימי מעפר דל מאשפות ירים אביון ..."
תהלים קי"ג: ז'

"He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, lifteth the needy out of the dunghill."
Psalm 113: 7.

The "house" I was born in was a mudbrick hovel, comprising one room, a kitchen and a porch. The walls were whitewashed with lime, the floor was mother earth polished with cow dung which made it shine (and smell!). A kerosene lamp or candles provided light, the stove gave some warmth in winter, water had to be fetched from a well in the yard, and the family washed in a bucket, with toilet facilities provided by a seat over a deep pit in a wooden cubicle in the yard.

Much about life in this primitive hovel, I have been told by my parents and siblings, and I shall try to tell it as I myself have experienced it.

The only bedroom was furnished with two wooden beds, two pedestals, a large wooden wardrobe, and a commode with four drawers on top of which there was an oval mirror. The kitchen had a stove and an oven heated with firewood, a large four-cornered wooden table which could be opened and turned into a large bed for four persons, and four wooden benches around the table where the family had three meals a day. The kitchen utensils, pots and pans,

crockery and cutlery, for dairy and meat food strictly separated, were kept on two stands. My parents were deeply religious. *Kashrut* was observed in its finest detail. In the kitchen and on the porch were more iron beds for the rest of the family.

Having lost all his possessions when fleeing from Svaljava, my father had to work hard to eke out a livelihood for his large family. He became a sack dealer, buying all kinds of second hand, torn corn, bean, sugar, flower or potato sacks. These had to be repaired to make them usable again and then sold to the mill or to merchants in Tornala. My mother attended to the household chores and to her numerous children.

Kralik (or Kiralyi in Hungarian) was a small village with about 300 inhabitants, of which only four families were Jewish: family Friedman who had an inn and a general store; family Saltzer who were farmers, and family Ungar who had a timber yard. Luckily for them and for us, the town of Tornala, where there was a congregation of 200 Jewish families with a well organized *kehillah* life, was about 1 km away.

My *brith milah* took place on the eighth day of my life, on the Fast day of 10 *Teveth* (*Assarah B'Teveth*). The *rabbi* of the town Tornala was the *mohel*.

Years later, my mother told me that a few days after my *brith*, I contracted a serious skin disease; my body became inflamed and wherever I was firmly touched, my skin began to bleed. Some people suspected that this infection emanated from the *brith*. My mother consulted one doctor after another, but with no results. Daily, she had to buy for 20 *kronen* cotton wool in which to wrap me, in order to absorb the constant bleeding. As the disease persisted for weeks, certain neighbours suggested that my mother should give up the fight. After all, they insinuated, she had numerous other children. My mother, of course, wouldn't

hear of it. Instead, she consulted additional doctors. My elder sister, Gussie, was my constant nurse, and carried me from place to place and from one doctor to the other.

After approximately two months, my mother and Gussie heard about a good doctor, Dr. Blajer, in the town of Rimavska Sobota, about 30 km from Tornala. Unannounced, they arrived with me at his clinic. Dr. Blajer was just on his way out to catch the train to visit one of his patients. Hearing my mother's desperate plea, he hurriedly examined me, prescribed a medication, and off he went. My mother applied the medication for a week, and lo and behold, one of my legs healed. Again, Dr. Blajer was consulted, this time by appointment. He took his time and gave me a thorough examination. He ordered the continuation of the medication. After a few weeks, thanks to G-d and to my mother's and Gussie's selfless love and dedication, I was healed.

My parents' life was not easy. My father could barely earn a livelihood, and the older children in the family had to work and help make ends meet. In 1923, my sister, Gussie, was invited by our aunt (my mother's sister), Anne Silverstein of New York, to emigrate to the United States of America. She left home when I was two-and-a-half years old.

My family thought that she would have a better chance in life in the "*Goldene Medina*", and that in a few years time, she might even be in a position to assist her family. We all accompanied her to the railway station in Tornala. There was a lot of tears and crying. (After Gussie's departure from Tornala, I did not see her for forty years!)

The needs of the family were great. Besides clothing, schooling and all other necessities, ten mouths had to be fed three times a day. My elder brother, Jeno, opened an agency for bicycles and sewing machines, and from his earnings he augmented the family income. Yolan became a

seamstress and began to earn a little. Yitzchak enrolled to become a carpenter, Fanny to be a milliner and corset maker. Moishie, Cilka and Marcsa attended school, and I, the baby of the family, went to a nursery school.

My best friends were the Ungar brothers, Laci and Mitcu. Laci was my age, Mitcu was a year younger. Their parents had a timber yard and were well-to-do people. We used to play together, mostly with small wooden pieces which were cut off the planks in the timber yard. We improvised and built small carts or whatever our imagination invented. "Hide and seek" was also one of our favourite games.

In September, 1926, I was enrolled at the only school in Kiralyi, the parochial primary school. The language of tuition was Hungarian, as were the people of the village. When our popular and highly respected teacher, Mr. Hancsovski, entered the classroom, all rose. Every morning, tuition commenced with the Christian prayer "Our Father Who Art in Heaven."

I was a diligent pupil and at the end of the year, I was awarded a prize at a ceremony which took place at the local Calvinist church. Mrs. Hevessy, a rich farmer's wife, was given the honour of presenting the prizes. All the pupils and their parents gathered for the occasion in the church and were addressed by the priest. My prize was 50 *kronen*. Emerging from the ceremony, I intended to spend some of the money on candy and cold drinks for my friends and classmates. Mother, however, quickly got hold of the money and decided to buy me a pair of shoes which I badly needed, but I remember how deeply hurt and disappointed I was.

At the end of June, 1927, I successfully completed my second school year. My parents were very pleased with my excellent report.

In July, 1927, my father's financial position improved. We moved into a better part of the Svajko house. It was in the same yard, but now we had two bedrooms, a kitchen and a pantry.

From this year on, Gussie annually sent us four or five parcels. She lived with our Aunt Anne and worked at a clothing factory. Gussie's Yiddish name Gittel indicates her character, "*git*" in Yiddish means "good". Indeed, she was an extremely good and kindhearted person and would rather deprive herself of the bare necessities to be of greater help to her parents and family. In every parcel was clothing and shoes for every member of the family, in addition to tea, coffee, chocolates, sardines, canned food and other delicacies. From time to time and especially for our birthdays, Gussie sent also some dollars. When a parcel arrived, it was a red-letter day for our family, and we all gathered around our parents while my father opened the parcel.

Gittel retained her sterling qualities throughout her life. At the time when I wrote these lines, she had reached the 90th year of her life. I deeply honour her for her goodness, selflessness, kindness, charitableness, religiosity and humility. She is a darling sister and a very special, goodhearted, kind and generous person.

Our meals became more plentiful and varied. We now had meat or poultry twice a week, in addition to *Shabbat* and *yomim tovim*. On weekdays, fresh bread and rolls were delivered from a bakery in Tornala. To this day, I recall how I looked forward to the rye bread and rolls sprinkled with salt and caraway seeds, and to the crisp round rolls split in the middle and spread with butter. Rolls with butter and jam, scrambled eggs and coffee were our staple breakfast.

Lunch was our main meal. Potato soup and "*shlishkelech*" (thick noodles made of potatoes mixed with flour and

sprinkled with bread crumbs) were the favourite food of Jeno. Bean soup and mashed beans topped with fried onions was another popular dish. My favourite food was barley soup and noodles with lots of poppy seeds and sugar. Pasta was served on most weekdays. The noodles were always home-made and we ate them with jam, cheese, sauteed cabbage, or nuts and sugar. Beans, potatoes, cabbage, peas and barley were also plentiful. On Friday eves and at *Shabbat* lunch, we always had a four course meal with beef, roast goose, or duck as the main course.

At the age of four, when I started attending nursery school, I was also enrolled into a *cheder* at the *Talmud Torah* in Tornala. Classes were Sunday to Thursday from 4.00 till 6.30 p.m. At the age of six, I read the *siddur* fluently and had started to learn *Humash* translated into Yiddish.

Mr. Elimelech Herskovits who was also the *shamash* in the Great Synagogue, was the *melamed* (Hebrew teacher). By the time I completed Std. 2 at the Kiralyi school, at the *cheder* I was studying *Humash* with *Rashi*, was fluent in all the prayer services, and knew many prayers by heart. We also learned to write in Hebrew and knew many Hebrew songs. The *Rebbe*, Mr. Herskovits, had a cane with which he used to hit anyone who misbehaved. Sometimes, he would twist the ear of a pupil who did not reply to his questions correctly. Generally he was, however, a kind person and I got on well with him.

At the *cheder*, my only problem was returning home after classes. From September until April, it was already dark at 6.30 in the evening. I walked home with the Rottenberg brothers who lived on the main street, in the direction of my house. From their house to mine, there was a stretch of about 1 km with very few houses. This part of the road was not lit up and I was afraid to walk by myself. I also had to cross a bridge which I was told was haunted by a witch who lived under it.

While walking alone in the quiet evening hours, the sound of the water rushing in the nearby river Sajo added to my fears. As soon as I had passed the last house on my way home, to overcome my fear, I started to sing Slovak songs. When I reached the bridge, I raised my voice in song. Sometimes I would sing a Hebrew song learned at the *cheder*. Mother tried to assure me that there was no witch under the bridge and that there was no reason whatsoever to be afraid, but my fears persisted for as long as we lived in Kiralyi.



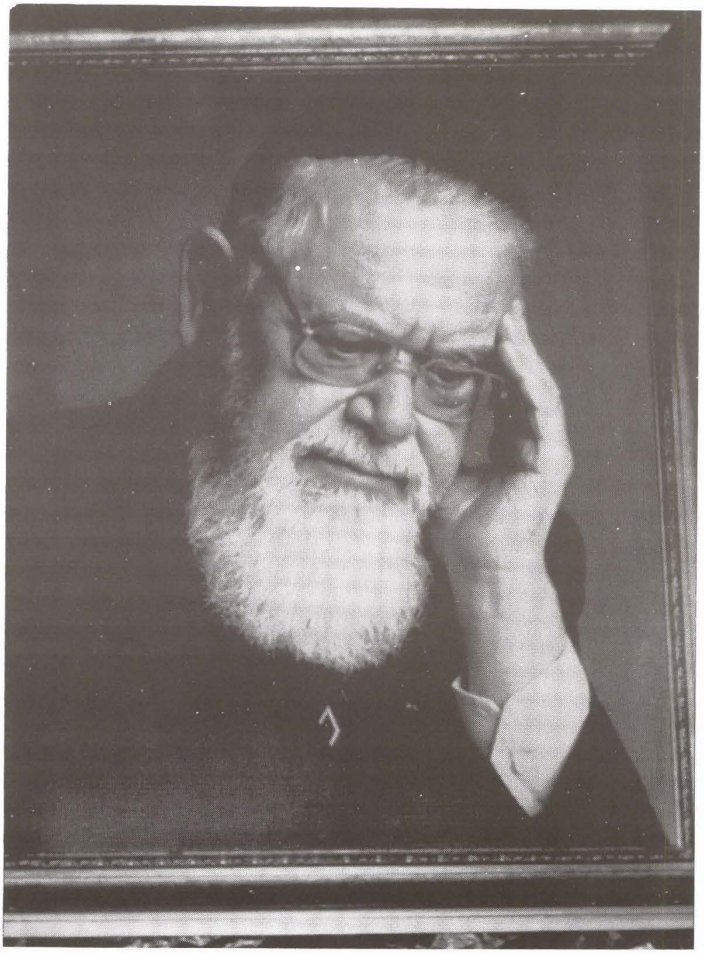
My late Parents
Pessil and Menachem Mendel Fogel ז"ל



My family , family Fogel - 1921
Upper row (l.to r.) : Yolan , Eugen , Gussie
Middle row: Moshe, Fanny, Father Menachem Mendel, Mother Pessil , Yitzchak ,
Bottom row: Miryam , - me (the baby) - Cilka.



Judy's family , family Zelmanowitz - 1940
Upper row (l. to r.) : Shlomo , Judy
Bottom row : Meir , Mother Serena , Helenka ,
Yaacov Tzvi , Father Menachem Mendel ז"ל



Rabbi Eugene J. Duschinsky זצ"ל
Av Beth Din , Cape Town .

2

TORNALA

In due course, we moved to a more comfortable, three bedroom house in Tornala. Meanwhile, my brother Yitzchak had become an accomplished carpenter and he made nice furniture for the bedrooms and the kitchen. Father earned somewhat more, and some of my siblings also brought home more pay which they gave to my parents. We were not so poor anymore.

In Tornala, there was a Jewish congregational school, but my parents could not afford to pay the tuition fees. In contrast to the Jewish school, where tuition was in Hungarian, in the state school tuition was in Slovak, which was the official language.

My parents were of the opinion that it was important for me to acquire the official language of the state. Thus, I had to study Slovak. Other than the change of language, my daily routine remained the same. School hours were from 8 a.m. until noon and from 2 p.m. till 4 p.m. whereafter I went to the *cheder* until 6.30 p.m., where in addition to *Humash* and *Rashi*, I also studied *Mishnah* and *Gemara* with *Rashi* and some *Tosafot*. At the school, I was a diligent pupil and at the year's end I obtained an excellent report.

Having left my good friends Laci and Mitcu Ungar behind in Kiralyi, I acquired a new and reliable friend in Tornala, Shlomo Meir Schwartz, the son of the *shohet*. We were constantly in each other's company. Shlomo attended the

congregational Jewish school, but at the *cheder*, we studied and played together, revelling in each other's company.

I continued my studies at the state school until I completed Std. 5. By that time, I was fluent in the Slovak language. I liked to go to the *cheder*, because there I was among my own kind, whereas at the state school, Jewish pupils constituted a small minority and were often teased for being Jewish. I felt uncomfortable having to attend class without a head cover. During breaks, I went to the school yard to have my sandwich and would then, trying not to look conspicuous, quickly cover my head and recite the blessing over the food.

Sometimes, we were called derisive names by our non-Jewish classmates and that hurt. We were distressed that we had to attend state school on Saturday mornings, although we were permitted not to write so as not to transgress Jewish law. By and large, there were no specific anti-Semitic manifestations at the school. Such would definitely not have been tolerated by the teachers and the headmaster.

At the *cheder* there was a different, much warmer atmosphere. We could exchange sandwiches with each other, as all of us had *kosher* homes. *Rebbe* Freund, a competent, experienced educator, was my Hebrew teacher during my last two years at the *cheder*. He loved us and we loved him. He would never hit us, but spoke kindly and gently. If we were naughty, our "punishment" was to have to learn certain prayers by heart, like "*Ashrei* ...", "*Aleynoo leshabeach* ...", and "*Modim De'Rabbanan*...", which was useful later, in adult life.

Tornala was an agricultural town surrounded by many goose breeding farms. Thursday was market day. Peasant women brought their poultry, dairy products, fruit and vegetables to the marketplace for sale. Moishie did the shopping for our family. When he bought a big, fattened

goose, he had it slaughtered by the *shohet* and had the *veshet* examined by the Dayan. When it had been declared *kosher*, he would bring it home and, with his face beaming with pride and joy, *would place* it on the kitchen table, declaring affectionately: "Darling *Mamme - na*!"

Goose would be served at *Shabbat* meals and had to suffice for the entire family. Mother was an expert in satisfying everyone's taste. Father was served first, of course, and I, being the youngest, always last. Actually, Mother was the very last and she cared little for what was left for her, as long as she could satisfy every member of her family.

Life in Tornala was pleasant and peaceful, with no upheavals. It was a regional town with a population of about 5000, with 47 villages in its region. Some 200 Jewish families, strictly orthodox, lived in the town, virtually 100% of them *shomrei Shabbat*. There were two or three Jewish families in every village in the region. These families came to town for special religious events; the reading of the *Megillah* on *Purim*, for *Pesach*, for the first *Selihoth* service and for the High Holidays.

Rabbi Chayim Ephraim Balajti was the *Rabbi* and *Dayan* of the congregation. There was another *rabbi* in the town, *Rabbi* Shmuel Dovid Reinitz. He was not a congregational official and was maintained by private families.

There were three prayer-houses. First, there was the Great Synagogue where the *chazan*, who was also the *shohet*, officiated every *Shabbat* and *yom tov*, assisted by a *chazan sheni*, and a *ba'al koreh* who also doubled as a *shohet*.

Then, there was the Talmud Torah with the *cheder* for pre-primary and primary Hebrew tuition. It also served as a prayer-house for the more observant families of the community. It had no *chazan*, and knowledgeable members conducted the services in turn.

And there was the *Beth Hamedrash*, nicknamed *Shevitze* (gusher) after a mineral water spring outside the town, used by the *Dayan* and the congregants on weekdays, and by the youth on *Shabbatot* and *yomim tovim*.

The congregation maintained two up-to-date *mikvehs* (ritual baths); one for men and another for women. The latter had a full-time lady attendant.

The Jewish community had an organized ladies guild, *Hachnoseth Kallah*, providing dowries for poor brides; and a *Bikur Holim* society for visiting the sick.

There was, of course, the *Hevra Kaddisha* (Holy Society) for attending, on a voluntary basis, to burial needs.

Tornala also boasted a *Linas Hatzedek* (lodging house) for visiting poor people who were also assisted financially. Each out-of-town visitor received an amount of "*Abfertigungsgelt*" (allocation money) twice a year, so as not to have to go begging from door to door.

There were two rival youth groups: Tiferet Bachurim and a splinter group, Ateret Bachurim. Both offered lectures, Hebrew songs, games, hikes, and the like.

All the prayer-houses used the system of "*shnoddering*", i.e. expecting those honoured by being called to the *Torah* to offer a donation to the congregation or to one of its institutions. The *aliyot* (call-ups to the *Torah*) were auctioned to the highest bidder.

On *Simhath Torah*, a public auction took place at the *shul* for the privileges of providing the shul with candles for the year; for lighting the candles before the prayer-desk on weekdays; for lighting the candles before the "*amud*" on *Shabbat* and *yom tov* eves, and on *Yom Kippur* eve; for reciting the prayer *Atta Horeta* on *Simhath Torah*, for the

appointment of the *Chatan Bereshit* and *Chatan Maftir*. *Chatan Torah* was reserved for the *rabbi* and not auctioned.

In those years, life in Tornala was peaceful. People went about their occupations without harassment. Jews associated by and large with Jews, the youth particularly so. On Friday evenings after dinner, we went for walks to the square in front of the Town House where friendships were made and strengthened.

A few weeks before *Pesach*, the ladies' gallery of the Great *Shul* was "out of bounds" and used for storing *matzos* for the whole congregation. *Matzos* were not on sale in the stores. They were ordered by the congregation's executive for all the local Jews, and distributed according to the size of every family. The cost of the *matzos* was also determined by the *shul* executive. Rich members had to pay more and the poor paid less, according to their assessment. The very poor were provided with *matzos* free of charge, and also with other necessities for the festival, like wine, meat, eggs and potatoes.

Biur hametz (the burning of *hametz* on *Pesach* eve) was performed with special flourish. The *shamash* had a family of eight children. In the morning, they set out to collect the *hametz*, which had been set aside during the "search" on the previous evening. There were four pairs of collectors, each equipped with two baskets. In one basket, they placed the bundles of *hametz*, and in the other the eggs people gave them for their trouble. All the *hametz* was brought to the *shul* yard where it was ceremoniously burned. The family of the *shamash* was amply provided with eggs for the *yom tov*.

At *Pesach*, we played games with walnuts and exchanged information on finding the *afikoman* and settling on what our "demands" could be for its "redemption" by the master of the *Seder* ceremony.



Revisiting my birthplace, Kralik , - 1996



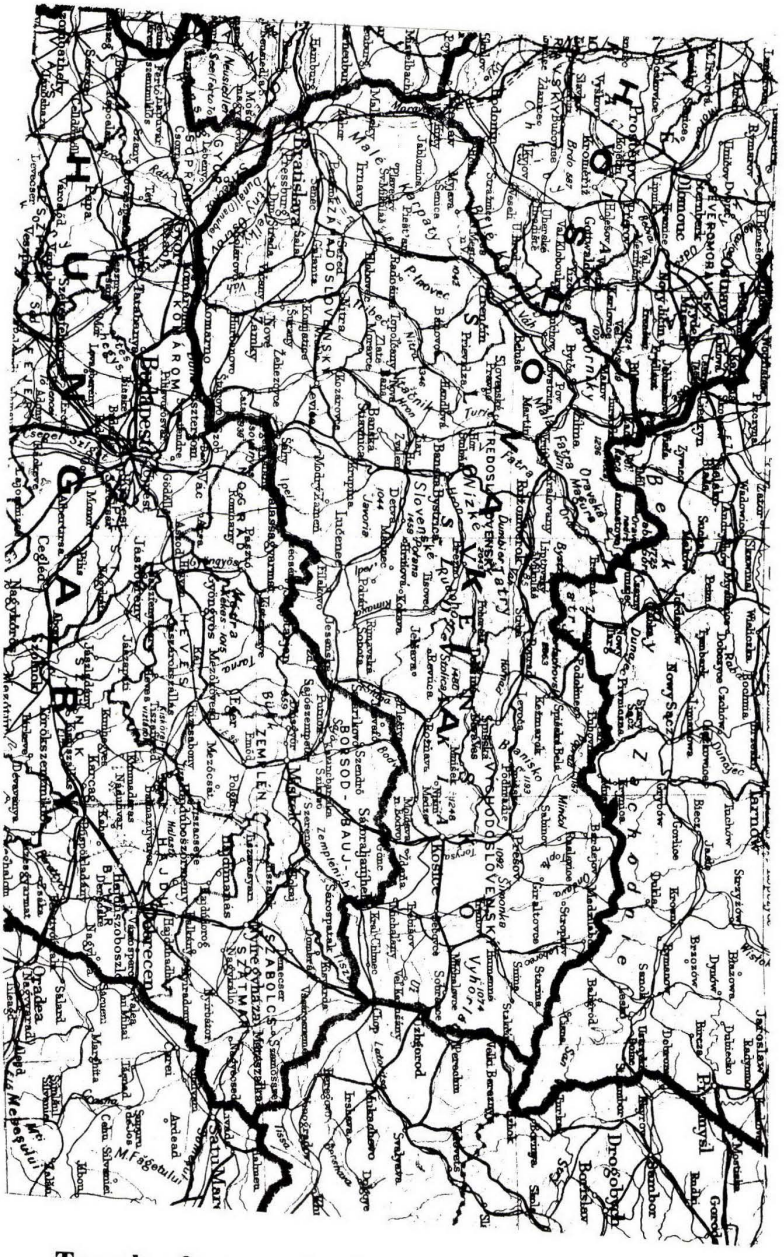
In Kralik, in the yard where I was born ,
with my son Ilan and the owners ,
Mr & Mrs Stefan Svajko Jnr. - 1996.



Revisiting Tornala - 1996
with my sister Cilka and son, Ilan



In front of Tornala's Town Office with my sister Cilka - 1996



Tornala ; for some time Safarikovo,as on this map; now renamed Tornala , once again !

3

BRATISLAVA-PRESSBURG

"The Torah is greater than the priesthood and than royalty, seeing that royalty demands thirty qualifications, the priesthood twenty-four, while the Torah is acquired by forty-eight. And those are they: by audible study; by distinct pronunciation; by understanding and discriminating, ... by meekness; cheerfulness; ... by being beloved, loving the All-present, loving mankind, loving just causes, rectitude and reproof, ..."

Sayings of the Fathers (*Pirke Aboth*) VI, 6

Having successfully finished Std. 5, my parents wanted me to continue my education at a school for advanced Jewish studies. There was no *yeshiva* in Tornala, but Bratislava was famous for its fine Jewish educational institutions. My parents decided to enrol me at *Yesodei Hatorah*, which also had high school facilities. I was only ten-and-a-half years old and most reluctant to leave my parental home and friends at such a young age. Perhaps I could have had my way with my father, who was always preoccupied with making a living for us. My mother, however, was absolutely determined to provide me with a sound Jewish education.

"My wish is that one of my sons should become a *rabbi*. He should be my *Kaddish*," she frequently said. Thus, during the last week in August, 1931, she took me to

Bratislava to make the necessary arrangements for my rabbinical studies.

My father, family and friends came to see us off at the train station. I cried bitterly at the parting and during our eight hour journey; gradually, with the comfort of my mother's presence I found courage for the adventure, seeing very different scenery and glimpses of fascinting places.

On our arrival at the Bratislava railway station, my mother hired a "*fiaker*" (a cart with two horses) to take us and our luggage to the *Judengasse* (Jews' street). There she arranged a lodging place for me at the house of *Rebbe* Gruenwald, a Hebrew teacher at *Yesodei Hatorah*. Shortly after my arrival, a friend of mine from Tornala, Moishe Herskovits (my *cheder* teacher's son) joined me at the lodging, and we shared the badly ventilated and poorly furnished, small room. His presence made it more pleasant and easier for me.

Yesodei Hatorah had some two hundred pupils in six classes, but no boarding facilities. Those who could afford it, paid for board in private homes. Those, like me, who did not have the means to pay, had to "*essen Taeg*"; each day we would go to a different family who would provide meals for the day, free of charge.

After two days of hard work, my mother managed to secure my "*essen Taeg*." It is a feat of memory, but even more a debt of gratitude, that prompts me to recall all those seven "*Taeg*" families. The families, whose hospitality I enjoyed, were:

Sunday, Benedikt, *Stefanikstrasse;* Monday Salzer, *Kaputzinergasse;* (parents of Rabbi J. Salzer of Johannesburg); Tuesday Berger, *Hradska Berggasse;* Wednesday Brichta, Zidovska *Judengasse;* Thursday Katzburg, Drevena *Holzgasse;* Friday Hotel-Restaurant Fischer, *Kaputzinergasse;* Saturday Sternfeld, *Nonnenbahn*.

The Jews of Bratislava-Pressburg-Pozsony were good-hearted, charitable people, and regarded it an honour and merit to welcome in their homes a young student, thus enabling him to study the *Torah*.

Bratislava is the capital of Slovakia. The official languages in Bratislava were Slovak, German and Hungarian. Jews generally spoke German or a mixture, "*Yiddish-Deutsch*". At *Yesodei Hatorah*, tuition was in Hebrew with *Ashkenazi* pronunciation, which was translated into "*Yiddish-Deutsch*". At the high school, which was a private, congregation-sponsored school, tuition was in German with Slovak a compulsory additional subject.

After passing a short verbal examination at *Yesodei Hatorah*, I was placed in Class II. My teacher was *Rebbe* Kohn, a sorely tested person whose teen-age daughter disappeared one day. Some said she was kidnapped. She never returned and her devastated father mourned her day and night.

The day started with the morning service at 6.30 a.m. At about 7.15 a.m., I went to the family, where I had my "*Taeg*," for breakfast.

Tuition commenced at 8 a.m. punctually and everyone had to be at his school desk on time. Between 12 noon and 2 p.m., there was time for lunch and for whatever one had to do. Tuition continued at 2 p.m. and concluded at 4.50 p.m., and also included the *Minhah* afternoon service. We were then dismissed in order to enable us to arrive at the high school (*Buergerschule*), where we attended studies from 5 p.m. till 7 p.m. When dismissed, we remained in the classroom for the *Maariv* (evening) service. Thereafter, each of us went for his dinner.

Upon return to the lodging places, we had to do homework, clean our shoes, bathe, write letters home, etc. This was our daily routine from Sunday to Thursday. On

Friday, tuition was only until noon. After lunch, we were free to take a bath, change clothes and prepare for *Shabbat*.

On Friday evenings, we were not compelled to attend the service at *Yesodei Hatorah* but were allowed to attend service together with our host for *Shabbat*. I would, therefore, go to prayers at the Great *Shul* in *Schloss-gasse*, the seat of *Chief Rabbi* Akiva Sofer-Schreiber, where my host, Mr. Sternfeld, was first *gabbai*. It was a large and beautiful *shul* with a magnificent *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark) and *bimah*.

Cantor Shlomo Stern, a *chazan* with a beautiful tenor voice, officiated at that time, and was accompanied by an excellent, large male choir. The service was awe-inspiring and the decorum befitted a holy place.

When, for the first time in my life, I attended such a dignified service, it made a deep impression on my young soul. I liked it very much and was eagerly looking forward to the next opportunity to have such an elevating experience.

On *Shabbat* mornings, we attended services at *Yesodei Hatorah*. After *shul*, we had *kiddush* consisting of wine and some biscuits. Immediately thereafter, we went to our classroom for an examination called "*Verhoeren*". A member of the Board of Governors examined us in the subjects studied during the week. The examiners of my class were Mr. Aron Kaempfner and Mr. Mendel Schwartz. The latter examined us in *Sidrah* and *Gemara*, which was our secondary (or "*neben*") *shiur*, usually taught with *Rashi*'s commentary only.

Mr. Kaempfner was the main *shiur* "*Verhoerer*" of *Gemara* with *Rashi*, *Tosafot* and *Maharsha*. He would also test us on *dinim* (laws and customs). There was a lot of agitation before the tests and a sigh of relief thereafter. Earlier, on Friday afternoons and early *Shabbat* mornings, we went

over the texts studied during the week, to be well prepared for the test which lasted about two hours, until 12.30 p.m. After the test, we could enjoy lunch in a relaxed mood.

I spent the afternoon hours resting or visiting friends, until the *Minhah* service which was followed by *Seuda Shelishit* and *Maariv*.

I became a member of Pirchei Agudat Yisrael, a religious youth group. At meetings, we sang, played games and busied ourselves with various youth activities.

During the first months of my stay in Pressburg, I was overwhelmingly homesick and would often cry, usually at night in bed. As time went by, my mood improved and I began to look forward to the time when I would be at home again.

Twice a year, we had school holidays when I could return home for a month; *Pesach* time and for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Succot*. The months rolled by quickly, for I was very busy with my studies, both at *Yesodei Hatorah* and at the high school, where my teachers were Profs. Koenig and Gruenwald and the headmaster was Director Sebestyen.

Eventually the day arrived when I could go home.

I boarded the train in the morning. During the eight hours journey, I day-dreamed, imagining the faces of my parents, siblings and friends. I wrote down the name of every station we stopped at and to this very day, I remember and can recall all the forty-six stations between Bratislava and Tornala.

Homecoming was always sweet. I was surrounded by love and affection which I had so much missed during the previous six months. My father took me on his lap, inquiring about my progress in studies and generously providing me with pocket money which he could ill afford.

My mother, brothers and sisters hugged and kissed me time and again, and my mother pampered me with my favourite dishes. My friends came over to see me and trusted friendships were renewed as if they had never been interrupted.

Arriving back, I successfully completed my first school year in Pressburg, both at the high school and at *Yesodei Hatorah*. At the latter, I skipped a class and was advanced to the fourth class. My teacher there was *Rebbe* Mordechai Zvi Petenyi, an outstanding educator blessed with much patience and lots of love for his pupils. He was a scholar of repute and a humble person, a real "*yarei shamayim*" (G-d-fearing person). To my delight and good luck, when I finished class IV, he was transferred to class V, so that I studied under him for another year. From him I have acquired my way of studying and he became my role model because of his outstanding humane qualities.

The years passed by in an unchanging pattern. Leaving home was always hard and sad. Returning home was always something to look forward to with expectation. Eventually, I became accustomed to living in Pressburg, acquired some good friends and felt happy in my studies and achievements.

In my class, I was among the first three. My rivals were Kalish and Deckner, bright young boys, each trying hard to outdo the other in learning, the envy of the rest of the class - and consolidating our friendly rivalry, we developed a relationship of camaraderie and loyalty.

In December, 1933, I became *bar mitzvah*, but could not afford to go home for that memorable occasion. Instead, on my *bar mitzvah*, *Shabbat Vayigash*, I conducted the Friday evening and *Shabbat* morning services, reading the whole *Sidrah* with *Maftir* and *Haftarah*.

Immediately after the service, a party was held at the *Yesodei Hatorah*, a frugal celebration for which I had bought a few bottles of soft drinks and my mother had baked homemade biscuits. There I delivered my first *d'var Torah* and *Rebbe* Petenyi said some encouraging words. An anonymous donor had arranged a present for me, comprising a navy suit, six shirts, six pairs of underwear and socks, and a new copy of the *Gemarah*. Nobody ever revealed the donor's name to me, but I suspected Mr. and Mrs. Sternfeld, my generous hosts for *Shabbat*.

For *Pesach* holidays, I travelled home in my new suit, which was admired by all. During my stay at home, my parents told me that they would be unable to send me money for my lodging, because their financial position had deteriorated.

I took bed linen from home, and on my arrival in Pressburg, bought a divan on credit to be paid in monthly instalments. I found a place, free of charge, in a room occupied by three other students, in the *yeshiva* building, under the *Shiur-Stube* in *Schlossgasse*.

I was recommended as teacher for younger boys and earned some tuition fees. Through the good offices of my teacher, *Rebbe* Petenyi, I was allocated five *kronen* a week for pocket money, which I fetched every Friday afternoon from Mr. Dezso Kastner at the *Republikanske Namesti*. In that way, I somehow managed to make ends meet.

My lodging place was, to say the least, most unsatisfactory, with no wardrobe and, worst of all, no washing facilities except for a washing basin which I filled with a bucket of cold water from the yard. Warm water was not just a luxury, but a memory! I even had to wash my bed linen, towels, shirts and underwear in that bucket, and then hang them to dry in the room itself, for fear that it might be stolen from the yard. There were, of course, no ironing facilities. My shirts looked shabby even when they were

clean. I "ironed" my trousers by neatly folding them under my sheet for the night. Next morning, they looked better.

On Friday afternoons, I went to the *mikveh* (ritual bath). For me, who yearned to be clean at all times, it was like a Garden of Eden, with its several showers with hot and cold water where I could soap, wash and clean myself to my heart's content. Thereafter, I went into the *mikveh* proper for the ritual immersion. The water was pleasantly warm and I soaked myself for quite a while, enjoying every minute of it. During summertime, I would bath in the great Danube (Dunaj) river.

My roommates were not particularly tidy, neglecting their share of cleaning, with the dreadful result that the room and beds were regularly infested with bugs. When it became unbearable, we had to hire fumigators, which we could ill afford.

For the High Holidays, I went home. I never told my parents anything negative about my lodging place. On the contrary, I would brag about my good fortune in having obtained free accommodation.

By now, I had reached an advanced *shiur* (lesson) at *Yesodei Hatorah*, comprising *Rashi*, *Tosafot*, *Maharsha*, *Maharam*, *Rif*, *Rosh* and *Ran*. I concluded the *Sidrah* every week with *Rashi*, *Siftei Hahamim*, *Even Ezra*, *Rambam* and some other commentaries and developed a special liking for "*kriat ha'Torah*" ("reading the *Torah*").

At the high school, what I most liked in the studies were languages and mathematics. Unlike daytime students, our tuition hours were from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. only. Nevertheless, we had to pass rigorous exams at the end of the schoolyear. *Yesodei Hatorah* gave us special time to study for this purpose. From mid-May until mid-June, we had the afternoons off, and in the last two weeks, we were

exempt from our Jewish studies. Those, who passed the exams, received recognized school certificates.

I remember the examiner, director Sebestyen, headmaster of the school. Engrossed in the many examination papers on his desk, he called out: "*Du, kleiner Fogel, komm heraus!*" ("You, little bird (in German, bird = *Vogel*), step forward!") The subject was botany. Ill prepared, I stepped forward fearfully. "*Wie heisst Du, mein Kind?*" ("What's your name, my child?") What a funny question, I thought, since he had called me out by my name. "Josef Fogel," I replied. He searched among the files on his desk until he found my file. "*Vorbereitet?*" ("Have you prepared?") "*Jawohl*" ("Yes"), I replied. "*Der Kirschenbaum!*" ("The cherry tree!") he commanded, not really paying attention to me, still engrossed in marking and correcting the many files.

Unprepared for the subject, but taking advantage of the situation, I rattled with perfect fluency: "The cherry tree ... the cherry tree produces cherries. There are many kinds of cherries; black cherries, pink cherries, red cherries .... Cherries are very tasty and nutritious .... Some cherries are infested with worms. We may not eat them .... There are different kinds of cherries .... Every cherry has a pip which is dangerous to swallow .... The cherry tree has green leaves, but it's fruit is green only in the early season .... Later the cherries become pink or red or black .... Cherries grow on a cherry tree .... Some cherries contain worms which we may not eat ...." I kept rattling, in German, of course. "Enough!" he interrupted me. "Excellent! This youngster knows his material 100%."

"You may be seated," he said, not even once looking at me. Since that day, I have had a liking for cherries!

Ever since my *Bar Mitzvah*, I had been "*leining*" on every *Shabbat*. At the beginning, I would read one or two

sections only. Gradually, I trained myself more and more and, eventually, I would read the whole *Sidrah* every week.

I also enjoyed conducting the services. From early childhood, I had accompanied my father to *shul* and had attended services regularly. At the age of six, I was fluent in the siddur and imbibed the "*nusach*" and many "*nigunim*" (melodies) used by the outstanding "*ba'alei tefilah*" (layreaders) in Tornala. There was always a good *chazan* in our Great *Shul* and I enjoyed listening to him and to the "*nusach*" in which he conducted the services. On *Shabbatot* and *yamim tovim*, I liked to be at the Great *Shul* to listen to the *chazan*. Cantor Frankel, and after him, Cantor Reinhertz, were both excellent *chazanim* and it was a pleasure to be in *shul* when they conducted the services.

On the High Holidays, I would go with my father to *daven* at the Talmud Torah. This was a smaller prayer house, which accommodated about fifty men and the same number of ladies. It was frequented by the more observant people. There were numerous "*ba'alei tefilah*" who, in turn, conducted the services during the year. On the High Holidays, however, *Reb* Shamshon Friedman, a textile merchant, would be the "*ba'al shachrit*" and *Reb* Shmuel Yaacov Weinstein, the secretary of the congregation, would, inevitably, be the "*ba'al mussaf*". Both these gentlemen were excellent "*ba'alei tefilah*" of the *Hassidic* style, conducting the services strictly according to "*nusach*", yet interpolating it with beautiful *Hassidic* melodies. Thanks to them, I acquired love for and knowledge of the "*nusach*" of the different services, which has served me well later in life.

At the age of fourteen, coming home for school vacation, I obtained a position as "*ba'al tefilah*" for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. About 12 km from Tornala, on the very border of Hungary, is the village of Linhartovce (Lenartfalva). On the Hungarian side of the border, at a distance of 1.5 km, is the village of Banreve. Both villages

together, had eight Jewish families, who decided to have a joined *minyan* on the High Holidays.

I was offered the position on condition that I could undertake to conduct all the services during these three days. I would have to do everything: *Minhah*, *Maariv*, *Shaharit*, *Torah* reading, blowing the *shofar*, *Mussaf* and, on *Yom Kippur*, *Kol Nidrei*, *Maariv*, *Shaharit*, *Mussaf*, *Minhah*, *Neilah*. This was hard work, but it was my first challenge. For me then, it was a prestigious step on my way to become "an international officiant" at famous services! I accepted, and applied all my talents and knowledge to it. The "*minyan*" evidently approved my services, for they had invited me to officiate again the next year. The fees were handy and my parents were proud of me.

Having some money in my pocket led me to mischief. I decided to try smoking, bought a packet of cigarettes and, together with my friend, Shlomo Schwartz, went to the Sajo river, hid in the bushes and lit my first cigarette. I drew one puff and, for a minute or so, choked and struggled to get the smoke out of my chest. I threw the box and the lit cigarette into the river, and felt ashamed of myself and confounded. Luckily, this became my first and last cigarette.

After the holidays, I returned to Pressburg. In a short time, I was hired to teach another two groups of children. Now, I could afford to rent myself a room, and moved to live with family Neumann in the *Dobs Haus*. (The Neumanns were the parents of *Rabbi* Dr. Yaacov Newman who, in 1956, brought me to South Africa!)

Nothing happens haphazardly!

My homesickness abated somewhat as I found myself in the swing of things. I advanced to Class VI, the class of *Rebbe* Goldstein. Like *Rebbe* Petenyi, he was an erudite and

excellent teacher. He always gave a well prepared, outstanding shiur and had a special gift of imparting his knowledge to his students. I liked to study under him. During this year, *Rabbi* Boruch Loebel, the *Rosh Yeshiva Ketana* often invited me to his home and befriended me, wishing thereby to secure my attendance at his *yeshiva* in the coming school year.

At this time, my brother Moishie finished school and became a merchant. To make a living, he bought and sold anything; scrap metal, agricultural products and hides. He set up a stand at the cattle market and sold cold drinks in summer and hot tea and hot-dogs in winter. He was daring, worked hard and tried his best to improve the lot of the family.

A day or two after I had come home for my next school holiday, Moishie told me: "Listen, my brother, you should not become a "*darmoyednik*" (a person who eats for nothing). Here, take some money, take my bike, ride to one of the neighbouring villages and buy some products. Bring them home and earn your keep." He gave me some basic instructions and a few hundred *kronen*. I was launched on a career in business.

Arriving at the village, I went to the village office and paid a fee for the drummer to go into the streets, drumming that a merchant from the town is here, wishing to buy grain, scrap metal and animal hides.

Soon, the villagers brought their merchandise for sale. Having bought a considerable quantity of grain, beans and skins, I hired a wagon with two horses and before evening, had transported my purchases to our yard. Moishie was already waiting. He helped the coachman to offload, sorted out the merchandise and sold it with a good profit. I was agog at the success of my first business adventure!

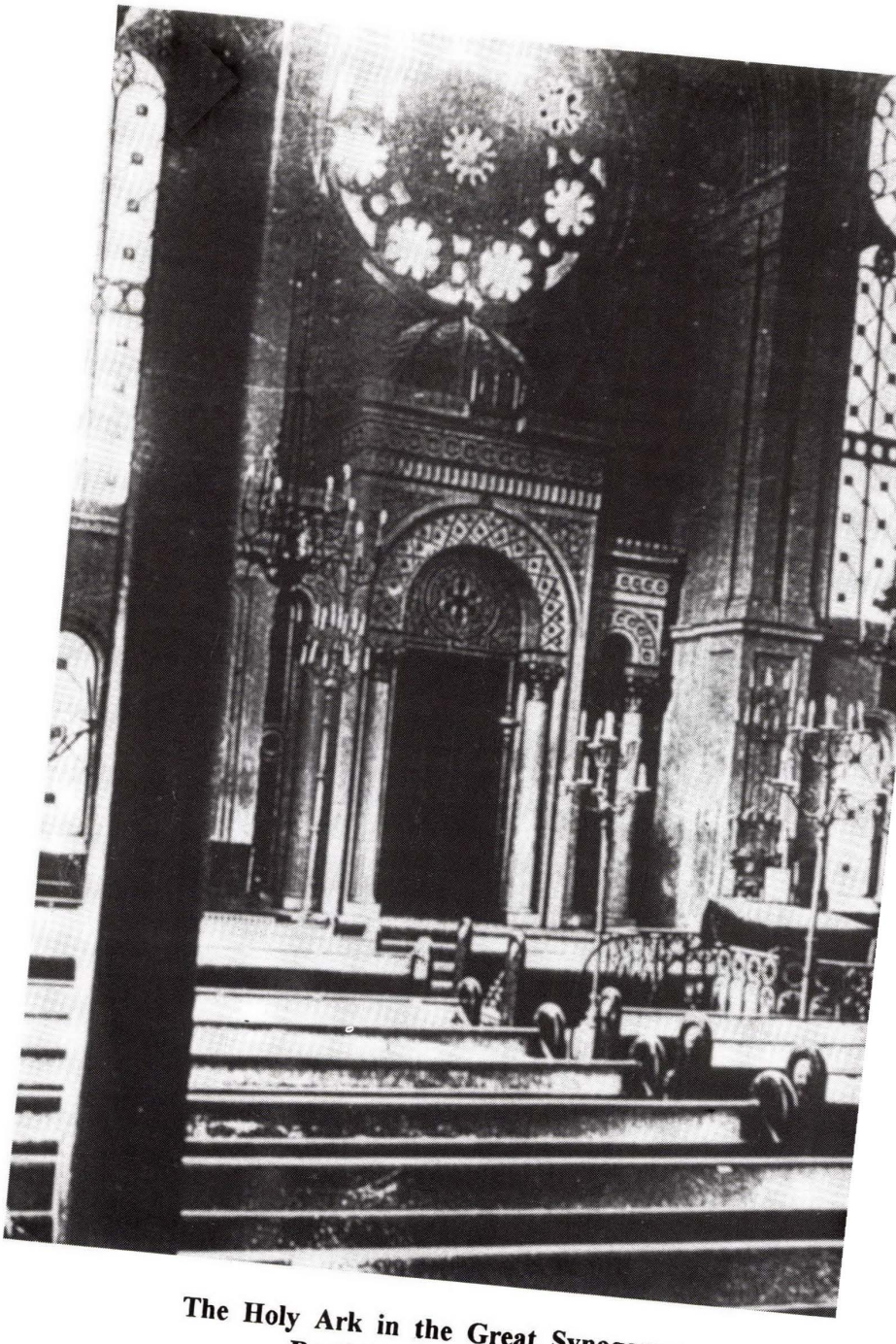
Thanks to Moishie's initiative, I, too, had been initiated into doing business, which was my contribution to the welfare of our closely knit, caring family.



Rabbi Akiva Schreiber - Sofer, זצ"ל
Chief Rabbi of Bratislava - Pressburg.



The Great Synagogue
Bratislava - Pressburg



The Holy Ark in the Great Synagogue
Bratislava - Pressburg.



Yessode Hatorah
Rabbinats Vorbereitungsschule
Bratislava -Pressburg
where I studied 1931 - 1935



The Orth. Jewish Buergerschule
Bratislava - Pressburg
where I studied 1931-1935



The world-famous Pressburger
Yeshiva Ketana and Yeshiva Haramah
Rabbinats Hochschule
Schlossgasse, Pressburg
where I studied 1935 - 1939

4

THE GATHERING STORM

"ויהי עד-כה ועד כה והשמים התקדרו עבים ורוח ..."
מלכים א' י"ח: מ"ד, מ"ה

"and it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was darkened with clouds and wind ...."
I Kings 18: 44, 45

As soon as Pesach was over, I returned to Pressburg. It was now spring, 1935, and in a few months time, I was to finish my studies at the *Yesodei Hatorah* and would advance to the *Yeshiva Ketana*.

In Germany, since 1933, the Nazis had been in power. An anti-Jewish atmosphere pervaded Slovakia. On more than one occasion, we were involved in fights with youth of the nationalistic Slovak Hlinkova Garda, who confronted us as we came out of the high school. They shouted "dirty Jews", and "Jews to Palestine", and provoked fisticuff fights. We fought back and they fled. The headmaster reported the fracas to the police. For some time, we had police protection and molestations ceased.

Notwithstanding the dark clouds gathering over Jews in Germany and the ever harsher measures taken against them with the Nuremberg Race Laws, the feeling was that in Czechoslovakia, the bastion of democracy and equality, such things would never happen! How little we knew or understood. How naive and childish we were!

My life in Pressburg went on as usual, preoccupied as I was with my studies and personal family concerns. *Rabbi* Loebel of the *Yeshiva Ketana* encouraged me to enroll for the next semester at his *yeshiva*, and treated me always as a welcome guest.

I went home for the High Holidays and, once again, officiated at the services in Lenartfalva, returning to Pressburg after *Succoth* and enrolling at the *Yeshiva Ketana.*

I was, however, in for a most unpleasant surprise. After a week or so, a member of the committee informed me that I would have to pay monthly tuition fees, which I could not afford. I went to see *Rabbi* Loebel who, to my utter surprise, shrugged his shoulders, claiming he had no say in this matter. "It is the decision of the *gabbaim* (the honorary officers)."

When I complained to him that he knew my financial position quite well, he said to me: "Yosef, I have good advice for you: 'הלוך ונסוע הנגבה!' ('travel further southward'," quoting a verse pertaining to the biblical Abraham (*Gen.* 12: 9). I was absolutely shattered by his behaviour.

I went to my lodging place, crying bitterly as I had never cried before, and did not attend the *shiur.*

Soon, some of my schoolmates came to inquire about me. I told them, disconsolately, that I could not return to the *yeshiva.* I asked them to inform *Rabbi* Loebel of my decision. I scribbled on a piece of paper: "*Rabbi*, what about the *talmudic* dictum: 'Take good care of the children of the poor, for from them will *Torah* go forth!'" (*Nedarim*, 81) and asked them to hand it to him.

I was resentful and embittered. I even threatened to become a "*sheigetz*" (totally unobservant person).

I did not show up at the *shiurim* for another three days. The *rabbi* came to see me, humming and "hawing", explaining very apologetically how sorry he was for what had happened, and that it was, indeed, the insistence of the *gabbaim* to impose tuition fees on everyone, without exception. They were obdurate that otherwise they could not maintain the *yeshiva*.

He then revealed that he had found an anonymous donor who would pay my tuition fees, and begged me to come back.

Still indignant over this episode and smarting from the cruel experience I, nevertheless, listened to my better inclinations and decided to return.

Some months later, I learned that the great *Talmudic* sage, Hillel, had been prevented from attending the *Beth Hamidrash* for lack of money to pay the fees. Eager not to miss the lessons, he climbed up to the chimney to listen. A snowstorm came and he was found, almost frozen, buried in the snow (*Yoma* 32 b). When I became aware of Hillel's plight, I felt ashamed of myself and became more humble about my personal hardships.

At this time, I ceased "*essen Taeg*." The *yeshiva* had a "*mensa*", an eating place where one could purchase coupons and obtain three meals a day. I prepared boys for their *bar mitzvah* and taught younger children basic elements of *Torah*. Thus, I could afford to eat at the "*mensa*". On *Shabbatot*, however, I continued to eat at my hosts' who insisted on having me at their table, where I would regularly deliver a *d'var Torah*. The *d'var Torah* usually related to the weekly *Sidrah*. The whole family sat in complete silence, paying attention to every word.

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In December, 1935, my sister, Fanika, was married to Martin Blobstein at my parents' home in Tornala. I was home for the wedding. By special request from my mother, I was asked to bring ten live carp fish, as no carp was obtainable in Tornala. How, I asked myself, do you carry fish, keeping them alive during an eight hours' journey in a train? I was told an ingenious solution. I put a piece of bread soaked in *slivovitz* (liqueur) in the mouth of each fish! As soon as I arrived home, I put the fish in water, and they revived and swam as soberly as fish ever swam!

My brother-in-law, Marci, who had lost his parents at a young age, was dearly loved, not only by my sister, but by all of us, and was warmly welcomed into our family.

The *chuppah* (wedding ceremony) took place in the yard of our home.

Marci, a tailor by trade, opened an outfitting store in Tornala. He was a good tradesman, well mannered, refined, and highly respected by everybody in town. We enjoyed a very good relationship and I loved him more than a brother. Marci honoured and respected my parents in a special way. They, in turn, were very fond of him.

Some six years earlier, Marci's elder brother, Samu (Shamai), had married my sister, Yolanka. Samu, too, was a tailor. They had two adorable and beautiful daughters, Marta (Malka) and Judka (Etya).

All four of them perished in the Holocaust.

My brother, Jeno, married Lenke (Leah) Singer, daughter of Rabbi and Mrs. Toviah Singer of Trebusany in eastern Slovakia. Soon after his marriage, Jeno gave up his agency in Tornala. They settled in Dobsina, where they opened a *kosher* restaurant. They had four children, two boys and two girls.

After Fanika and Marci's wedding, I returned to my studies at the *Yeshiva Ketana*, and during 1936 and 1937, made considerable advance in my studies of *Talmud* with commentaries; *Shulhan Aruk*, *Yoreh Deah* and *Orach Hayim*, and became an accomplished *"ba'al koreh"*, reading the whole *Sidrah* almost every week and often conducting the *Shabbat* services.

The situation of the Jews in Germany was deteriorating. Austria was swallowed up by Nazi Germany. Pressburg was now on Germany's border, and Pressburg's Jews became exceedingly worried.

Many young people tried to emigrate to Palestine. Legal emigration was severely limited because of the very few certificates issued by the British, who ruled in Palestine.

Jewish youth organized groups for illegal immigration. My brother, Yitzchak joined such a group. After travelling for some six months through Romania and Italy, he eventually reached the shores of Palestine, the Promised Land.

After the *Rosh Hashanah* recess in 1937, which I spent with my parents and family, scarcely seventeen yet, I returned to Pressburg and advanced to the *Yeshiva Haramah*, which is better known as the world famous *Pressburg Yeshiva*.

Life was exciting. We were about three-hundred students from all over the country, others from Hungary, Romania, Austria, Switzerland, and even some from overseas countries.

Learning was dynamic. The *shiurim* given by the *rebbe*, *Chief Rabbi* Akiva Sofer-Schreiber, were thoughtful, deep, sometimes even electrifying. Other *maggidei shiur* were the sons of the *rebbe*, *Rabbi* Avrohom Shmuel Binyomin and *Rabbi* Shimon Strasser.

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There were two specific groups among the student body. "*Chevra charifuss*," a programme comprising a weekly address delivered by one of its members in a "*pilpulistic*" style which demanded erudition and scholarship. The other was the "*chevra maggiduss*", dealing with biblical homiletics and preparing for reach-out programs and for congregational *rabbinic* leadership.

The *Yeshiva Haramah* (*Higher Yeshiva*) resembled a university and the studies were on a very high level. The student body consisted of selected, intellectual students, deemed to be the pride of Jewry. The *yeshiva* had produced hundreds of *rabbis* who headed important orthodox congregations all over the world. From the ranks of the *yeshiva* emerged also numerous *chazanim*, *shohetim*, Hebrew teachers and *maggidei shiur*, who strengthened Jewish religious life in all parts of the world.

Above all, however, the *yeshiva* produced a learned, knowledgeable laiety which adhered with pride to Judaism, becoming the mainstay of religious observance and activating orthodox congregational life wherever they settled. To be a Pressburger *yeshiva bochur* was in itself a recommendation. Parents with daughters of marriageable age would look for a groom for their daughters from this *yeshiva*.

Learning at the *yeshiva* continued unabated, in spite of the political situation which was very worrying. Jews feared the future and these fears were soon substantiated.

The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, and the French Premier, Daladier, eagerly assisted by Mussolini, sold out Czechoslovakia to Hitler at the infamous Munich meeting on September 29, 1938. Czechoslovakia was dismembered. Sudetenland was ceded and incorporated into

Hitler. Czech and Moravian regions were declared a German protectorate.

Slovakia became an "independent" state under Nazi influence, and Felvidek, the eastern part of it with a principally Hungarian population (including my hometown, Tornala), was incorporated into Hungary. That year, I did not go home for the High Holidays. The situation was frightening, and travel was to be avoided at all costs, particularly by Jews.

In April, 1939, the police ordered me to leave the city within a week, because I was no longer a Slovak national, my hometown being now part of Hungary.

Within three days, I packed my belongings and, with a heavy heart, left Pressburg. After a couple of weeks at home, I enrolled in the *yeshiva* in the Hungarian town of Miskolc, about 75 km from Tornala. It was a *Mizrachi*-founded *Torah Ve'Avodah Yeshiva* (known by the name of its founder, *Rabbi* Austerlitz), where students worked for half a day acquiring a trade, and studied *Torah* for the other half of the day. The *yeshiva* had an "*internat*" (a boarding house).

The "*internat*" was eager to have an ex-Pressburger "*bachur*", and after a while, I was placed in charge of the thirty-five students residing there. I was responsible for maintaining good order to Mr. Roth, the administrator. Everyone had to be in bed and lights out at 10 p.m., and I had to wake them up at 6.15 a.m. *Shul* service commenced at 7 a.m. For my trouble, I received board and lodging free of charge.

I had chosen to become a silversmith. Every week, I was shown different aspects of the trade by Mr. Eisner, the craftsman, like machine cleaning and polishing of silverware, welding, silver-plating, manufacturing rings, jewellery, etc.

silverware, welding, silver-plating, manufacturing rings, jewellery, etc.

I corresponded frequently with my parents from whom I learned that my brother Moishie had been enlisted in the Hungarian army. Antisemitism was rife in that army. One day, a corporal called him "dirty Jew". Moishie broke his jaw, and was sentenced to seven days solitary confinement. Soon after, he was discharged from the army under the pretext that he was not a Hungarian citizen. My parents had apparently neglected to register as such, and were declared "stateless persons".

On January 1st, 1940, I received a cable from home: "Father critically ill, return home immediately." I boarded the first train and during the three hours' journey, continuously recited *Tehillim* (Psalms). At 1.30 p.m., minutes before arriving in Tornala, my watch stopped.

On arrival, I hoped that somebody from the family would be at the station to meet me. It would be an encouraging sign. Nobody was there. Before going home, I stopped at my sister Yolan's house and found her in tears. "Daddy is critically ill. He is unconscious," she said, adding, "I wonder if you will find him alive."

I hastened home. Reaching the house, I saw the *Dayan* and a group of people coming out of our yard. Seeing me running, the *Dayan* stopped me. "Do you know that your father is ill?" "Yes," I replied. "Do you know that he is very ill?" "Yes, yes, yes," I said and burst out crying, and moved quickly forwards. "My son, please be prepared for the worst," I heard him say.

Through the window, I noticed that candles were lit, and realized that all was over. My father was still in his deathbed. I kissed him and closed his eyes, thinking of the promise given to biblical Jacob: "*... and Joseph will place his hand upon your eyes.*" (*Gen.* 46:4).

Dayan, and a *minyan* of Jews reciting "*Shema Yisrael* ...." Next day, the *Chevra Kadisha* performed the *taharah* in our home.

Many people attended the funeral. The *Dayan* delivered a moving *hesped* in our yard. The coffin was carried for a long distance by hand, and then taken by a two-horse cart to the cemetery. At its entrance, in a small hall, the coffin was placed. The congregation, led by the *chazan*, recited the *Tzidduk Hadin* prayer. On behalf of our family, I delivered a eulogy and Father was laid to rest in the second row on the left hand side of the cemetery. *Shivah* services were held at our home, morning and evening, during the *shivah* week.

Except for Gussie, who was in the United States, and Yitzchak, who was in Palestine, the whole family was together.

Once during the *shivah*, Mother said:

"I wish to die like your father died. In his own bed, with a *minyan* reciting "*Shema Yisrael* ...."

"Dear Mother," I said, "is it not enough that we have lost our father, and now you talk about your death."

Little did I realize at that time the meaning of her wish. She was to perish in Auschwitz, with millions of martyrs not one of whom was granted a burial.

After the *shivah*, I returned to Miskolc.

5

THE OPPRESSION

"ויעבידו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך."
שמות א': י"ג

"And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to labour with crushing oppression!
Exodus 1: 13

Hungary had by then joined the German war effort as one of Germany's allies. Because of the dominant Nazi influence on the Budapest regime, Jews were declared unreliable and were not taken into the army. Instead, they had to serve as labourers in the working battalions called "*munka szazad*", which were under military rule. They were given military uniforms, were under military discipline, and were accommodated in military barracks. Instead of weapons, they were equipped with shovels and pick-axes, and had to perform 10-11 hours hard, manual labour, daily, building roads and airfields, digging trenches, and felling trees in forests. Food was ample and treatment was not bad.

Many tried to leave the country, but there was nowhere to go!

No country would take Jews! Some young people went to Budapest, hoping to obtain a certificate from the National Office of the Jewish Community to emigrate to Palestine.

I, too, went to Budapest and had to wait some weeks for an interview. To maintain myself, I worked as a delivery

I, too, went to Budapest and had to wait some weeks for an interview. To maintain myself, I worked as a delivery boy at a bakery. In addition, for two weeks, I worked as a male nurse at the Jewish hospital in Buda. A very religious, old man would not accept the services of a female nurse, and I attended to him. When he passed away, my job had come to an end.

My interview with the Jewish National Office was unsuccessful. Certificates were needed for those already called up for compulsory work.

I once again returned to Miskolc.

The Hungarian Army was now fighting on the side of the Germans and Italians in occupied Russian territory. Rumours about Jewish working batallions taken to Russia were confirmed.

My life took a sudden, dramatic change for the worse, into a black physical and spiritual landscape of storm and stress, when on October 1st, 1941, I was recruited to the compulsory labour camp at Petervasara.

We were given military uniforms but after a while had to remove the military brass buttons and replace them with ordinary buttons. However, that was but the least of the humiliating demotions from the status of an individual to the anonymous.

We worked under strict military discipline, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., with an hour for lunch.

Within a short time, we had to wear a wide yellow band on our left sleeve to distinguish us as Jews, a despised race of half-men. We were summarily moved to Miskolc to work in a cement factory. We had to return our military uniforms and replace them with our own, civilian clothes.

communal leaders were beaten up and then imprisoned. All young men over twenty had been taken to compulsory labour camps. Only old men, women and children remained at home. Storekeepers were advised to take Aryan partners to their businesses. Universities adhered to strict "*numerus clausus*" in admitting a minimal number of Jewish students.

In April, 1942, our camp was moved to Jolsva and we were told that we would, in the near future, depart for Russia. We informed our families.

In due course the dreaded day of departure arrived.

In mid-June, we were ordered to collect our belongings, marched to the station, and waited for the train. Jews from all over the country came to the station to see off their dear ones, and in the motley, disconsolate crowd, I found my mother and Moishie.

We kissed and embraced in a desperate, tearful farewell. Then those who had come to say goodbye to their loved ones were ordered to stay at a distance. At an opportune moment, Moishie came nearer and whispered to me:

"When you will be there, give my regards to 'Uncle *Roth*' (the Red Army). Try to visit him."

It was late in the afternoon, and I sent an imploring last message to my mother and Moishie:

"Please, go home. There is no point to stay on. It will be easier for you and for me."

My mother, frightened out of her wits, sent her reply with Moishie.

"Until my eyes can no longer see you, I will not go away."

"Until my eyes can no longer see you, I will not go away."

There she stood stoically and would not move until it became dark and we could no longer see each other.

That was the last time I ever saw my mother and Moishie.

Late in the evening, we boarded a goods train which pulled out towards an undisclosed destination in Nazi-occupied Russia.

For seven days, we travelled under strict military escort and finally arrived at a station near the city of Kursk in Ukraine. There we disembarked and were handed over to other Hungarian military personnel waiting for us.

Their rough behaviour cowed us at once. They shouted at us, stampeding us like cattle, cursing us as "Jew pigs", and insulting our parents as dogs and whores. They threatened to mercilessly teach us some discipline. We were lined up four in a row, and ordered to march. After several hours, some food was handed to us in the roughest fashion.

We continued to march into a deluge of soaking rain.

The field road became muddy and the horses were unable to pull the wagons loaded with our working tools and other equipment. We had to replace the horses and were harnessed sixteen men to a wagon and forced to pull with all our strength, our feet sinking into the mud, amidst the shouting and cursing of our new "overlords".

Towards evening, we arrived at a village, and were accommodated in a huge barn for the night. Soaked to the bone, we threw ourselves on the ground and lay down in our wet clothes, exhausted and humiliated.

The next morning, we were subdivided into working groups. I belonged to the 7/3 company. We had to commence work

We were given hot, black coffee and a piece of black bread, and marched to work. There we were subdivided into platoons with one of us appointed platoon commander, responsible for apportioning the work - the repairing of the road through the village.

Each of us was alotted a stretch of road which had to be repaired by 6 p.m., the end of the working day. The work was supervised by a sergeant and two corporals, who reported to their commander daily. These supervisors were nothing but crude sadists who would hit us for the slightest reason.

We had to carry our working tools, spades, shovels and pick-axes like soldiers carry their rifles. Those with wheelbarrows marched behind. In the beginning, food was sufficient, but as time passed, its quality and quantity deteriorated.

We had reached the stage when whoever worked in front of a house, regarded that house as "belonging" to him. At an opportune moment, he would run to the yard and beg for some food from the owner. Often, an elderly woman stealthily brought some food, milk, bread or boiled potatoes and, making sure she was not detected, gave it to the man working nearest to her house. Then she crossed herself, muttering sadly: "Who knows where my son is. Perhaps someone will have compassion on him, too." These old Russian *babushkas* were kind and compassionate and helped us not only with food, but also to retain our faith in humanity.

We worked six days a week, from Monday to Saturday. Sunday was a free day for cleaning and resting. We had no contact whatsoever with our families. Life was hard and bitter. I reminded myself of Israel's slavery in Egypt, as described in the Bible, and hard as it was, kept faith in my belief in better days to come.

described in the Bible, and hard as it was, kept faith in my belief in better days to come.

Weeks rolled monotonously by and *Rosh Hashana* was approaching. Unable to celebrate the festival as we were used to at home, we nevertheless made mental preparations for celebrating the day in its spiritual sense. On the eve of *Rosh Hashana*, we organized an evening service, after which we greeted each other with the traditional "*leshana tova tikatevu*", full of hope for a better future.

Next morning, we rose earlier and recited the prayers with a *minyan*. We then marched to our working place and arrived at 6.05 a.m., five minutes late. Usually, the lieutenant arrived at about 10 a.m. This time, however, he was there when we arrived. He rode up on horseback and in abusive language, shouted at us for being late for work. He called us saboteurs and threatened to punish us severely, should such a thing ever happen again.

Meanwhile, he hurried the platoon commander to allocate the work. The latter became nervous and entangled with the measuring rope. Noticing the delay, the lieutenant requested the sergeant to find out who was the last to have used the rope. Soon, the sergeant reported: "Jakubovits and Fogel."

We were called out and confirmed the sergeant's finding.

"Sergeant Takacs," shouted the lieutenant. "twenty-five lashes for each! I'll teach them a lesson about storing the measuring rope."

Jakubovits was lashed first. I watched him being beaten by the sergeant who counted aloud the number of lashes. Jakubovits had to bend down with his fingers reaching his toes, and was hit time and again on his buttocks. It took quite a while until the twenty-five lashes had been

Then came my turn. The lieutenant, either too tired to view this spectacle or unwilling to lose more valuable working time, suddenly commanded the sergeant: "Right! For this one, fifteen lashes will be enough."

The sadist sergeant was himself somewhat exhausted by now, yet started to hit me with all his strength. After receiving ten lashes, I straightened up, unable to endure the pain any longer. "Bend down, you coward," he shouted and lashed me another five times.

Everyone went to his allotted work. I was bitterly anguished that this had happened to me on *Rosh Hashana* and particularly after having conducted the morning service earlier. I carried on working, crying inconsolably.

The sergeant passed by and mocked me:

"Hey you, you got a good hiding today, hey?"

"Yes," I dared to retort, "today, it was me, tomorrow it may be you!"

Hearing such unheard-of audacity, he fell upon me and beat me repeatedly. In the most abusive language, he shouted: "You bloody, filthy Jewish bastards, none of you will ever return home. We will extract from you the last ounce of strength and then, we shall kill you all. Come on, hurry up with your work, otherwise I'll split your head!" he yelled in a rage of uncontrollable anger.

That day, after we had finished our work and were on our way "home", the sergeant, time and again, made us stop, shouting: "Sit down!" We all sat down in the mud. "Up! March on!" "Stop! Lie down!" "Down! Lie on your backs!" "Down! Crawl forward!" "Up! March on!"

By the time we reached the barns, we were all bloodied, covered in mud and dirty as pigs. But we were also unbowed.

Nobody complained about my retort, realizing that my response had been but a pretext for the brutal punishment.



In the 107/3 compulsory labour batallion
at PETERVASARA - Hungary , 1941
(l. to r.) T.Oblat , G. Karlin, 8th in the row - me.
By courtesy of George Karlin , Montreal .



In the 107/3 compulsory labour batallion at LOSONC - Hungary, 1942, before being dispatched to the occupied Russian front . By courtesy of George Karlin, Montreal.

6

A BREAK FOR FREEDOM

"הלא זה אוד מוצל מאש?"

זכריה ג: ב'

"Is not this man a brand plucked out of the fire?"

Zechariah III: 2

Time went by monotonously. Days, weeks and months were all the same. Working, working, working, compulsory labour, constantly shouted at, harassed, unappreciated and with but meagre food rations. We were struggling to keep body and soul together, making every effort to complete the daily quota.

The weather turned colder. Winter was approaching.

We were put to dig trenches and other military fortifications in the Voronezh district. We endured in these trenches, without any washing facilities, for four weeks.

We were infested with lice. During the long, sleepless nights, and the unending days of exceedingly hard work, we found ourselves compelled to scratch our bodies until our skin was lacerated.

One day, on our return from work, tired and exhausted, there was a call for twelve volunteers to do some "special work". We were not told for what kind of work the volunteers were needed.

Impulsively, I put up my hand and soon found myself, together with another eleven volunteers, travelling on a truck with all our belongings. Sergeant "*Chatzi-Nezek*" ("Half-Nose"), so called because his nose had been operated on and he had remained with a disfigured half nose was appointed as our commander.

We were delegated to a military field hospital, and our task was to provide the hospital with sufficient firewood from a nearby forest. From this day, the lot of the 'volunteers' changed for the better. We were accommodated in private homes in a nearby village and were provided with good and ample food from the hospital kitchen. The sergeant appointed my friend, Tibor Oblatt, to be in charge of the work, while he was, most of the time, drunk or fooling around with the local women.

We had to fell trees, saw them into one metre pieces, and stockpile them. Once a week, twelve ox-driven wagons came to transport the logs to the hospital and we then had to be ready with enough logs to fill all the wagons.

Being on our own, with no one constantly shouting at us, we organized ourselves into three working groups of four each. Two felled the trees and cut off their branches, the other two sawed the tree into one meter logs and piled them.

We worked energetically and with enthusiasm, and by the end of each day, had prepared many piles of firewood.

Late in the afternoon, the sergeant came to inspect our output. "Well done, boys," he quite often said - something that had never happened before. His few words of appreciation served as an incentive to even greater output. After a week's work, the twelve wagons were not enough to take all the wood, and several piles were left behind for the next week's transportation.

By the following week, we had again improved our output and as a result, our working hours were reduced. Instead of commencing work at 6 a.m., as before, we now started at 8 a.m. and finished at 4 p.m.

Our reduced working hours gave us time to get acquainted with the local population and the opportunity to explain to them who we were and what our part was in the logistics of the occupying forces.

By this time, I spoke Russian fairly fluently, and learned from the villagers that the German Army was in full retreat and that it was now just a matter of time, before the Red Army would reach and liberate this area.

We had to be prepared for this. Daily, during work, and in the evenings, we discussed it amongst ourselves and came to the conclusion that certainly, if only possible, we would not retreat with our taskmasters, but go into hiding and thus escape.

We took the head of the village, called "*starosta*", into our confidence. He assured us of his protection and earmarked houses for us, in the cellars of which we could hide until the arrival of the liberators.

Weeks rolled by. The harshness of winter was upon us. The forest was covered in snow but our work went on unabated. We worked industriously and cut more than sufficient firewood for the hospital. Our effort was appreciated and we were granted ample and good food and sufficient time for rest and recreation.

One freezing morning, at the beginning of January, 1943, with a temperature of 42°C below zero, we were told not to go to the forest. Instead, we were taken into the cornfields of the village and told to fill matresses with straw for the many injured soldiers who were brought to

the hospital. Our breath froze and we had to work very briskly in order not to freeze altogether.

At about 10 a.m., an officer on a horse arrived, and we were told to stop the work, return immediately to the village, collect all our belongings, and assemble in front of the hospital. "The hospital is to be evacuated. We retreat before the advancing Red Army," the officer told us, without further comment.

Our moment of freedom had struck! Being well prepared for this new situation, we returned to the village and quickly hid in the cellars of the villagers earmarked by the *starosta*. A few hours passed, and we were informed that the hospital had been abandoned and the Hungarian Army had retreated.

We were on our own!

Free at last! Immediately, we contacted the "*starosta*", who took us under his protection and promised to represent us before the advancing Red Army.

Late in the afternoon of that day, a few of us ventured out and went to the hospital. Many seriously wounded soldiers had been left behind. Everything had been left in good order. There were large stores filled with food, medicine, clothing and equipment.

After a short discussion at an urgently called meeting, we decided to exchange our torn clothes for brand new, military uniforms and pretend that we were on guard duty at the hospital. In case that retreating army units would arrive, we would tell them that we had been left in charge of the hospitalized, injured soldiers, until transport could be arranged for them. However, if the Russian Army would arrive first, we would reveal our true identity which the "*starosta*" would confirm.

During the next two days, many retreating, straggling soldiers arrived. We served them hot tea, coffee and biscuits, and they readily accepted our story. When they were about to leave, we gave them canned foods which we had in plentiful supply. They certainly did not even suspect our true identity!

On the third day, the Red Army arrived. The "*starosta*" kept his promise. Our liberators declared us prisoners-of-war. We were ordered to gather in one room, where we were placed under guard. Among the injured in the hospital, were a number of German soldiers belonging to the notorious S.S. They were summarily executed and their bodies thrown into the latrines.

All the others, Germans, Rumanians, Hungarians, and Italians, were taken prisoner. During the next few days, the hospital became a gathering point for P.O.W.'s. Soon their numbers reached several hundred, of different nationalities, including us, twelve Jews, like broken reeds plucked from the flames of war and destruction.

Some of these miserable P.O.W.'s tried to befriend us, claiming that they had never hurt a Jew and had treated their Jewish fellow citizens well and with respect. We, however, kept away from them, preferring to be among ourselves.

After a week or so, came the order to move. We collected our quite substantial belongings taken from the hospital's stores, and started our march into the unknown.

We marched about 30 km. Before nightfall, we reached a village and were accommodated for the night in a huge, communal barn. There, we had to line up in two rows facing each other in the middle of the barn, and were told to lie down for the night. No food at all was distributed during this march but, luckily, our boys still had sufficient canned food from the hospital's stores.

During the night, when attending to my physical needs at some distance from the barn, I noticed the absence of the Russian military guards and pointed it out to my friend, Tibor Oblatt. He had been in charge of our unit when we were seconded to the Hungarian military hospital. He was from Salgotarjan in Hungary, and we had become friends. Now, both being P.O.W.'s of a very special sort, I felt the need to have someone in whom to confide.

Although we neither knew where we were heading, nor the direction in which we were driven, we decided to escape at the first opportunity.

By now, thanks to my knowledge of the Czech and Slovak languages, I was fairly fluent in Russian, and could communicate with the local population, whereas Tibor spoke only Hungarian. Thus, I became his spokesman whenever necessary, and on certain occasions, I advised him to keep silent, in order not to reveal our origins.

Next day, we marched another 30 km. Towards evening, we once again entered a communal barn for the night. At about midnight, Tibor and I went out and looked around. When we had made sure that there were no guards, we left the barn, walked to the village, and took up shelter in a stable with two cows. We lay down, warming ourselves next to them.

At about 6 a.m., the owner of the stable opened the door and found us. Immediately, I jumped up and pacified him (in Russian, of course), explaining that we were P.O.W.'s originating from Carpathian Russia, that we had been working under the Nazis at a compulsory labour camp, and that when the Red Army had liberated us, they simply threw us among the other P.O.W.'s who had fought against the Red Army.

I apologized for having taken up shelter at his stable without permission, and asked him to take us to his house and allow us to wash ourselves, for we had not washed for the last eight days.

Accepting the truth of my story, he invited us to the house and gave us two pails of warm water. We were also served breakfast; kasha, bread, and milk. On my suggestion, our host was more than willing to exchange our almost new uniforms for second hand, typical Russian peasant clothes. Having ascertained, that the prisoners' camp had left the village, our host insisted that we be on our way, as he could not offer us shelter for fear of inspection by the authorities. We thanked him profusely for his hospitality and departed.

We were "free" again and on our own, not knowing where we were and whither we were to go.

The countryside was covered in snow. We left the village and reached the national or provincial road. Having walked about 500 m, we saw a military truck stuck in a ditch, with soldiers trying hard to pull it out. Without thinking, we went to assist and after a while, together we succeeded in pushing the truck back onto the road.

The driver invited all who had helped, to get on the truck.

"Where are you travelling to?" I asked him.

"To Shirinkin," he replied.

"Well, that's exactly where we're going," I said innocently.

"Fine," he said, "then climb up and off we go."

After an hour's drive, we reached Shirinkin. The truck stopped in a huge, military ammunition depot. We all jumped off the truck. Every 50 meters, there was a

military guard with a rifle and a drawn bayonet. "How do we get out of this?" I whispered to Tibor.

Having heard rumours about the formation of a Czech Legion in Russia, I suggested to Tibor that we inquire about it from the commander of the depot. Soon, we were in the commander's office. I told him that we were from Czechoslovakia and would like to volunteer for the Czech Legion.

The commander had heard that the Legion was being organized somewhere, and suggested that we travel to the town of Kalatsh and inquire from the military authorities there. He also advised us that there was a train in the afternoon to Kalatsh. We thanked him for this valuable information, left the depot unmolested, and went to the station to await the train.

We had no money, but it was wartime and people were accustomed to travelling without tickets. A goods train arrived and we climbed into a wagon occupied with all manner of people - military and civilian. Somehow, we found ourselves seated next to two men who seemed to be dressed better than the others. I started a conversation with one of them. He inquired who we were. I told him, confidentially, that we were from Czechoslovakia, eager to volunteer to the Czech Legion.

He began to speak to me in Yiddish and when I replied in Yiddish, he lowered his voice and told me that he was a doctor of medicine, and his fellow traveller a chemist, also Jewish. They lived in the town of Kalatsh and had both been appointed to work with the P.O.W.'s there. After a short conversation, he suggested that, on arrival we should carry their suitcases so as not to create any suspicion. He would accommodate us at his house. He suggested that we refrain from any further conversation in order not to draw attention to ourselves.

Excited about the day's happenings, I thanked G-d for our wondrous escape, and gratefully wondered what He had in store for us in the future.

The doctor brought us and his companion to his house. He gave us food, and also mattresses and blankets for the night. In the morning, we were woken up early. He gave us some tea and bread and 50 *rubles*, and told us to leave his house immediately, as it was dangerous to keep foreigners.

Thanking him for his hospitality and generosity, we took our meagre belongings and left. With money in our pockets and with great expectations, we went to the market, but all we could buy for the money was half a loaf of bread.

Not molested, probably because of our Russian outfits, we walked around the town, seeking a lodging place, but to no avail.

There were posters in the town, proclaiming that there were several dangerous spies around, and that if anyone happened to spot a stranger, he should notify the town commander's office.

Unable to secure a lodging place, I suggested to Tibor that we should go to the Commander's office to confirm our intention to enroll in the Czech Legion.

Some Russian officers were coming towards us, and I asked one of them: "Could you, please, tell us where the town commander's office is?" "Why," said the officer with the highest rank, "it is at 28 Lenin street."

"But who are you?"

"We are P.O.W.'s from Czechoslovakia."

Turning to me, he asked: "Are you Czech or Slovak?"

Immediately, I understood that a person knowing the difference between Czech and Slovak must be an intelligent, knowledgeable person, hence I responded: "*Ya Yevrey*." ("I am a Jew.")

Placing his hand on his pistol, he said: "*Chto? Ty Yevrey, skazhi Shema Yisroel*!" ("What, you are a Jew! Say *Shema Yisroel*!")

"*Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokeynoo, Hashem Echod*!" I said with great excitement.

The officer fell upon me, hugged and kissed me, and said to his fellow officers, probably also Jewish:

"This is the first Jew I have met from the other side! Commander, Shmomander, ... *nyenada* (you don't need it!). I am a commander! You fellows, come with me!"

He excused himself from the other two officers, took us into a military depot and dressed us up in new clothes and shoes, and gave us a winter cap, "*ushanka*", which kept our ears warm, as well.

Then, he took us to a military eating place and treated us to a sumptuous meal. Admitting to him that we did not have any documents about our identity, he immediately scribbled on a piece of paper, in Russian, certifying that we were P.O.W.'s, Jews from Czechoslovakia wishing to enrol in the Czech Legion and asking the authorities to give us every necessary assistance.

Handing over the "certificate" to me, he said:

"*Yosif, nezhurij sa, zhitj budjesh i nje-umrjosh, zhitj budjesh i damoj pojdjosh*!" ("Yosef, don't worry, you will live and you won't die, you will live and you will reach your home!")

He wished us good luck and sent us on our way.

מלא*** כל הארץ כבודו = מזמינם* לפונדק* אחד*
Nothing happens Haphazardly!

"The whole earth is full of His glory! =
He brings them together at one place."

It became late afternoon, and we had no option but to voluntarily go to the P.O.W. camp, which was in some communal barns. Quickly, before the crowd entered, we staked out our claim for sleeping space on the floor. There may well have been some thousand people of different nationalities in that barn, but no Jews.

In the morning, we lined up at the kitchen for breakfast, which consisted of black "coffee" and a piece of brown bread. The line was very long, and I noticed that it ran parallel to a main road with heavy vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

The camp was not fenced and there were no guards. After breakfast, I discussed the situation with Tibor and suggested that at lunchtime we should try to be the last in the line. Those in the line, will advance toward the kitchen to obtain their portion of soup, and their minds will be on the food. As the line curves parallel to and near the road, being last in line, we will just have to turn around and head for the road, without anybody noticing.

Our desire to be free was irresistible. At lunchtime, we took our meagre belongings, and as planned, stood at the end of the line. People in the line were pushing forward, their eyes fixed on the kitchen from where the food was distributed. When the end of the line reached the nearest point to the road, we turned around, and walked in the opposite direction, onto the road leading away from the

camp and out of the town. The road was busy with traffic and nobody noticed us.

We walked for about four hours, and reached a village where an elderly woman allowed us to stay in her house for the night. Upon her inquiry, I told her that we were headed to join the Czech Legion which fought together with the Red Army against the German occupiers.

Tibor, not knowing the language, could not speak with her. I told her that he had lost his voice in the freezing weather. The woman gave us borscht and potatoes for supper, and warm water to wash ourselves. Every now and then, she crossed herself and implored G-d's mercy for her son, who was somewhere on the front. Next morning, we got up at the crack of dawn, bid our hostess farewell, and departed.

It became a pattern to be at a different village every day, and to remain unknown in the big nowhere. We heard that some P.O.W.'s lived and worked in the villages. This information served as a further incentive for our trek. We continued to move like this for the next ten days, stopping at another village every evening. The people in these villages were very poor, yet, they were hospitable and kindhearted and provided us with food and shelter.

Tibor and I were pleased at having left the camp behind, and our main concern at this time, was to somehow manage to survive through the winter.

One day, on our way to yet another village, I felt very bad. My strength was ebbing and I was unable to walk any farther. I sat down in the snow. Tibor begged me to carry on till the next village, but I just didn't have the strength. We were stranded. It was frightening.

Soon, however, people travelling in a sleigh drawn by two oxen came by and seeing us, took us into the village and

to their home. My head and body were aching, I was running a very high fever, and thought that this was the end.

I asked Tibor to notify my family about my death, should he survive and reach home. My goodhearted hosts put me in bed, covered me with a heavy eiderdown, and gave me lemon tea with syrup. They assured me that I would get better, and I fell asleep.

In the morning, they put me in the sleigh and took me to the hospital in a nearby town. It was small, had two wards and twelve beds in each. On admission, I was registered by my name as a Czechoslovakian P.O.W. Tibor said goodbye and left. That was the last time I saw him.

For eight days, I lay in the hospital, unable to eat. My body burnt like fire. I had typhoid. Slowly, the fever eased and I was able to take some tea with milk. After a fortnight, my temperature was normal again and the doctor, who had treated me, said that in a day or two I could be discharged.

Then, the doctor bent down and whispered in my ear:

"Yosef, I know that you are a Jew. Listen well. About 30 *vjorst* from here, there is a Jewish *kolkhoz* (communal settlement) called Yekaterinovka. Try to reach it. There you will be safe."

מלא*** כל הארץ כבודו = מזמינם* לפונדק* אחד*

"The whole earth is full of His glory! =
He brings them together at one place."

Saying nothing more, he left.

The next day, I was discharged from the hospital, but was told to wait at the entrance for my "papers". Suddenly, a man sat down next to me and started a conversation.

"Who are you? From where are you?"

I told him that I was a Czechoslovakian P.O.W.

"Where are you going to now?"

"I was hoping to volunteer for the Czech Legion and want to ask the commander of the town how to go about it."

"Would you like me to take you to the commander?"

"I would be most grateful."

The man (who turned out to be a member of the secret police) took me to the local police station. I was told to wait while the man went to the commander's office.

I overheard him saying: "Take him, let him get his daily ration."

The man reappeared and told me: "Come, let's go!"

"Are you taking me to a restaurant?" I inquired.

"Sure," he replied.

We walked for a while and he had to support me, because I walked with difficulty, still being weak and hungry after my illness. Eventually, we reached a building on the outskirts of the town. It was the local jail. There, a guard searched through my meagre belongings and took away my pair of *tefillin*. Quickly, he locked me in a cell, together with eight others. I was shocked and mentally unprepared.

I knocked on the door and, eventually, a guard came.

"Why am I incarcerated here?" I demanded to know.

"I am not a criminal. I am a P.O.W. I wish to speak to the commander."

"The commander is not here today," he answered nonchalantly.

"In the meanwhile, have a rest until tomorrow."

The guard returned to his post.

At that very moment, one of my fellow prisoners hit me on my head and shouted: "You, good-for-nothing! For two years, I am here, and I don't know why! And you already want to know why you are here. Sit down, you worm, or else I will poke out your eyes!"

He pushed me down to the floor. I got the fright of my life and knew that I'd better remain quiet, at least for the time being.

Some hours later, my fellow prisoners, convinced by my story, became friendlier. They laughed at me for being a "greenhorn", and even gave me some bread to eat. They were hardened criminals awaiting trial for murder and robbery.

The "accommodation" in the cell was horrible. There was nothing in it. We sat on the floor and were expected to sleep on it, too. The cell was filthy, with no sanitation facilities at all. The filthy cell was also infested with mice, rats and lice. There was no rest from them, neither day nor night.

Once a day, we were given four-hundred grams of black bread and some "*kipiatok*" (boiled water). This was the official diet. The local prisoners received food from their families and, occasionally, gave me some, too. After my

illness, I was constantly hungry and could hardly wait for even the meagre daily portion to still my craving for food.

On the eighth day of my stay in the prison, all of us were ordered to collect our belongings and line up in front of the building. Guarded by nine soldiers armed with rifles with fitted bayonettes. The commander ordered the sergeant in charge of us to deliver the eight prisoners to the central prison in a town some 70 miles away. As for me, he was instructed to hand me over to the P.O.W. camp at Chrenovoye.

We were marched to the railway station and boarded a goods train. Earlier, in the cell, I had been warned that the Chrenovoye camp was a horrible place, overcrowded, with tens of thousands of prisoners and very little food to eat.

I also heard that some of the prisoners there had become cannibals.

Our train travelled fast and did not stop at Chrenovoye. Instead, it arrived at the station in a town, the name of which I cannot remember. We were told to get off and line up for a march (which I had been told was some 15 km) to the central prison.

Hearing this, I stepped forward, and made an appeal to the sergeant in charge. "I can't march such a distance, because I have been seriously ill and am still too weak. If you intend to force me to march, you had better shoot me right now. If you are prepared to listen to me, please, appoint one of your guards to return me to Chrenovoye with the next train. Should it not stop there, he can always return me to the prison."

The sergeant was prepared to take me up on my "offer". He departed with seven soldiers and eight prisoners. I

remained at the railway station with my guard, who vigilantly watched me.

While waiting, numerous trains, packed with soldiers, pulled into the station.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a little boy, aged nine or ten, came, looked at me, and said:

"Uncle, are you hungry? Would you like to eat something?"

"I am very hungry, indeed," I answered this unknown angel.

"I'll bring you food," he said.

"You had better get the permission from my guard," I suggested.

The guard nodded his approval. The little boy ran away, and in a short while, returned with a can of hot *kasha*, which he had obtained from the kitchen of one of the military trains. He gave it to me and said:

"Here, Uncle, eat!"

The food was hot and tasty, and I must have eaten it very fast, for the little boy, who was watching me, asked:

"Would you like some more?"

"Yes," I said, gratefully.

He took the empty can, ran away, and soon returned with another can of food. I looked at my guard, who again gave his approval. The little boy ran away and disappeared. I was full of awe about G-d's gracious ways, and could think only of the words of the biblical Joseph's brothers:

"מה זאת עשה אלקים לנו."
בראשית מ"ב: כ"ט

"*What is this that G-d has done unto us.*"
Gen. 42: 29

Soon, a train arrived, travelling in our direction. I boarded accompanied by my guard, of course, and half an hour later, we stopped at Chrenovoye.

It was raining heavily. The guard took me to the police station in the railway building, telling the policeman in charge that he was handing me over to him as a P.O.W., and that he should take me to the P.O.W. camp.

The policeman did not take him seriously.

"It is your job to deliver him there, not ours. Besides, why should he be taken there? Hasn't he got legs to walk there himself?" he joked.

"Hey, you," he said, turning to me, "will you go to the camp?"

"Sure I will," I said, "all my friends and compatriots are there."

"Be aware!" he warned me, "If we find you anywhere outside the camp, we shall shoot you on sight, boom, boom, boom ...."

He then turned to my guard: "You had better run to catch your train, don't miss it!"

The guard saluted, and out he ran. I was told to start walking to the camp.

I left the station, and began to walk into the village. It still rained heavily, and there was not a living soul in the

streets. After walking five-hundred metres or so, I ventured into a house, where I found an old woman. Thanks to my Russian apparel and my knowledge of the language, she agreed to let me sleep over in her home.

The woman asked me lots of questions, but I told her only that I was on my way to my military unit. I soon excused myself, being very tired, and lay down to sleep in a corner of the room on the straw she provided for me.

Early in the morning, I thanked my hostess, and was on my way out of Chrenovoye, in the direction of the village which the doctor at the hospital had advised me to go to - Yekaterinovka.

My way to Yekaterinovka took seven days. Every waking moment, I thanked G-d for having so miraculously saved me from the horrors of the Chrenovoye camp.

I reached Yekaterinovka in the early morning hours. It was a sunny winter's day, and everything was covered in snow.

I entered a house and inquired about the whereabouts of the "*predsedatyel*" (the chairman of the village). I noticed a tallith-bag hanging on the wall, and realized the doctor's words had been true. This was indeed the Jewish village he had spoken to me about.

I was told that the "*predsedatyel*" was presently not at home. The people inquired about me and my profession. I told them that I was Jewish and had been a gardener (thinking, anyway, it was winter).

"A gardener! Wonderful!" they exclaimed.

"Chananya Yefimovitch, our chief gardener, needs an assistant."

They advised me to go to his house and see him. I did so, and found a bearded man in his fifties, who told me that he had been a *shohet*, but having been incarcerated for three years for practising *shehitah*, he had given it up and had become a gardener. Nevertheless, he confessed, he still slaughtered for his own needs. He asked me if I had "papers" which I would be obliged to present to the "*predsedatyel*".

Luckily for me, the "*presedatyel*" wasn't in the village, and the matter was left in abeyance.

Meanwhile, I was invited to feel at home. As soon as the snow would melt, I should begin carting manure into the fields.

This village *kolkhoz* in the district of Voronezh, consisted of two hundred families, all of them Jewish. The Russians called these people "*subotniki*", meaning *Shabbat*-observers.

There was a synagogue in the *kolkhoz* but, besides Chananya, no one could read Hebrew. The services were conducted in Russian from a Hebrew *siddur* with Russian translation. *Torah* reading was performed by Chananya and after each section, the *gabbai* translated the text into Russian.

Since the incarceration of Chananya, *kosher* meat was unavailable, but people did not mix meat with milk. The *kolkhozniks* rested on *Shabbat*, and only absolutely necessary work, like milking the cows, was done. All the young men were in the army, and only elderly folk and women were left in the village and available for work.

My knowledge of Hebrew was regarded as extraordinary, and I was often called to assist Chananya with the reading of the *Torah*. Many villagers, particularly those who had marriageable daughters, invited me for a meal to their homes. Quite frequently, I was told: "Yosef, stay with us.

We shall give you a house and a cow, you will sleep in a bed, find a wife and live here happily."

Being comfortable with me no-one asked further about my "papers" ... it was clear they were more than happy to have me there.

Chananya had a wife, a young daughter and a younger son, all of them at home.

Teaching religion was prohibited by law, and Jews were even afraid to teach their own children. The children attended state school and were taught to be atheists. Their Jewishness consisted of the experiences they had in their parents' homes. The *shul* was attended by the elderly only, and mainly on *Shabbat* and holidays.

***Jahrzeit* was an important event, which was lavishly celebrated by providing a sumptuous meal for the entire congregation.**

Although I did not have *tefillin* any more, I used to *daven* regularly, every day.

Nadia, the daughter of Chananya, asked me: "What are you doing, Yosef?" "I pray to G-d," I replied. She retorted: "Our god sits in the Kremlin."

One day, Chananya took me down to his cellar and showed me various Hebrew books and a set of the *Talmud*. He explained that he was afraid to teach Judaism even to his own children, lest they reveal it inadvertently to someone who could cause him trouble.

I had arrived in the village just after *Purim*. For *Pesach*, the villagers baked *matzos*, but I cannot recall that anyone changed their regular dishes. Everything in the houses was very primitive and the dishes were wooden.

At the *Seder*, parts of the *Haggadah* were recited in Russian, *matzos* and *marror* were eaten, and immediately thereafter, the meal was served. Chananya had slaughtered chickens for his *kosher* kitchen and, perhaps, secretly, for others in his family. Usually, the food was very simple: *borscht*, potatoes, *kasha*, *piroshki* (dumplings filled with potatoes or cheese), vegetables and milk. During the three months I was there, they never had fruit.

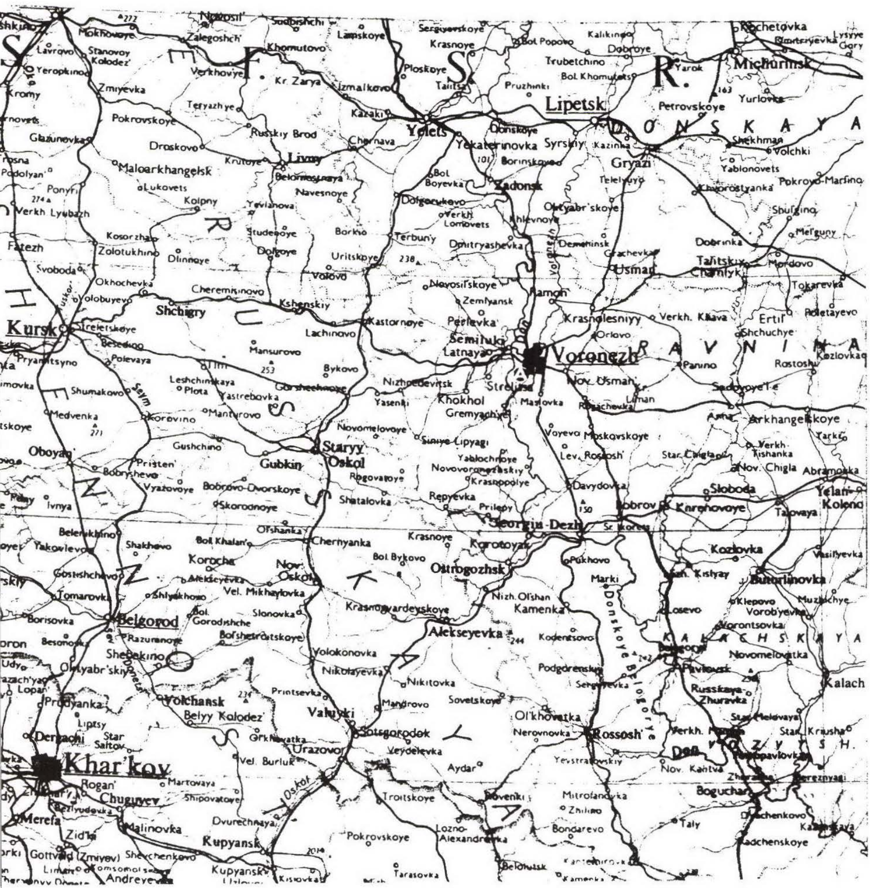
Gradually, spring arrived. The snow melted and I was busy with all kinds of work; in the stable, in the fields, preparing the soil for gardening, etc.

I felt quite comfortable, yet had but one objective for being in this G-dforsaken place - to survive.

One day, a few days before the *Shavuot* holiday, while working in the field, a man came to me, identifying himself as a detective from the N.K.V.D., and advised me that the authorities had decided to prohibit P.O.W.'s from doing any work in the *kolkhoz*. He insisted that I collect my belongings and come with him.

Without even a chance to say farewell to the family who had been so good and kind to me, I had to simply pick up my bag and follow the detective. He took me to the railway station, and after a journey of two hours, we alighted at a station where many hundreds of P.O.W.'s were gathered.

First, I was taken to a shower, and my clothes were disinfected. When dressed again, I was told to stand in a line and wait for further instructions. From the fellows standing with me in the line, I learned that we were to be transported to Siberia.



Kalach. Khrenovoye, where the infamous P.O.W. camp was situated.
Yekaterinovka, with the Jewish " kolkhoz."

7

TO THE FRONT LINE

"עתה לך והכיתה את עמלק ..."
שמואל א': ט"ו.ג'

"Now, go and smite Amalek ...."
I Samuel 15: 3

An order came to all those who had recently arrived from a *kolkhoz*, to step out of the line. There were about sixty of us. Being healthy and well fed, we were formed into a special unit of sanitarians.

The trainwagons were filled with sick P.O.W.'s, and three sanitarians were seconded to each wagon. Our task was to bring and distribute to the passengers the food and water supplied once a day, and to maintain order in the wagons.

My two sanitarian companions were a Hungarian fellow and a Gypsy. Each of them had just been removed from a different *kolkhoz*, where they had lived and worked for some time, just as I had. Having so suddenly been deprived of our relative freedom was a traumatic shock for us, and at the thought of being transported to Siberia, we desperately put our minds together and planned our immediate escape.

There were about thirty sick people in the wagon, lying on wooden boards. They could barely move. The wagon had a window crossed with barbed wire attached with but a few

nails. We assumed that with a good push, the wire would give way.

We resolved that at about midnight, when everyone, including the guards, would be asleep, we would force open the wire, jump out of the moving train, and if our luck held, escape. We drew lots, as to who should be the first to jump. The lot fell on the Gypsy.

The train travelled at a steady speed. A beautiful full moon lit up the landscape, and only the noise of the train disturbed the peace of the night. All the passengers in the dark wagon were asleep.

At about midnight, we managed to pry the barbed wire aside, bade farewell and good luck to the Gypsy, and he jumped. We heard shots from the guards positioned on the train. The train slowed down, and then came to a standstill.

We heard shouting from far away. After a while, we saw a flashlight on the window. Noticing the pushed-out barbed wire, a voice exclaimed: "Here it is!"

The guards opened the door of our wagon, pushed in the injured Gypsy, locked the door, and the train was on its way.

The Gypsy told us that when he had jumped, he fell into a grass-filled ditch and was not hurt. He got up and started to run into the fields. The guards saw him running and shot a couple of times in the air, and the train stopped.

The guards ran after him and as he stopped and turned around to see how far the guards were from him, they shot him - it was full moon - and he was hit by a bullet in his stomach. Injured, he lifted his hands up in surrender

and they brought him back to the train, throwing him into the wagon.

He was bleeding profusely. We bandaged him with pieces of linen torn from a shirt. Poor fellow, he lost lots of blood. As he became weaker and weaker, he began to curse us and threatened to blame us for his attempted escape. By morning, he had bled to death.

We abandoned the idea of escape.

Every morning, we were given food and water to last the day. We were the fortunate ones called upon to distribute the food in an orderly fashion to those who were sick and helplessly lying on their backs.

We heard about serious fights which went on in some of the other wagons. Every morning, when opening the doors, the guards inquired: "*Kaput yest*?" ("Are there dead?") whereupon the dead were summarily unloaded and casually laid beside the railway lines. In the course of our journey, sixteen persons died in our wagon.

We tried to read the names of the stations we passed, in order to find out in which direction we were travelling. Having no maps, our effort was, however, to no avail. We inquired about the place of our destination from the guards, but they would not disclose it to us. We were told to mind our own business.

We had by now travelled for eleven days and nights. On the twelfth day, the train stopped at the station of a great city, Gorkij. Our train was shunted to a side line. After some time, we travelled for an additional hour and stopped at a small station in the middle of nowhere.

We were told to disembark. I felt greatly relieved at not being sent to Siberia. We were in central Russia, in the vicinity of the city of Gorkij.

Guards ordered us to line up four in a row, and warned us that whoever left the line, would be shot on the spot. We marched the whole day, and towards evening, reached the camp assigned to us. We entered the barracks, ten asigned to one room.

Absolutely exhausted from the journey and from the long march, we threw ourselves on the wooden bunks and were soon asleep. Rudely awoken by the guards the next morning, we showered and our clothes were disinfected. When this was done, we were marched into the quarantine section of the camp.

We could not believe our eyes! We were placed in hospital wards and ordered to lie down in beds with clean sheets, pillows, and woollen blankets. Elegantly uniformed nurses attended to us and checked our temperature.

We were served breakfast on trays with china crockery and stainless steel cutlery. The breakfast consisted of a bowl of porridge and milk, two slices of white bread, a portion of butter, jam and honey, and coffee or tea.

Unbelievable, but true!

Later, we were served a sumptuous lunch and then, dinner. We were told to rest and recuperate. What is this all about, we wondered, perplexed and inwardly afraid, suspicious of this fairy-tale development.

Having spent four days like this, the riddle was solved. On the fifth day, we were visited by representatives of the International Red Cross.

They came, inspected, inquired, interviewed many of us - and departed.

Our "honeymoon" was over. On that very day, the quarantine section was closed.

We returned to our regular barracks and were selected for work according to our former trade or profession. Those without any trade were sent to do maintenance work in the kitchen, laundry, courtyard, or storerooms.

I was sent to work in the woods, to fell trees, work in which I had some experience. In the forest, I found small green berries which tasted like apples, and were a welcome addition to my daily staple food.

Willingness to enlist in the Czech Legion was not enough. With no papers of origin, we were submitted to tests in geography and in our knowledge of the Czech or Slovak language. Having qualified, we had to supply our names and personal data and were told that we would, in due course, be informed about our acceptance.

There were those working in the kitchen and storerooms, who urged us not to risk our lives by going into battle on the front, with the Germans and their allies now retreating. Nevertheless, we saw it as our chance to help defeat the Nazis and were eager to play our part in this supremely important duty and task.

Sad to say, for weeks and months we heard nothing from the Czechs. Then came the great day when, we were informed that the Czech mission had arrived and would make the necessary arrangements to enlist the volunteers into the Czech Legion.

On the following day, we were briefed by the military mission, then taken to the railway station where we boarded a military train and travelled for two days to Krasnogorsk.

We were accommodated in a P.O.W. camp which proved to be a "political camp" with numerous former German generals and other high ranking officers. We were neither

told why we were placed in this camp, nor how long we would stay there.

After two days, we were sent to work at a nearby steel factory where we had to sort out and pack machinery components. The food in this camp was much better than at our former camp. Two weeks went by until we were told to fetch our belongings and move to a different section of the camp.

The officers of the Czech Legion were waiting for us. After registration, we were supplied with brand new, English battledress, shirts, underwear, socks and shoes, and were regaled with a sumptuous dinner. Next morning, after an elaborate breakfast and a pep-talk, we were driven in military trucks to Moscow for sightseeing, and a delicious luncheon at Moscow's Central Station Restaurant. We then boarded a passenger train and after two days, arrived at the headquarters of the Czech Legion in Priluky in Ukraine where we underwent basic military training for seven days.

I was assigned to an infantry unit. Finally, I was sent to the front, digging in at the third defensive line before Kiev, the capital of Ukraine.

If I remember correctly, it was November 7th, 1943, in the early morning, when the Soviet artillery broke loose with a deafening bombardment, initiating the offensive for retaking Kiev.

For about an hour and a half, thousands of guns, *katyushas* and various other artillery pieces spewed their deadly loads against the positions held by the Germans.

At 6 a.m., we received the command to move forward. The Germans and their allies were retreating "according to plan" along the whole width of the front.

Later on the same day, Kiev was taken.

We rolled through Kiev and took up our positions before Bieliy Cerkev, a small nearby town where we were engaged in fierce battles with the Germans and suffered considerable losses.

As a result, our units were reorganized. I was called to report to the office and was asked whether I knew any Russian. My reply being the affirmative, I was granted the rank of corporal and appointed interpreter to the Russian colonel, representative of the Red Army at our military headquarters. My task was to accompany him to every meeting and to translate the proceedings. In my free time, I had to see to his needs regarding board and lodging and I was empowered to requisite whatever was necessary.

My life style and status changed dramatically. With the front advancing, I was required to go ahead and arrange the best available lodgings and commandeer the services of the best cook.

During the next four months we were constantly on the move and I had to constantly be on my toes to satisfy my colonel. In recognition of my services, I was promoted with another rank, "*desatnik*".

Our legion was allotted a new front line, but before we could dig into our new positions, the Germans attacked from the air. Bombs fell in every direction. My colonel and I took shelter beneath a large, military truck. I overheard the colonel, lying next to me, pray: "*Bozhe moy, Hospodin* ...." ("Oh my G-d, oh L-rd ....") - in spite of the fact that as a registered communist, he was a professing atheist!

I dared to ask: "Sir, are you praying for G-d's help?"

He replied, shaking with fear: "Our lives are in serious danger. Now, stop your infernal 'music' ...."

We emerged unscathed from this bombardment. A few weeks later, the officer was recalled from his post, and I was transferred to the ammunition stores and promoted to the rank of "*chetar*". My task was distributing the necessary ammunition to our unit at the front line. I had twelve men under my command and it was our duty to obtain ammunition from the central depot, store it, and then supply it when and where it was required.

By now, the Red Army - and with it, the Czech Legion - were in continuous advance. It was March, 1945. We were fighting on Slovakian territory, near the town of Liptovsky Svaty Mikulas. My duties often took me to the front line to supervise the distribution of ammunition. At other times, I was controlling stocks in the depot.

I had been promoted to the rank of "*rotny*". On one occasion, in the depot, a Ukrainian soldier from Podkarpatska Rus dared to say:

"Of course, the Jewish fellows have their jobs in the rear, while they send us to the front line."

I reported this remark to Lieutenant Gruenwald, who was in charge of food supplies, saying:

"I want to go this very morning to the front line with the ammunition!"

He reminded me that no matter what Jews do, the anti-Semites will always be the same. Nevertheless, I ordered the anti-Semite to stay behind in the depot and went to the frontline with the dispatch.

Our unit was then engaged in a fierce battle at the railway station of Liptovsky Svaty Mikulas. After I had delivered the ammunition, the Commanding Officer saw me and shouted:

"*Rotny* Fogel, what are you doing here? You have to stay at the depot to secure our supplies. Return at once to your post!"

"Yes, Sir!" I saluted, and turned on my heels to walk the kilometre to our delivery cart.

Just then the Germans counterattacked with heavy artillery fire! A shell exploded near me and I was hit by shrapnel in my left arm and right leg. I fell to the ground, and noticed that our soldiers were running in retreat. I was lying on the ground, bleeding from my injuries. With not one of our soldiers in sight, I took hold of my pistol, determined not to allow myself to be captured alive by the Germans.

Suddenly, I saw a cart drawn by two horses galloping in my direction. When it was fairly near me, I fired a shot in the air, shouting: "Stop!"

The driver brought the horses to a sudden halt. Directing my pistol at him, I pleaded to take me along with him.

By good luck, he was one of the soldiers who had delivered ammunition to our unit and recognizing me he helped me into the cart. In less than minutes, we arrived at our depot. There I learnt that the Germans had recaptured the town and, of course, the very place from where I had been rescued.

Lieutenant Gruenwald reprimanded me, even as he organised sanitarians to bandage my injuries. "I ordered you not to go there!" he said gruffly.

I was transferred by ambulance to a Russian military hospital near the town of Poprad. Some forty injured soldiers were in the operating theatre. Three surgeons were operating without anaesthetic. As one of them was about to start on me, I said to him, in fluent Russian:

"How can you operate without an anaesthetic? Are you not Soviet people?"

"What do you know about Soviet people?" he asked.

"They are the elite of humanity," I replied.

"All right," he said. "I'll give you a local anaesthetic."

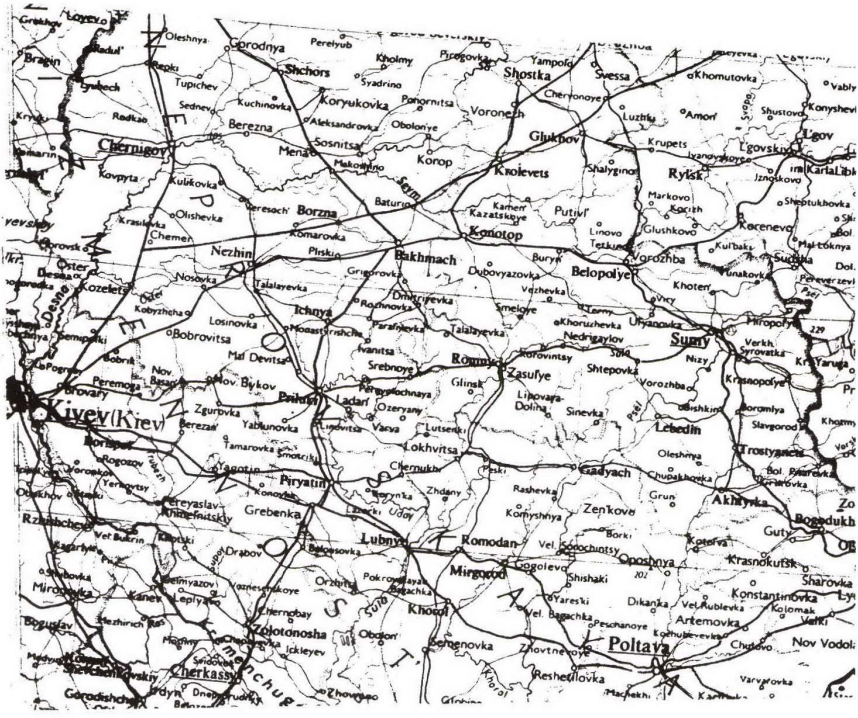
Without further ado, he administered two "locals", one into my left arm and another into my right leg, and I felt no pain.

After twelve days in the hospital, I was sent to a convalescent home in Liptovsky Svaty Mikulas which, by then, was securely in our hands. There, I spent about four weeks.

The front line had advanced much further to the west. I was still limping when I returned to my unit.



Krasnogorsk , to where we were sent from Gorkij P.O.W. camp , en route to join the Czech Legion



Priluki , where I joined the Czech Legion before the battle for Kiev, Ukraina, Nov. 1994.



Lt. M . Gruenwald . Czech Legion 1943-45.
On the reverse side of this photo :
" Dedicated to my fellow-warrior Joseph Fogel -
in remembrance. Litomerice 18-8-945 " .

8

TROUBLE AND SORROW ...
SALVATION AND RESCUE...

"צרה ויגון אמצא ובשם ה' אקרא ...
"כוס-ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אקרא ..."
תהלים קט"ז

"I found trouble and sorrow and I invoked the Name of Hashem ....
I will lift the cup of salvations and the Name of Hashem I will invoke...."

Psalms 116

The war ended on May 8th, 1945. I was granted ten days leave to visit my hometown, Tornala in Slovakia.

It took me two days of hiking and limping to reach Tornala. There, I found my sister, Fanika, and her husband, Marci, and two of my unmarried twin-sisters, Cilka and Miryam.

From them, I learned about the searing tragedy which had befallen our people in Europe - and of the terrible fate which had overtaken our family.

They told me of the bitter end of my mother, my sister, Yolan, her husband, Sam Weber, and their two small daughters, Marta and Judka, my sister-in-law, Leah Fogel, and her four children, Tzvi Aharon, Etya, Sholom Shmuel and Mindel.

All had perished in Auschwitz. I rent my clothes and lamented bitterly for the tragic fate that had befallen them.

Marci told me that my brother, Moishe, had been shot in the Hungarian town of Satoraljaujhely.

It was Tuesday, October 24th, 1944 (7 *Marheshvan* 5705).

Moishie, together with my brother-in-law Marci, worked at a compulsory labour camp in that town.

Moshe Weltz of Budapest, son of *Rabbi* Israel Weltz and grandson of our *Rabbi* Balajty of Tornala, passed by with a group from another labour camp.

Having recognized my brother, he called out to him:

"Moishie Fogel, have you got something for me to eat? I am dreadfully hungry!"

"Yes, I have," he replied, went to his rucksack and fetched a piece of bread and an apple for him.

The sergeant who supervised the work, noticed it and ran, yelling at him:

"You dirty saboteur, you communist Jew, who gave you permission to leave your work?"

The lieutenant overheard the shouting and said to the sergeant:

"Why do you argue with him? Shoot him!"

The sergeant drew his pistol and on the spot, shot him. As he fell to the ground, he whispered:

"My dear Marci, this is my end!" A few minutes later he expired.

Permission was granted to bury him in the Jewish cemetery of Satoraljaujhely.

Ascher Bittermann of Tornala (presently of Bnei Brak, Israel) and *Rabbi* Tzvi Donat of Salgotarjan (presently of Petah Tikvah, Israel) performed the *taharah* and laid him to his last resting place.

My comfort was the fact that some of our family were alive to tell these terrible tales and that my family received me with affection and even pride, confirming my conviction that I had made the right decision in volunteering to the Czech Legion.

At least, I had had the satisfaction and the privilege of doing my bit, however small it was, towards the defeat of the Nazi beasts, and at the same time, towards the liberation of what had been my home country.

There were some thirty Jewish survivors in the town. They had established a communal kitchen where, every day, they all had lunch together.

It was at lunch that I met Mr. Kalman Mann, a fellow survivor who showed me a letter which he had received a few days earlier from the U.S.A.

I looked at the envelope and could scarcely control my hands sufficiently to open it, because I recognized the handwriting of my sister, Gussie, from New York.

In that letter, she asked him to report on the fate of her family, if he could trace any survivors!

Since the outbreak of the war in 1939, we had not heard from her.

We still knew nothing about the fate or whereabouts of my brothers, Jeno and Yitzchak.

During my leave of absence, my military unit had moved to the town of Litomerice.

I returned to Litomerice, obtained a furnished apartment, and invited my sisters, Cilka and Miryam, to stay with me. I contacted the Red Cross in Prague, inquiring about the whereabouts of my brother, Jeno. Within a short time, I received their reply.

Jeno was alive in a sanatorium in Prague!

The very next week-end, I journeyed to Prague and found Jeno. His condition was pitiful - he was all skin and bone. A survivor of the Buchenwald concentration camp, he weighed 36 kg. I obtained his release, brought him by taxi to my home, where under the loving care of my sisters and me, he rapidly recuperated.

The High Holidays were approaching. The handful of survivors in the town had organised services. I was appointed *chazan*.

On the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, after the service, a young man came to me and in great excitement, gripped my arm and cried out:

"Yossi Fogel, what are you doing here in Litomerice?"

"I am here in the army. And what are you doing here, Shimon Shimonovitz?" I asked him.

"I am demobilized and live in this town. Come to my home for *kiddush*!"

Shimon and I had worked together in the Hungarian labour camp in Russia. On one occasion, he had saved me from severe punishment when, due to an injured wrist, I had been unable to finish my daily work load, and he had come to my rescue by completing it for me.

We had been separated from each other, when I had gone with a small group of volunteers to work at the Hungarian military field hospital. Shimon, too, had been a P.O.W. and had also volunteered for the Czech Legion, serving in a different unit.

Nothing happens haphazardly!

Before *kiddush*, Shimon introduced me to his wife, Hela, and his two cousins, Ida and Helenka Zelmanovitz. All three girls were survivors of the Holocaust and were now living together.

Ida was beautiful and refined. We struck up a friendship which quickly led to a courtship. In those days, when a young man and a young girl went out together a few times, people began to talk about a "*shidduch*".

I was still in the army, and owned nothing. I could not think of marriage yet. This I told to Ida, but she did not seem to mind. We often went out together. Ida would come to my house, and my sisters and brother liked her very much.

It was *Purim*, when my elder brother, Jeno, by now fully recovered, asked me:

"Yossi, how long do you intend going out with this girl without any commitment? She is a lovely, fine person, and obviously '*balabatish*'."

Cilka, present during this admonition, added:

"I think you should go over and propose to her. Should she agree to marry you, I would gladly accept her as a very dear sister."

I went over to Ida's home and proposed to her. I had no material possessions at the time, but I did promise to share

with her all that G-d would grant me during the course of my life. She accepted my proposal with a kiss, and we then went to my family and announced our engagement, inviting Helenka, Shimon and Hela to our *Purim* dinner. According to tradition, Jeno broke a dish for mazal *tov*.

We sent a telegram to Fanika and Marci. They undertook to arrange our wedding in Tornala. The date was set for *Rosh Hodesh Iyar*, 5706 (May 1st, 1946). We were civilly married on April 6th. I was demobilized from the army, and all of us were invited to Fanika and Marci for *Pesach*.

We were married in the yard of my late parents' home, now occupied by Fanika and Marci. The marriage ceremony was performed by Rabbi Klein, the rabbi of the town.

Fanika and Marci provided the wedding feast to which all survivors were invited. The bride's dress was made from an American parachute which Jeno had purchased earlier, in exchange for twelve dozen eggs! Ida was a most beautiful and graceful bride.

As a former Czech legionnaire, I had the right to go into whatever business I wished, in the Sudeten region of the country. The German population of this region had been transferred *en masse* to Germany and the homes and businesses they had left behind were standing empty.

What did I know about business? Iduka (Ida, called so affectionately in the diminutive) had a solution. A landsman of hers, Simcha, had been a well-known businessman in her hometown, Slatinske Doly (Slotvina), and he was willing to join me in partnership.

Iduka and I travelled to Prague where we had our wedding photo taken. From there, we continued to Ash where I obtained a wholesale paper business, of which I became the national representative. Officially, Simcha was my employeee and, unofficially, my partner.

I also obtained a fully furnished house and we invited Helenka to stay with us.

A few months later, when I felt experienced enough in business management, I left the wholesale business to Simcha, and secured a bakery and grocery business in Mokriny (Nassengrub - a suburb of Ash) for ourselves.

Meanwhile, my sister, Miryam, had married Menush Beck. I brought them to us, fixed them up with a furnished apartment, and employed Menush as a driver of the truck xwhich belonged to the business. Business was good and provided Iduka, Helenka, Menush and myself with employment.

By now, Ash had a small Jewish community. Every Friday evening and *Shabbat* morning, we met for *shul* services in an apartment in the middle of the town.

I became secretary of the *Mizrachi* Movement. The air was full of expectation regarding the future of Palestine, about which rumours and debates were afoot.

Our future in Czechoslovakia was regarded by many as uncertain. There was an active *aliyah* to Palestine, and representatives of the *Bricha* were helping people to cross the nearby Czech-German border.



My late Mother, Pessil Fogel הי"ד
Auschwitz - 23 Sivan 5704 - 14 June 1944



My late sister Yolan Weber (nee Fogel)
and her two late daughters
Marta (Malka) and Judit (Etya) הי"ד
Auschwitz - 23 Sivan 5704 - 14 June 1944



My late brother Moshe Fogel ה"יד
Satoraljaujhely, Hungary
7 Heshvan 5705 - 24 October 1944



Memorial Plaque for the Martyrs of TORNALA and RIMASZECS at Mt.Zion Remembrance Hall, Jerusalem.



Martyrs of Judy's family. Her late Father,
Menachem Mendel Zelmanowitz הי"ד
24 Shevat 5705 - 7 February '45

Judy's late Mother, Serena Zelmanowitz
and her two late sons ,Yaacov Tzvi (bottom row
4th from left to right) and Meir (1st) הי"ד
Auschwitz - 2 Sivan 5704 - 24 May '44



Memorial Monument for the Martyrs of SLOTVINA -(Judy's home town) at Netanya's cemetery .



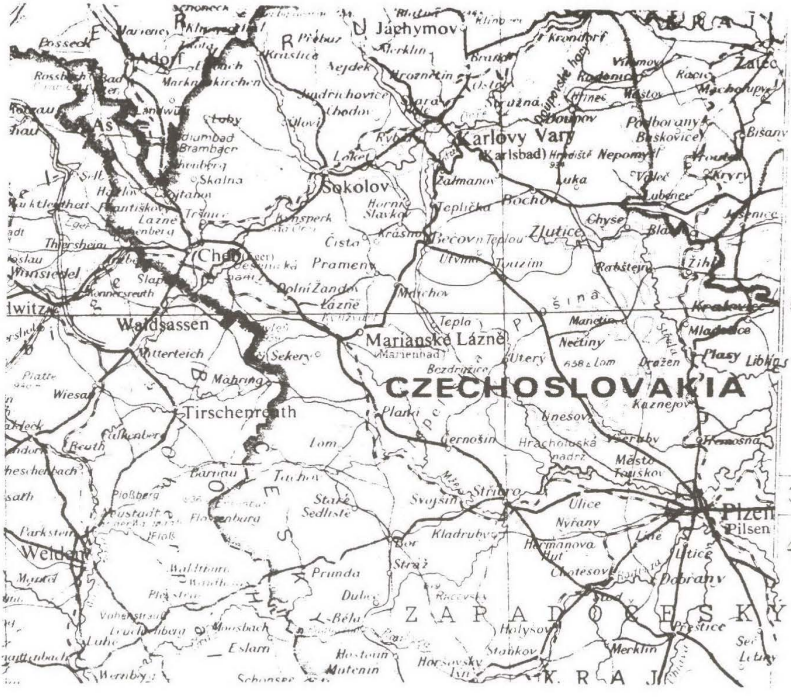
Shimon Shimonowitz with his wife Hela introducing to me their cousins Ida and Helenka Zelmanowitz - Rosh Hashanah 5706 - 1945



Ida (Judy) - my beautiful bride
Purim 5706 - 17 March '46



Our wedding photo
Rosh Chodesh Iyyar 5706 - 1 May 1946



Ash , on the Czech-German border,where Judy and I lived shortly after our marriage until our aliyah to Israel , was the centre of "Bricha". Also on the map is Cheb (Eger) where our daughter Shula was born . Both Ash and Cheb were formerly in Sudetenland .

9

FROM SERVITUDE TO REDEMPTION

"בשוב ה' את שיבת ציון היינו כחולמים."
תהלים קכ"ו

"When Hashem will return the captivity of Zion, we will be like dreamers."

Psalm 126

"When the long-awaited return to Zion finally comes to pass, the recollection of the past oppression of the exile will swiftly fade away and seem like a bad dream."

Radak

November 29th, 1947, was a turning point in our lives. On that auspicious day, the United Nations' General Assembly decided by a majority vote to divide Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state.

In February, 1948, less than three months later, this dramatic event was followed by a bloodless revolution in Czechoslovakia when a communist regime was voted into force.

A high-ranking Czech officer from Prague, with whom I had served in the Czech Legion and become friendly, strongly advised us to leave the country.

Another three months passed, months of anxious decision-making.

On May 15th, 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed.

Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, issued a call to Jews to come to the help of the infant state, beleaguered by Arab neighbours determined to strangle it at birth. As former Czech legionaires with fighting experience, we at once began to organise ourselves into Haganah units.

A military camp was established in Mikulov, Moravia, with the tacit blessings of the Czech government. Some three thousand former legionaires volunteered for the Haganah and were ready for transport to Israel.

By this time, we had made contact with my brother, Yitzchak, who had survived the World War as a soldier in the Jewish Brigade of Palestine, attached to the British army. He was now living in Tel Aviv, had married Helen (nee Glattstein), and they had a baby girl, Poriyah.

Shlomo Zelmanovitz, a brother of Iduka and Helenka, had also established contact with us. He, too, had survived the Holocaust in Europe, and when the war was over, had remained in Germany, studying at the Ort school to become an auto-mechanic. After the completion of his studies he, too, was headed for Israel.

Their parents, Menachem and Serena, and two younger brothers, Yaacov Zvi and Meir, had perished in the Holocaust.

My elder brother, Jeno, who had lost his wife and four children in the Holocaust, had on *Lag b'Omer* remarried. His new wife was Frida Leitner, a childless widow from Vranov in Slovakia. They, too, were making aliyah to Israel.

Fanika and Marci were also headed for Israel. Through my connections, I arranged for them to ship some of their sewing machines there. In the interim, they obtained

immigration papers to Canada. This was where Marci's only surviving sister lived, so they decided to emigrate to Toronto.

Cilka and Helenka, Miryam and Menush, however, were all on their way to Israel.

The date of our departure was set for December 27th, 1948, when the first transport of Haganah (one thousand persons) was to leave. We had transferred our business to representatives of the local municipality, packed our furniture and belongings in a lift, and shipped it to Israel.

Iduka was expecting her first baby. On Saturday night, December 26th, we said farewell to our neighbours. We were about to retire before boarding the train for Prague at 4 a.m., when Iduka felt her birth pangs. I took her to the Maternity Hospital in Cheb, about 18 km away, and returned home.

At 7.30 a.m. the next morning, I found her standing in front of the hospital, insisting that it was all a false alarm and that we leave for Israel as scheduled, that day.

"We'll not do anything before consulting the gynaecologist," I told her, with equal determination.

After examining her, the gynaecologist said:

"I don't advise you to travel anywhere. Your baby will be born within the next twenty-four hours."

Reluctantly, she returned to her ward, and on the night of December 28th, 1948 (second night of *Hanukah*), our darling first child, Shulamit, was born. When I came to the nursing home in the morning, I found the nurses enraptured by our beautiful daughter. And so were we!

After six days, I brought mother and daughter "home".

Our neighbours rallied round us wonderfully. They provided us with all our needs; beds, linen, utensils, and food. Now, of course, we had to wait for our turn to make *aliyah*.

Eventually, towards the end of March, 1949, when Shula was three months old, we were able to join the last transport.

We travelled by train from Ash to Prague, and from Prague to Naples in Italy. The journey took two days. When the train stopped at stations, I fetched hot water from the train locomotive, and Shula was bathed every day!

In Naples, we boarded a cargo vessel, and were accommodated in the hold with three hundred passengers, among them, no less than one hundred babies!

Shula seemed to us to be the best baby, for she never cried. We placed her in a swinging hammock where she was comfortable and pacified. The other babies provided us with a constant "concert".

Our boat sailed to Tripoli where it collected three hundred and fifty *olim* from North Africa.

After twelve days at sea, we caught from afar a glimpse of the shore of Israel. Our excitement was tremendous. We blew the *shofar* and lustily sang Hatikvah. On the morning of April 9th, 1949, we landed in Haifa.

We were thrilled, but also somewhat bewildered, to be in Israel, at long last.

Transported to a camp for *olim* at Sha'ar Ha'aliyah near Haifa, we were accommodated in former military barracks, twenty-eight of us in one large room. This was distressing, not only because of lack of privacy, but also because it hampered our preparations for the imminent *Pesach*.

We felt more secure, when my brother, Yitzchak, and, a few days later, Shlomo, who was in the army, came to visit us. We were, however, anxious about how we would manage to observe *Pesach* together with people who did not, to say the least, care much about it.

Out of the blue, early in the morning on *Pesach* eve, a new friend of mine came running to me, shouting excitedly: "Yossi, come quickly! People are moving out of a small room nearby. Let's get the room for ourselves!"

We rushed to it and no sooner had the people left, we were in occupation. We cleaned the room, scrubbed the floor, and moved our beds and belongings. We thanked the Almighty for our good fortune to be able to celebrate our first *Pesach* in Israel in the proper way.

Nothing happens haphazardly!

At about lunchtime, Shlomo arrived with a supply of wine and salami. We were supplied with *matzos* and all our needs from the camp's kitchen. We had a wonderful *Seder*. Intoxicated with our good fortune, we repeated the "*Chasal Siddur Pesach*" song many times and danced into the late hours of the night.

On *chol hamoed Pesach*, we went to visit Yitzchak, Helen, and baby Poriyah in Tel Aviv. They lived in the city, in a one room apartment at 63 Allenby street. It was a joyous reunion. Although they had no place to put us up, Yitzchak had found accommodation for us with a friend, Yoshka Reiss, who had recently lost his wife and lived alone in a charming house in Bat Yam near Tel Aviv.

Yoshka was scarcely at home, working during the day and on guard during the night. His kindness to us extended to an offer to stay in the house. So, soon after *Pesach*, we moved in. For the first month, Yitzchak gave us one pound

sterling a day, which was sufficient to cover our daily needs.

In due course, our lift arrived from Czechoslovakia, and I went looking for a place where I could accommodate its contents and where our little family might live.

After a week's search, I found an abandoned Arab house on the road to Lod airport near the entrance to the Tel Litvinsky (now Tel Hashomer) military camp. The house consisted of two big rooms joined by a wide corridor. No windows or doors; no water or electricity; but it had a big yard walled in from all sides. The nearest houses were at a distance of 300 metres.

I had neither money nor work. Nonetheless, we decided to move into this house. Acquaintances of ours, David Rosenfeld and his wife, accepted our invitation to join us there. Together we cleared the yard and whitewashed the walls. I sold our piano - still in the lift - for 20 pounds sterling, and bought second hand windows and doors which Yitzchak helped us to fix.

I claimed our lift with beautiful furniture and Persian carpets, furnished our home, and when all was ready, moved my little family to "our" house.

I bought a huge, old, wooden barrel, in which we stored water for washing and drinking. Each day, I would go to the entrance of the 'camp,' and cart water back to the house. For lighting in the evenings, we used a petroleum lamp and for cooking, a "*ptiliya*" (a petroleum cooker). The nearest shop was 600 metres away. In spite of the great hardships and difficulties, my darling wife never complained.

10

ALL BEGINNINGS ARE DIFFICULT

"אין א"י נקנית אלא ביסורין."

תלמוד

"The Land of Israel is acquired only through hardships"

Talmud

Soon after we settled into the house, I went to look for work. It was difficult to find. I found out that workers were needed for digging the ground between the trees in a nearby orange *pardess* (orchard). The weather was hot and the work hard and exhausting, but I worked steadily from Sunday till Friday. I expected to get paid on Friday, only to be told that payment would be in the following week.

"I have to feed my family," I told my rascal employer, but he couldn't have cared less. I asked the man who lived at the gate of the camp to pick up my money, and began the search for other work.

During the week, I had noticed that many civilian labourers were entering the nearby military camp. So, on the following Sunday morning, I went to the camp and inquired about work. It so happened that a contractor was looking for labourers to dig trenches for canalisation. I was willing to do the work, on condition that I be paid on a daily basis. He agreed.

I worked with enthusiasm, completed my work timeously and returned home daily with cash in my hand. My work there lasted for two weeks whereafter the trenches were dug and I was again unemployed.

The very next day, I went to see the administrator of the military hospital, Menachem Kunda, who was a high-ranking officer. He listened to me sympathetically.

"What kind of work are you looking for? he asked.

"Any kind," I replied.

"How long have you been in the country?"

"About six weeks."

"How is it that you speak such fluent Hebrew?"

"I studied in *yeshivot* in Czechoslovakia."

"Where do you live?"

"At the camp's gate, on the road that leads to Lod airport."

That clinched it, as far as he was concerned. He told me to register at the Labour Office in Bnei Brak. There, I had to overcome resistance from the registering official. Eventually, I got my permit and started to work the next day.

My job was to cart beds, pedestals, and other furniture from a warehouse to the various pavilions of the hospital. This work lasted for two weeks. The warehouse was in considerable disorder, and I suggested to Mr. Efrati, the manager, that he allow me to tidy it up. He agreed, and for the next four weeks, I worked indoors sorting, concentrating, packing, listing and registering the equipment

of the one-thousand-bed hospital. Eventually, the warehouse looked like a well organised pharmacy.

Some days after I had overhauled and reorganised the warehouse, Dr. Chaim Sheba, medical head of the hospital, visited the warehouse. When Mr. Efrati showed him around, he expressed his astonishment at the unexpected orderliness, and Mr. Efrati explained that it was due to Yosef, the new worker.

I overheard Dr. Sheba say: "With your permission, we could use this man for some more important work."

Soon, I was called to the administrator's office. He offered me secretarial work at the orthopaedic workshop.

Hundreds of soldiers had lost limbs in Israel's War of Independence, and had to be fitted with artificial limbs. This entailed considerable administrative work. I moved in, and became the workshop's secretary.

While there, I organised a daily minyan at the hospital, and became its voluntary ba'al tefilah. For the High Holidays, I was officially appointed and received remuneration for the service.

In April, 1950, an important delegation from the U.S.A. visited the hospital. The visitors inquired about synagogue facilities and were astonished to learn that a hospital of this size, lacked one. Forthwith, Dr. Sheba ordered me to organise a synagogue in one of the pavilions, and I was appointed its minister.

At this time, a group of demobilized, religious soldiers were trying to establish a moshav on a hill near to where we were living. We joined the group. The hill was situated on the road which lead to the Lod airport, about 1 km from where we lived. On the hill were numerous abandoned

Arab buildings. Fifteen families had decided to settle on the site, and we were among them.

The building allotted to us was a two-story house. We moved in downstairs, where there were two bedrooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a large covered porch. Upstairs, there were identical facilities, and Efraim and Gitta Gruenfeld became our neighbours.

By now, our organisation had one hundred members, and we settled on the hill as its pioneers. The name of the organisation was "HeMeD", an acronym from the initials of "*Hayalim Meshuchrarim Dattiyim*" ("Demobilized Religious Soldiers"). Consequently, the settlement was named Givat Hemed.

We had water from a well, supplied by means of a motor pump which belonged to the settlement, but no electricity. The intention was to turn the settlement into a religious *moshav*. The organisation had received the patronship of *Mizrachi*'s Settlement Department and thus we became officially Israel's second *Mizrachi moshav* (the first was Bet Meir near Jerusalem).

Mizrachi assisted us by supplying fifty chickens per family, gardening implements, equipment for a synagogue, and an initial, small settling loan.

A local *va'ad* (council) was elected by the settlers. Menachem Rosenberg was elected *rosh hava'ad* and I the secretary. The first fifteen families concerned themselves with settling in, and were expecting the bulk of the organisation to follow in due course. The *givah* (hill) was surrounded with thousands of *dunams* of fertile land, and we hoped to make a success of our *hityashvut*.

In the meantime, the head office of our organisation in Tel Aviv was notified that the Ministry of Post and Communication had expropriated the fields around Givat

Hemed for a new radio station, and they would no longer be available to us. In exchange, they offered similarly fertile fields some 10 km farther to the south-east.

After haggling for a few weeks, our organisation reluctantly accepted the proposal. As to the fifteen families already settled on the "*Givah*", no one would accept responsibility for the cost of the investment we had made.

Quite simply, we were abandoned. Under these circumstances, we resolved to stay on the "*Givah*" and look for other ways and means to make our settlement a success.

As representatives of the "*Givah*", Menachem Rosenberg and I went to see David Zvi Pinkas of *Mizrachi*, who was the Minister of Post and Communication. We suggested turning our *moshav* into a settlement of semi-farming (*meshek ezer*), with a half *dunam* plot attached to each house. This would enable us to be self supporting - growing vegetables and breeding poultry - and would not interfere with the plans for the radio station. We further argued that we were the only *Mizrachi* settlement, besides Bet Meir, in the Jerusalem Corridor and that it was in *Mizrachi*'s political interest to maintain our *moshav*.

Mr. Pinkas was most sympathetic to our plea. He undertook to study our plan, and he and the general manager of the Ministry of Posts, Mr. Bar Menachem, came to inspect the *moshav* and the surrounding area. A short while later, Mr. Pinkas flew to Vienna on government business, suffered a severe heart-attack and passed away.

We were shocked and bereaved by this sudden turn of events. The local *va'ad* accepted my recommendation to commemorate the name of the late Mr. Pinkas by renaming our settlement Ramat Pinkas. I immediately obtained the permission of his widow.

On the main road to Lod airport, at the entrance to our *moshav*, we put up a huge sign: Ramat Pinkas. This step would make it virtually impossible for the authorities to evacuate us. In a short while, we successfully attracted a few more families to settle on the *moshav* and, eventually, we doubled our number.

The Ministry of Posts instructed us not to enroll further settlers. After several years of negotiations, they agreed to legalize our settlement as a "*meshek ezer*" - as we had suggested.

During these years of constant struggle, we established a kindergarten for our children, a primary school, a synagogue, obtained electricity, opened a grocery store, organised steady ice-supply for our ice-chests, joined Mekorot's national water supply, obtained municipal representation on the District Council of Ono, and became a recognized settlement in the State of Israel.

In due course, our family also grew. On Tuesday, February 24th, 1953 (9 *Adar*, 5713), we were blessed with our second child, a son, Menachem, born at the Dajani maternity hospital in Yaffo.

Although life now was somewhat easier than at the beginning, it was still physically and emotionally hard. The shadows of the Holocaust quite often shut out the sunshine of freedom in our own Homeland.

Iduka was kept very busy with our two small children and the unending chores of maintaining a home in strange circumstances. Also our vegetable garden and chickens and ducks in the yard gave us much additional work.

In 1952, I left my job at the orthopaedic workshop and was promoted to the staff office of the hospital. Every day, I interviewed some sixty people. They came to me with their many problems - salary, sick leave, annual leave,

housing and social problems, and so on. The work was demanding but interesting and satisfying.

My daily work schedule required that I rise at five in the morning, work for an hour in the garden, go to *shul* for *Shaharith*, feed the poultry in the yard, and at 7 a.m., leave by bicycle for my office.

Returning home after 5 p.m., I had to attend to the secretarial duties of the settlement (in a voluntary capacity) and then sit through endless meetings.

On Friday evenings and *Shabbat* mornings, I conducted the *shul* services, including *Torah* reading, at the hospital's synagogue.

Yet, my earnings barely covered our expenses. Extra income for officiating on the High Holidays was necessary to buy a dress for my wife or a shirt for myself.

But we were young and healthy, patriotic and idealistic, and had the satisfaction of making demands of no one. We were frequently visited by members of our respective families.

Occasionally, we had trouble from the *fedayeen* (Arab terrorists), and were always well aware of the fact that life in Israel was fraught with danger.



Welcoming a new Sefer Torah
at Ramat Pinkas , Israel - 1952
(from l. to r.) M. Rosenberg, chairman, a visitor,
me - secretary, B. Jakubovits, council member.



Kindergarten in Ramat Pinkas - 1954
Top row (l. to r.) the 8th - our daughter Shula.

11

THE CHALLENGE OF "THE SOUTH"

"... הלוך ונסוע הנגבה."

בראשית י"ב: ט'

"... travel further southward."

Genesis; 12, 9

Sometime in 1954, a friend drew my attention to a newspaper advert in which a *rabbi* from South Africa was inviting candidates for vacant ministerial positions in rural communities in South Africa.

I went to meet him in Tel Aviv. He was *Rabbi* Dr. Jacob Newman, originally from Pressburg, and at that time, occupying the position of National *Rabbi* of Country Communities in South Africa.

He asked me where I was from and where I had studied. I told him that I was born in Czechoslovakia and had studied in Pressburg. I noticed that he became interested, for he asked: "And where did you live in Pressburg and who were your teachers?"

"The first two years I lived with *Rebbe* Gruenwald in Judengasse and thereafter, for about three years, I lived with Mr. and Mrs. Wolf Neumann in *Dobs Haus*.

"My teachers at the *Yesodei Hatorah* were *Rebbe* Gruenwald, *Rebbe* Petenyi, and *Rebbe* Goldstein; at the

Yeshiva Ketanah, *Rebbe* Boruch Moshe Nechemya Loebel; and at *Yeshiva Horomoh*, *Chief Rabbi* Schreiber."

I saw the excitement in his eyes.

"So, you lived with the Neumanns in *Dobs Haus*. They were my parents! I need young people like you, and I am prepared to offer you a position in South Africa, on condition that you immediately start studying English and *shehitah*, etc. etc."

He offered me an initial contract for three years, after which I could opt to remain in service in South Africa, or return to Israel.

Flight expenses and settling in cash would be defrayed by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' Country Communities Committee. The remuneration conditions were definitely attractive. I remembered what my *Rebbe* of the *Yeshiva Ketana* had said to me: "... southward!" These factors, and my desire to fulfill my late mother's wish that I should become a *rabbi* and her *Kaddish*, I put forward my candidacy.

Nothing happens haphazardly!

A few weeks later, my papers were submitted to the South African authorities through the *Rabbi*'s office which advised me that the Wepener Hebrew Congregation in the Orange Free State would like to employ me as their minister and spiritual leader. The job description sounded good, but in actual fact, it was required that I be minister, *shohet*, teacher at the Hebrew school, *ba'al tefillah*, *ba'al koreh* and, of course, preacher.

It was a challenge and an adventure.

I began to learn *shehitah* and obtained my *kabbalah* for poultry and cattle with distinction. At the same time, I also began to study English.

A friend of mine, Gershon Meir Engel, also a former *talmid* from Pressburg, was the "*samal dat*," "seargent of religion," at the military section at Tel Hashomer hospital and became the candidate for the Standerton Hebrew Congregation in the Transvaal.

We exchanged information with each other, as the waiting period became endlessly long. It took nearly two years until our entry permits to South Africa were granted. I obtained "leave without pay" for three years from Tel Hashomer hospital.

One day after *Tisha B'Av*, the Engel and Fogel families boarded the same plane and after a twenty-two hour flight, we landed safely at Jan Smuts airport near Johannesburg on July 19th, 1956.

Rabbi Newman welcomed us at the airport and we were driven to the Carmel Hotel in Yeoville, run by Rev. and Mrs. Mirkin.

After ten days, the Engels left for Standerton, but we remained in Johannesburg for over a month, because of some problems that had cropped up but which would be solved "soon!"

As we later learnt, our sponsors, the Wepener Hebrew Congregation, had dwindled during the last two years and were no longer in a position to maintain a minister.

After six weeks of negotiations with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, another two Orange Free State congregations joined Wepener, namely Dewetsdorp and Thaba 'Nchu.

Thaba 'Nchu became our headquarters. There were nine Jewish families with fourteen school-going children. In Wepener there were eleven families and five children, and in Dewetsdorp four families and two children. There were two families in Tweespruit and two families in Westminster, and they were also members of the Thaba 'Nchu congregation. Altogether, there were twenty-eight families within a radius of sixty square miles.

I was allocated a car with a chaffeur by the Board of Deputies, and was required to visit each town twice a week. I organised a Hebrew school (*cheder*) in each place, and the children were given Hebrew lessons twice a week. From the *kosher* butchery established in Thaba 'Nchu, I distributed kosher meat to families with *kosher* homes.

The congregation bought for our use a spacious and modern, four bedroomed house with a large bath and shower room, but no indoor toilet! A wooden cubicle in the yard constituted that facility, and it was emptied twice weekly by prisoners from the local prison. Another obstacle was the coal-heated combustion stove in the kitchen.

Iduka, now renamed Judy (her Hebrew name being Yehudit), was unhappy with such outdated facilities and so, after some convincing, the congregation installed a gas stove in the kitchen and a flush toilet in the bathroom. Soon after, several congregants treated themselves to similar "luxuries"!

The congregation had equipped our house only with the very bare necessities: crockery and cutlery, beds, and a table with chairs. Ministers who had at the same time taken office in other towns had been provided with fully furnished homes.

When the committee of the congregation would not compensate for the shortcomings, I appealed to the Board of Deputies and they provided us with the funds to

purchase suitable furniture and curtains, which was to remain their property.

The Hebrew school for the children was established in the vestibule of the synagogue, and a choir was formed for the *shul* services. The children were lovely pupils. They liked and eagerly attended *cheder*.

In a short while, we had made some very good friends. Every Friday evening, Judy invited guests to our table. This served a double purpose: to teach the congregants the beauty of *Shabbat* observance and also to share the *mitzvah* of *hahnasat orhim* with them.

I performed *shehitah* at the Thaba 'Nchu abattoirs, four times a week. Not that the congregants consumed that much *kosher* meat - the chairman liked to have fresh tongue daily!

I did not mind the extra work, as it afforded me the opportunity to practice. The butcher was a splendid and religious Boer. He made every facility available for the provision of *kosher* meat. There was a separate electric saw, block and counter, and the *kosher* meat was only handled in my presence.

Customers had to submit their orders in advance. These were made up, packed and sealed in my presence and under my supervision. Thereafter, no *kosher* meat was available until the next day. For these services, I was supplied with meat for my family, free of charge.

The Hebrew school ran smoothly and efficiently, and the children made good progress. They were taught Hebrew reading, writing, Jewish laws and customs, Hebrew songs, plays, and the meaning of the various Jewish holidays.

Our daughter, Shula, was enrolled in the public school and within four months, by December, 1956, she ended her class term with distinction.

From the outset, we had regular domestic help, as well as a gardener. There was no kindergarten in the town, so a nanny took care of Menachem.

Shul services were held every Friday evening and on the occasion of a *Jahrzeit* and a childrens' service also on *Shabbat* morning.

I was, however, unhappy that we had no *minyan* in Thaba 'Nchu. The town's population consisted of 50,000 black and 800 white people, of which the Jewish population was a tiny minority of only nine families, all storekeepers. Only on the occasion of a *Jahrzeit* could we call members from a neighbouring town to make up the *minyan*. Thus, on Friday evenings, I conducted the service without a *minyan* and without reciting *Barehu* and *Kaddish*. We did at least have the childrens' choir.

Once a month, we spent *Shabbat* in Wepener, and were accommodated at the home of Mendel and Taube Baskind who maintained a *kosher* home. We became very friendly with them. They were a childless couple, and came to regard us as their own family. There was a *minyan* in Wepener for the Friday eve *shul* service, and on *Shabbat* morning we had a children's service for the few local children.

Besides being in Wepener for *Shabbat*, I visited Wepener and Dewetsdorp twice weekly, bringing with me the *kosher* meat ordered from the Thaba 'Nchu kosher butchery. I taught the children in each town, and made calls (*huisbesoek*) on individual families inquiring about their welfare and spiritual needs.

The city of Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State, is forty-three miles away from Thaba 'Nchu. Occasionally, we went there, either to *daven* with a *minyan*, or for a social visit to meet colleagues, for in Thaba 'Nchu we felt very isolated.

About two months after our arrival in the region, I visited Rev. Kuperberg, the *shohet-chazan*, and then *Rabbi* Dr. Sholem Coleman, the *Rabbi* of the city. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that *Chief Rabbi* Rabinowitz, with whom I kept in contact since our arrival in South Africa, was also visiting. He, of course, immediately inquired about our well-being.

When we had arrived in South Africa and the Wepener Hebrew Congregation, our original sponsors, had found themselves unable to meet their obligation, *Rabbi* Newman had tried to place me in Bloemfontein as an assistant to *Rabbi* Coleman. *Chief Rabbi* Rabinowitz, however, had opposed this, arguing that if I would be allowed to have a position in a larger city, other ministers, who had recently come to serve the Country Communities, would want to relinquish their positions.

Candidly I told him about my unhappiness at having no *minyan* in my area. After inquiring about my other activities in the region, he promised to find a more favourable position for me, and indicated that I should come to see him at his office, soon. Telling Judy about *Chief Rabbi* Rabinowitz' interest in me, we had high hopes for an improvement in the near future.

Soon after, we received an invitation to attend the induction ceremony of my friend and colleague, Rev. Engel. It took place on a Sunday afternoon in Standerton, with *Rabbi* Newman, the National *Rabbi* for the Country Communities, officiating.

I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to visit the *Chief Rabbi*, seeing that I had no duties to perform until Monday afternoon. Thus, I planned to travel on *motzaei Shabbat* half way, attend the induction ceremony on Sunday afternoon, and meet the *Chief Rabbi* on Monday morning.

Early Monday morning, I was duly at the *Chief Rabbi*'s office. Before allowing me to open my mouth, he shouted at me, almost in a rage:

"What are you doing here? How dare you leave your post?"

Dangling the "Rand Daily Mail" newspaper before my eyes, he pointed to a report on Rev. Engel's induction, illustrated by a photo of all the officials who had participated in it, standing in front of the Standerton synagogue.

"Look at this: *Rabbi* Newman, *Rabbi* Engel, *Rabbi* Fogel, "*Rabbi*" Levy (the choirmaster), and "*Rabbi*" Klipin (Mr. Abe Klipin, chairman and the representative of South African Jewish Board of Deputies' Country Communities Committee from Johannesburg)."

Then, turning to me, he said sternly:

"You had better return immediately to your place, and I will see to it that you stay there! You are now dismissed!"

His behaviour struck me like a thunderbolt! What had I done wrong that he should behave like this, particularly in light of our meeting in Bloemfontein? I could find no explanation.

On my return home, I related the episode to Judy, and we were despondent, even devastated. Judy felt particularly unhappy that out of the five ministers who had come from Israel at the same time as we had, we were in the worst position, literally dumped in a "*loch*".

The *Chief Rabbi*'s mysterious behaviour was seen by us as a debacle.

Meanwhile, we heard that a colleague of ours, Rev. Rotkowitz from Tel Aviv, who had come to South Africa at the same time as we came, had already returned to Israel considerably disappointed. Then and there, we decided to save up for our fares and, as soon as we had accomplished this, we, too, would return to Israel.

Two months later, we received an invitation from the Welkom Hebrew Congregation to the opening of their newly built synagogue and communal hall. Their newly appointed Rev. Efraim Shach, minister of the congregation, who also had come to South Africa at the same time as we had, was in continuous contact with us. He called us to say how delighted he would be if we "would grace the occasion with our presence."

We thought it would be a nice outing and decided to attend. Particularly so, as the *Chief Rabbi* would be officiating. At the ceremony, Judy was seated next to Mrs. Rabinowitz, who inquired about our well-being. Judy told her how unhappy we were, and that we were saving up for our return fare to Israel.

Three days later, we received a letter from the *Chief Rabbi*, marked "Personal and Strictly Confidential." He implored me not to take any hasty steps and informed me that he was busy finding a more favourable position for us.

A short while later, he sent me copies of correspondence between himself, the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the former being very keen to obtain my services and the latter reluctant to release me.

"We import - not export - ministers," the Board stated.

In his letter to the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation, the *Chief Rabbi* recommended me in glowing terms.

When this position did not materialize, the *Chief Rabbi* called me and asked me to be patient, saying that he was still working on a solution to my situation.

Soon thereafter, I had to be in Johannesburg to purchase books for my Hebrew school and to meet the director of the Board of Education, Dr. Isaac Goss. I decided to make an appointment to see the *Chief Rabbi.*

Sitting in his office, face to face with him, I asked:

"What is my sin and what my transgression, that you treated me so harshly at our last meeting here?"

"I'll tell you," he said.

"When I met you in Bloemfontein, I informed you about my intention to find a more suitable position for you. And then, you went to Standerton and attended the induction of Rev. Engel, where *Rabbi* Newman was officiating, overriding my authority. With your attendance there, you stabbed me in the back."

I explained my absolute innocence.

"As far as I know, *Rabbi* Newman is the National *Rabbi* of the country communities, and Standerton is a country community. From where and how should I have known that this constituted a trespass of your authority?"

The *Chief Rabbi* accepted my explanation and was pacified.

A few weeks later, on his initiative, a regional conference of the Board of Deputies was held in Bloemfontein. I was invited to voice my grievances.

"I am grateful for everything you have done for me, but I am still most unhappy at not having a *minyan* in the town," I complained to the Board's chairman, in the presence of the representatives of Thaba 'Nchu, Dewetsdorp and Wepener and the *Chief Rabbi*.

Mr. Henry Bradlow, then regional chairman of the Board, turned to me with a plea:

"We have been involved with substantial expenses in bringing you to this country. We have provided you with a fully furnished, modern house, and a car with a driver. We are trying our best for you. Why are you unhappy?"

"My wife and myself are grateful for all you have done for us, and we deeply appreciate it. But how can I live in a place where there is no *minyan*?"

"I have brought with me a *Sefer Torah* from Israel, and have placed it in the Holy Ark. Should it become a museum piece, never to be read?"

"So, that's all there is to it! You are unhappy because you have no *minyan*!" the chairman said. "I thought you were asking for a higher salary."

"Did I ever mention a word about my salary?" I retorted, "although my salary is nothing to boast about. That is absolutely of secondary importance."

"So, you are dissatisfied because of the lack of a *minyan*! This is the first time in my experience as chairman, that I hear such a complaint. I take my hat off to you!"

I was asked to leave the deliberation for a while. After an interval, I was called in, and the chairman informed me:

"Upon recommendation of the *Chief Rabbi*, the Board has decided to release you from your present position. However,

having been brought to this country to serve country communities for an initial three years, we shall offer you three other congregations where there are *minyanim*. After completing your three year contract with us, you will be free to accept any call in the bigger cities."

Obviously, this was the work of the *Chief Rabbi*, whereby he redeemed his earlier promise. On the recess of the meeting, he called me and informed me of existing vacancies at three different country communities, and that we would be afforded the opportunity to choose.

After the Board meeting in Bloemfontein, I had indicated our preference for the Carletonville Hebrew Congregation, which consisted of thirty-five families in the fast growing, modern town. There, I would be the first incumbent minister. Thus, we were invited for a *Shabbat* to Carletonville, where I officiated.

Immediately after *Shabbat*, I was offered the position. We purchased from the Board of Deputies the furniture which they had originally bought for our use, and called in movers who packed the contents of our home.

The next morning, as we were about to depart, we found the garage with our car locked by the chairman. He claimed that the car belonged to the Board and it was his responsibility to return it to them. The two young business executives, Mr. Bill Levitt and Mr. Mike Hersch, executive members of the congregation, were furious at the chairman's behaviour, and insisted on the immediate release of the car, giving their personal security for it. The chairman had no option but to open the garage and put the car at our disposal.

We had spent about one-and-a-half years in this area, and could leave satisfied that we had succeeded in imbuing an awareness of Judaism. We had taught the children to pray and to sing in Hebrew, prepared three boys for *bar mitzvah*

and conducted the ceremonies, provided *kosher* meat, *kashered* two homes, conducted High Holiday services twice, the first in Wepener and the second in Thaba 'Nchu, and attended to the Jewish inhabitants' spiritual needs. Above all, we had acquired their friendship.

Here, I would like to recall a few episodes during the period I served in the area.

Our next door neighbours in Thaba 'Nchu were Janie and Katie Louw, an Afrikaner couple, both teachers. They befriended us from the beginning. Every week, they brought over a basket of fruit and vegetables from their garden as a "tithe offering to the priest." They were childless, and confided in us their perplexity. We advised them to adopt a baby, with the prospect of thereafter producing a baby of their own.

They acted on our advice and adopted a little girl. At the party given in honour of the occasion, I was the only minister invited to speak. Quoting from the Psalms "*The stone which the builders rejected, is become the cornerstone of the edifice.*" (118: 21), I said:

"This lovely baby, rejected by her biological parents, shall become the cornerstone of joy and happiness of her adopting parents."

Our prediction materialized. Soon afterwards, Katie became pregnant and gave birth to a healthy little boy and, later, she had two more children.

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Although there was no *minyan* in the town, every Friday evening, I conducted the *Shabbat* eve service with a choir

made up of the *cheder* children but without *Barehu* and *Kaddish*, of course. The time for the service was 6 p.m.

On one occasion, it happened that the chairman of the congregation, who usually attended the service, did not arrive on time. Nevertheless, I commenced the service. He arrived five minutes later, occupied his seat of honour, and I noticed him huffing and puffing.

After the service, he came to me and without his usual "good *Shabbos*" greeting, rebuked me:

"You must have been aware that I was not present in the synagogue. How dare you start the service without me?"

"I am sorry," I said, "I had a *rendez-vous* with the Almig-ty at 6 p.m. and I could not possibly let Him wait ...."

The chairman was a simple fellow, constantly exerting his authority and often plying me with all kinds of silly requests, but two young business executives who were on the committee prevented him from pestering me further.

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One *bar mitzvah* deserves special mention - that of Alan Cohen in Dewetsdorp. After his father died, he had been brought up by his mother Ray in the home of his grandparents Pesach and Chasse Green. All their lives, they had been pious people, *shomrei Shabbat*. In their home, which I visited frequently, I was always warmly welcomed.

Earlier, Dewetsdorp had been a congregation of over thirty families with a synagogue and a resident minister, but by the time we arrived in the area, the congregation had dwindled to four Jewish families. Mr. Pesach Green was

the only Jew who frequented *shul* daily. He used to pray there in his *tallith* and *tefillin*. When he finished his prayers, he went up to the *bimah* and said:

"*Ribbono shel Olam, ich bin do gewesen.*" ("Master of the Universe, I was here.")

For the *bar mitzvah* ceremony, all the former Dewetsdorpites were invited. On Friday eve, *Shabbat* morning and afternoon, the synagogue was packed. It reminded me of "resurrection." Soon after the ceremony, the guests departed, and when it was over, it seemed it had been a beautiful dream.

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I do not wish to leave my recollections of Wepener without recalling our first welcome in the home of our dear friends there, Mendel and Taube Baskind. We had arrived on Thursday in the late afternoon, and stayed with them for *Shabbat*, the last *Shabbat* before the High Holidays.

On Thursday evening, after having had dinner with them, Mendel and Taube placed on the table scores of envelopes which they had received from various organisations and institutions appealing for contributions. They had made out a cheque for each and everyone, when Taube said:

"*Mendel, yetzt kennen mir eych hoben Yonteff*!" ("Mendel, now we may also have yom tov!")

They were very generous people and their home was frequented by many *meshullochim* from Israel. Everyone received a generous contribution. On one occasion, when Mendel was somewhat hesitant, Taube encouraged him saying:

"*Mendel, gib him, gib him, eyb du vest im nit geben, vet er next yor nisht kummen tzu dir und du vest oyszehn vie Zelik.*" ("Mendel, give him, give him, for if you won't give him, next year, he won't come to you, and you will look silly.")

On *Yom Kippur*, after the fast was over, the Baskinds entertained the entire congregation for dinner. They lived next door to the synagogue and had it under their care. Mendel loved cantoral records, and many an afternoon or evening, I joined him in listening to same. They were good and honest people and very respected by everyone in the town, Jew and gentile alike.

* * * * *

Joyce and Leo Osrin and Phyllis and Bill Levitt had befriended us from the day of our arrival in Thaba 'Nchu. Their children and our children were of the same age, played together and attended *cheder* together and thus, the friendship became very close.

Leo had to undergo a stomach operation and I begged him not to do so, as there were other means of being healed.

Leo was determined to have the operation and did not survive. When he passed away, he was in his thirties. We were heartbroken. His funeral took place in Bloemfontein and was the only one I conducted during my term of office in the Orange Free State. In my eulogy, I emphasized Leo's many sterling qualities. Then, I took a small bag containing holy earth which I had brought with me from Israel, poured the earth over his coffin which had been lowered into his grave, and said:

"It is one of our cardinal beliefs that at the time that will please the Creator, blessed be He, the dead will be

resurrected for eternal life, whereas the holy soil of the Land of Israel accomplishes the necessary atonement.

As the *Torah* itself testifies in Deut. 32: 43:

"וכיפר אדמתו עמו"

Hence, we shall meet again. Thus my dear, good and unforgettable friend, I don't say good bye to you, but I say to you: *tot siens*! We shall meet again!"

Some years later, Judy and I came from Johannesburg to Thaba 'Nchu where I conducted the *bar mitzvah* service of Leo's and Joyce's son, Alan. In the meantime, Joyce had remarried. She and her husband, Hans Loeb, reside in Johannesburg and we still correspond. Subsequently, we came to Bloemfontein for the marriage of Margarette Levitt, daughter of Phyllis and the late Bill Levitt.

Prior to leaving the area, we bade farewell to all of them. We still correspond with some and maintain mutual friendships until today.

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CARLETONVILLE

The congregation of Carletonville comprised thirty-five families, mostly young couples with two or three children. Their congregational hall also served as their synagogue.

Until our arrival, they had only had a *minyan* once a week, on Friday evenings. I conducted the service and delivered my sermon, and was told: "You are our man for the job." On *motzaei Shabbat*, the executive had an impromptu meeting, discussed with me the tasks to be performed and the conditions of remuneration. We reached a mutual agreement and, there and then, I was appointed the first minister of the congregation.

The congregation bought a three bedroom house for our use, next door to the hall, and we moved to Carletonville. Right from the first day, it was a mutually satisfactory *shidduch* (arrangement).

We did not have a car. I inquired from the chairman how many members of the congregation did not have a car.

"Why," the chairman said, "everyone drives a car, and you are also entitled to one. We shall put a car at your disposal."

Judy and I were asked to choose a car at the local car dealer who was a member of the executive. We appreciated the graciousness of their gesture and also the way they went about it. It was a good omen.

My induction into office took place on the first Sunday. The whole congregation gathered at the synagogue. The Mayor of the Town and the ministers of the Christian churches were also present. *Rabbi* Prof. Louis I.

Rabinowitz, *Chief Rabbi* of the Federation of Synagogues, performed the induction. Cantor Philip Badash, of the Yeoville Synagogue, Johannesburg, with his choir conducted the service.

Immediately, I threw myself into work, and organised a daily evening *minyan* and a *Shabbat* morning minyan. In spite of the advice of the *gabbai*: "Please, don't overburden the congregants. You won't succeed. They will laugh about it." I insisted and they cooperated.

The daily *minyan* and the *Shabbat* morning *minyan* did indeed thrive. Members were proud of their achievement, and the *minyan* remained a permanent institution long after we left the town.

Next was the organisation of the Hebrew school, the *cheder*. With the active cooperation of Judy, I managed to organise forty children into three classes. We loved the children and they loved us in return. They also loved coming to *cheder*. They seemed eager to acquire knowledge of *Yiddishkeit* and we, in our turn, made the lessons enjoyable for them. Every week, we taught the children a new *b'racha* and a new Hebrew song. It reached a stage where the children preferred to come to *cheder* than go to the cinema.

Without delay, *kashrut* received my attention. I made all the necessary arrangements with a local non-Jewish butchery to have a separate *kosher* section where, once a week, *kosher* meat would be offered under my personal supervision. Once a week, I performed *shehitah*, and the *kosher* carcasses were stored in the refrigerator until the next morning when, under my constant vigilance, orders were made up, sealed, and delivered to the customers. The arrangement worked well, and the customers were satisfied.

The butcher, intrigued that my constant vigilance was necessary, asked:

"Don't you trust me?"

No matter how often I tried to explain to him the requirements of our law, he remained ever sceptical. Eventually, an occasion presented itself which convinced him.

It was in December, during the festive season. In the *shehitah* process, one animal became *treif*, and instead of the usual two carcasses, there was only one *kosher* carcass. Early the next morning, when I came to the butchery to supervise the dissection of the carcass, I found to my great surprise that the carcass had already been cut up. The butcher apologetically explained that it was due to the pressure of work at the time. I found, however, two carcasses cut up, instead of only the one that I had deemed to be *kosher*. Confronting the butcher with his undisputable mistake, he acknowledged the correctness of our supervising system. He was convinced. Subsequently, I had to do *shehitah* again, and *kosher* meat was available on the following day, under correct and strict supervision.

During the first year of our stay in Carletonville, numerous homes were made *kosher*. Congregants availed themselves of my offer that I would personally *kasher* their homes if they only wished me to do so. Almost on every *Shabbat*, we entertained a number of members in our home. They were proud and privileged to be in a position to reciprocate.

Our children, Shula and Menachem, made many friends, and were integrated both at school and socially. Both were good scholars and were well liked by their peers. In December, 1960, Shula turned twelve - a good reason to arrange her *bat mitzvah* celebration. Together with three other girls of her age, we formed a special *bat mitzvah* class and had a well-organised *bat mitzvah* ceremony at the communal hall, the first of its kind in this congregation.

For almost every *chag*, we staged a play at the *cheder*, highlighting the meaning of the holiday. Both children and parents were enthusiastic about it, and it became the talk of the congregation.

We also organised a communal *Seder* for *Pesach*, in which the whole congregation participated. Everything for the *Seder* was pepared in the kitchen of the hall, under strict supervision, and the ladies "rolled up their sleeves" and worked enthusiastically to make it a success. The owner of the local cold drink factory offered to supply us with *kosher le'Pesach* cold drinks, free of charge. There is a story worth recalling.

In order to produce a *kosher le'Pesach* product, it was necessary to obtain the *hechsher* of the *Beth Din* of Johannesburg.

"But *Rabbi*," said the factory owner, "this will involve great expense!". I reassured him.

At the *Beth Din*, he was instructed the process of manufacture to be adopted. When he asked about the cost, he was told:

"If your *Rabbi* undertakes the supervision, we shall be highly satisfied and it will cost you nothing."

Leaving the *Beth Din*, he mumbled:

"Well, I was proven wrong."

On the day of production, I came to the factory and asked the owner to make a special announcement over the intercom, that no food whatsoever may be taken to the production plant. On his stating that this was a normal procedure at the factory, I insisted on the announcement and he complied.

Before starting production, the owner came over and whispered to me:

"You know how it is being done elsewhere? The *Rabbi* comes, makes a *b'racha*, gets his donation, and everything is *kosher*!"

"No Sir," I said, "I don't make a *b'racha* and don't take any donations. I shall stand here during the whole process and supervise the entire production."

"O.K., please yourself," he said, and disappeared into his office.

After the lunch break, production commenced again. And, lo and behold, the person in charge of controlling the bottles against impurities, took out a piece of bread from his pocket, munching it just over the as yet open bottles. I pressed the alarm, and the owner appeared.

"Please, just look over there and see what's happening!"

When confronted with that undeniable fact, he went into a rage, shouting to instantly dismiss the worker, but I quietened him:

"We are all only human. We should have made the announcement again, and we failed to do so. It was our mistake as well. Of course, you won't dismiss this worker. Instead, we shall disqualify the bottles produced during this session and continue with our work," I said with determination.

"Yes, I was wrong again," said the owner with resignation. "Now, I am convinced of the importance of *rabbinical* supervision."

Life in Carletonville was peaceful. Socially, we made numerous friends, and were on visiting terms with the

rabbinical families of the Zwebners in Krugersdorp and the Saltzers and the Emanuels in Johannesburg.

For the summer school holidays, we drove down to beautiful Cape Town, and became friendly with *Rabbi* Eugene and Greta Duschinsky and with *Rabbi* Lionel and Freida Mirvis.

Our children had many friends, too, and were happy both at the school and at the *cheder*. After Shula's *bat mitzvah*, however, she once complained to Judy:

"On *Shabbat*, I feel like a Cinderella here. All my friends go to the cinema and I have to sit all alone at home."

Hearing this, I said to Judy:

"For the sake of the children, we shall have to move from here."

At that time, *Rabbi* Isaac Zwebner of Krugersdorp was appointed *Rabbi* in Emmarentia, Johannesburg, and the president of Krugersdorp congregation offered me the position of *Rabbi* of his congregation.

I confided to Dave Waks, our chairman, and his answer was:

"I agree that you are entitled to advance in life, particularly since you have spent with us twice the time agreed upon in your contract. Krugersdorp, however, is not really an advancement for you, in spite of their larger membership. I myself am originally from Krugersdorp and I know all the in's and out's of that congregation. If you wish to take my advice, bide your time until something more worthwhile becomes vacant in Johannesburg. Then, you will move on with our blessing."

We accepted his advice and declined Krugersdorp's invitation.

In the meantime, Judy was pregnant and according to the local gynaecologist, she would have to terminate her pregnancy because of some internal disorder. We were very upset about it and consulted the top gynaecologist in Johannesburg.

He said: "It is true that ninety-nine per cent of such pregnancies have to be terminated, but one per cent go to full term. I shall personally take care of you and you will be in that one per cent group!"

Events in South Africa were taking a dramatic turn and as a consequence of the disturbances in Sharpeville, the incumbent minister, Rev. Dr. S.N. Gut of the Hebrew congregation Etz Chayim in Johannesburg gave notice, to return to his native Switzerland.

This congregation, comprised mainly of German Jews, now looked for a German speaking *rabbi*. *Rabbi* Salzer of Johannesburg recommended me to them, and I received a call from their chairman and met with their executive committee. At the end of the meeting, an agreement was drawn up, and I was appointed for an initial period of five years.

When we told our chairman in Carletonville, he said:

"Yes, this is for you! Heartiest *mazal tov* and you will go with the best wishes and blessings of our entire congregation!"

In due course, we were invited to the farewell party given to Dr. Gut by the congregation. *Chief Rabbi*, Dr. Louis Rabinowitz, who was the main speaker, quipped:

"I always thought that Gut stays for *gut*, and Fogel *flieht* (flies), and now I see the Fogel stays for gut, and Gut *flieht*."

The time came for Judy to deliver our baby, and on March 22nd, 1961, she gave birth to a beautiful boy at "The Florence Nightingale" maternity hospital in Johannesburg.

His *brith milah* had to be postponed because of jaundice.

Judy and the baby came home to Carletonville. The ladies of the congregation helped us to prepare for *Pesach* and arranged for a beautiful *seudah* after the *brith milah* which took place one day after *Pesach*.

Rabbi Salzer was the *sandak*, *Rabbi* Isaac and Rella Zwebner were *kvaters*, and Heini Emanuel the *mohel*.

Our baby boy was named Ilan Meir (Ilan after my martyred sister Yolan and Meir after Judy's martyred brother Meir). There was a large delegation from the Etz Chayim congregation at the *brith milah*. *Rabbi* Gershon Meir Engel of Welkom, a long-standing friend of our family, was also present, as was the whole Carletonville congregation.

About two weeks later, the congregation arranged a farewell party in our honour, and on May 15th, 1961, we moved to our new residence, 38 York Street in Berea, Johannesburg.



Rabbi Dr. J. Newman welcomes two new ministers to South Africa ,July 197h,1956 : left , Rev. G. M. Engel (Standerton ,Transvaal) : center , Rev. J. J. Fogel (Thaba 'Nchu and Wepener , Orange Free State.)



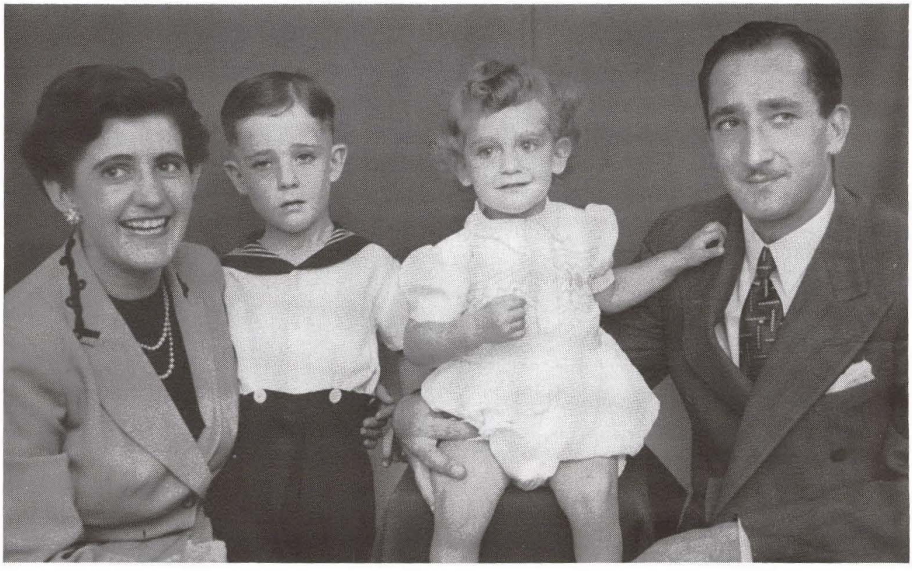
After the induction service for Rev. G. M. Engel in Standerton , Tvl ; (from left) Rev. J. J. Fogel , Rabbi Dr. J. Newman , national rabbi to country communities , Rev. G. M. Engel ; choirmaster S.Levy.



Our house in Thaba 'Nchu , O. F. S.



Our first motorcar ! - 1956



In blessed memory of our dear good friend
LEO OSRIN ז"ל
of Thaba 'Nchu, O. F. S.
Passed away 4 Adar II.5717 - 7. 3.'57
(l. to r.) His wife,Joyce, sons Leslie and Alan,
and the late Leo Osrin .



Our dear good friends
Taube and Mendel Baskind,
Wepener , O. F. S. - Nov.'57.



Prize-giving at Carletonvile
Hebrew School (Cheder). Dec. '58
Errol Grolman receives his prize
from Chairman Mr. Dave Waks



In front of the Holy Ark
Careletonville - Jan. '58



Purim celebrated at Carletonville Cheder.
1959



Our younger son Ilan Meir's Brit Milah celebration in Carletonvilee - April '61. At the main table : (l. to r.) : Mr. H. Sachs , Vice - Chairman Etz Chayim congregation, me, Rabbi J. Saltzer , AdathYeshurun congregation , Jhbg , Rabbi I. Zwebner , Krugersdorp Hebrew congregation , Mr . W. Bruckmann, Treasurer and Mr. E Jacobsohn , Hon. Life President Etz Chayim congregation , Johannesburg. Also present, but not in this photo : Rabbi G.M.Engel , Witbank Hebrew congregation .

12

ETZ CHAYIM

"עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותומכיה מאושר."
משלי

"It is a Tree of Life for those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy."
Proverbs

Berea neighbourhood, which had formerly been a modest, but pleasant, domestic residential area on a hill close to the centre of Johannesburg, was, by the time we came to serve there, favoured by an unassuming, settled middle class community, mainly Jewish, most of them originally refugees from Germany.

When I took office at Etz Chayim Congregation on May 15th, 1961 (8 *Iyar*), the congregation comprised about 400 families living all over the city. Their common denominator was their German origin.

The synagogue was housed in an ordinary, one-story house at 20 Barnato Street and could accommodate about 100-150 persons.

The congregation purchased for our accommodation, the house of my predecessor at 38 York street in Berea, with a *succah* in the yard. The servants' quarters in the yard were made of corrugated iron, with no washing facilities. The first thing we did was to build two rooms, made of walls of brick and plaster, and a bathroom with running hot and

cold water, and suitable toilet facilities for the servants.

With our arrival, dormant congregational activities were revived.

I immediately organised a daily *minyan* which functioned well throughout my tenure of office.

Judy and I at once commenced to organise the *cheder* which, on our arrival, was attended by only two pupils. Within a short period of time, the number had increased to forty, divided into three classes. In addition, we had a separate class for *bar/bat mitzvah* preparation. The *cheder* functioned well, and the pupils liked to participate. The average attendance was 95 per cent, and there was progress all round. Judy, Brenda Goldblatt, Selma Bacher and Rella Zwebner were teachers of the three classes, while I was the principal, teaching the *bar/bat mitzvah* class, and a small post-*bar/bat mitzvah* class.

In a short while, I started a bi-weekly Bible study group class for adults at our house. Every second Wednesday evening, over twenty persons gathered at our home for the *shiur* which was open to questions and answers, making it stimulating for the participants. Very often, I managed to teach only one or two verses from the text and the rest of the time was taken up by questions from the participants, who also were invited to prepare a passage for the next *shiur*. After each such study session, Judy served us coffee and cake. The *shiur* was uninterruptedly maintained during our fifteen years of service at this congregation.

The monthly congregational bulletin, "Etz Chayim News", established by my predecessor, Rev. Dr. S.N. Gut, required my active participation. Although it had an able editorial board headed by Mr. Guenther Samson, slowly but surely, most of the editorial work was delegated to me, as well as the monthly article "From the *Rabbi*'s Desk."

Cantor Joshua Herison conducted services at *shul* and I delivered the weekly sermon and the *Torah* reading of the weekly *Sidrah*. I had read it since the age of *bar mitzvah* and continued to enjoy it.

Sermonizing, however, was not one of my favourite occupations. Firstly, I was far from being a good English speaker, and had to spend many hours in preparation of material. True, my congregants were also not English-speaking from birth. Nevertheless, I had to do better than they could. Secondly, I wanted to find the best theme and subject. It was hard work but also heart work. Although done somewhat reluctantly, it continued as a significant aspect of my *rabbinical* duties.

Visiting the sick in hospitals or at home, and also going on calls to the homes of congregants (*Hausbesuch*), were among my favourite activities. I had a feeling of satisfaction from their response and their expressions of appreciation.

I had been inducted into office by *Chief Rabbi* Dr. L.I. Rabinowitz in the presence of representatives of the *Beth Din*, the *South African Rabbinical Association*, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the South African Zionist Federation, the Federation of Synagogues, and various sister congregations, as well as a large gathering of members of our congregation. Cantor Herison conducted the service, supported by the choir of Berea Hebrew Congregation. A contingent of the Carletonville Hebrew Congregation was also present.

Our *shul* was large enough to accommodate the worshippers throughout the year, but it could not accommodate the swollen attendance of members during the High Holidays.

Therefore, for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* services, the congregation rented the communal hall of the nearby Berea Hebrew Congregation. Besides lacking the solemn atmosphere of a proper synagogue during the Days of Awe,

this hall had serious *Halachic* problems with the seating of men and women during services.

During the first two years, I preached one sermon in German on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. Once, I overheard an elderly lady saying to her friend:

"*Ach, heute hat der Rabbiner gepredigt ..., dass war doch wunderbar!*" ("Ah, today the *Rabbi* preached ... it was so wonderful!")

The services were well attended. Communal singing added much to the joy and beauty of the prayers. Yet the hall's drabness could not create the atmosphere of a proper synagogue.

In order to overcome these difficulties and to have a befitting venue for the size and status of the congregation, I proposed building a new synagogue and community centre that would cater to all the needs of the congregation. I envisaged a synagogue seating five hundred persons, two classrooms for the *cheder*, a hall with kitchen facilities for functions, offices, storerooms, etc. In the vestibule of the present synagogue house, there was a memorial plaque commemorating those who had passed away. This gave me the idea to create within the new building a memorial hall for the martyrs of the Holocaust.

On the executive council, opinions about the feasibility of the project were divided. Eventually, by an overwhelming majority - spearheaded by the younger members of the council - it was decided to adopt the plan.

The chairman of the congregation overtly supported the plan, but clandestinely, worked to frustate it, arguing that it would cause an influx of members of non-German origin, which would lead to the elimination of the uniqueness of the congregation. Further, he argued, the upkeep and repair costs would be an impossible financial burden.

I asked to attend the next meeting of the council and openly challenged the chairman, whereupon he tendered his resignation and terminated the meeting.

The chairman had been a founding member of the congregation and was a highly respected person. Turning to me, the council members asked: "What are we going to do now?" "Now, you will elect a new chairman and we shall get on with the job."

Mr. Guenther Samson, a young and capable businessman, was elected chairman. Mr. Walter Bruckmann and Mr. Max Ledermann, both men of integrity and high standing, were elected vice-chairman and honorary treasurer respectively. This trio was, of course, supportive of the project.

The council requested Mr. Hartwig Stern, an architect, to submit a plan for the building. Mr. Stern produced about one hundred plans - all in an honorary capacity - until one was accepted by the council. The cost of the building and equipment was estimated at 200,000 rands, an average of 500 rand per member. This was a lot of money, and the council entrusted me with the task of fundraising.

My first step was to offer to contribute the first 500 rands, thereby establishing the building fund - and making a precedent. (This sum was an equivalent of two months of my salary.)

At the next council meeting, most council members followed suit, a few giving lesser contributions. I remember calling on a member for his contribution to the building fund. "*Ja doch*," he said, "I'll give twenty rands." "Wonderful, thank you very much," I said, proceeding to make a bank "stop order" for twenty rands, monthly, for twenty-five months.

He was quite satisfied and signed the "stop order".

Some donated larger amounts, two members endowed the two classrooms by giving 5,000 rands for each room, which would bear their names.

A few, really well-to-do members, were against building, and refused to contribute. I left them alone. Later, when I had half the budget in the kitty, they relented.

Eventually, even the former chairman came forward with his contribution!

Thus, the old *shul* was pulled down, and a new one built on the same plot. For the duration of building activities, we were lucky to find and rent a house across the street, where we continued services, *cheder* and all other activities, until our new *shul* and community centre was built.

We were about to celebrate the *bar mitzvah* of our elder son, Menachem. Not having the facilities at our own synagogue, and being principally against the mass *chilul Shabbat* caused by such celebrations, Judy and I chose to celebrate Menachem's *bar mitzvah* on a Sunday (which was also *Purim*) at the Great Synagogue in Wolmarans Street, where the *Chief Rabbi* officiated.

My brother, Yitzchak, from Tel Aviv, came to us for the occasion. On the *Shabbat* before the *bar mitzvah*, Menachem conducted the Friday evening service and the *Sabbath* morning service at our *shul*, reading the whole *Sidrah* of *Tetzaveh* and the *Maftir* and *Haftarah* of *Shabbat Zachor*.

On Sunday, after the service and the reading of the *megillah*, there was a brunch reception for six-hundred guests; *rabbis*, congregants, and friends, from all over the city as well as from Carletonville and Wepener. It was for us a beautiful and memorable celebration.

Our children were growing. Shula attended King David High School, Menachem *Yeshiva College*, and Ilan began at

the Berea Nursery School. Judy and I belonged to a select group of *Shomrei Shabbat*, who formed a *kiddush* club called "Emesh", the Hebrew initials of "*agudat mekadshei shvi'i.*" We gathered every *Shabbat* at an alternative member's home for *kiddush*, during which a *d'var Torah* was delivered. Lively, topical discussions and *zemiroth* made the *Shabbat* special and pleasant. Members of this group were: *Rabbi* Joseph and Prof. Leila Bronner, *Rabbi* and Mrs. Israel Hazdan, Adv. A.I. (Mitzi) and Yocheved Katz, Mr. and Mrs. H. Glazer, Mr. and Mrs. Reuveni, Mr. and Mrs. Solly Liebgott, *Rabbi* and Mrs. Kopul Bacher and some others, all living within walking distance.

By now, we had without fail, a regular *minyan* at morning and evening services. Friday evening services were well attended, and each week, I delivered a sermon. I really struggled every week, choosing the theme, writing, typing, and delivering, but my ministerial work was not particularly demanding it.

Our daughter, Shula, often helped me and corrected the composition of my sentences. Sometimes, she would pass her opinion on the text itself, like "is this really warranted or necessary?" Or she would note: "This is repetitive!" I was most grateful for her willing assistance.

The average age of my congregation was rather high and this inevitably led to a large number of funerals during the year.

During 1961, *Chief Rabbi* and Mrs. L.I. Rabinowitz went on *aliyah* to Israel, and *Rabbi* Bernard Moses Casper was appointed *Chief Rabbi.*

Since our arrival in Johannesburg, *Chief Rabbi* Rabinowitz had been most understanding, and had in different ways manifested his friendship and fraternity.

The *Chief Rabbi* presided over the *Beth Din* and was president of the *South African Rabbinical Association.* From the outset, I had joined the Association whose weekly meetings were held at our *shul.* I was delegated as its representative to the South African Board of Jewish Education. A short while later, I was elected council member of *Mizrachi* and of *Yeshiva College.*

In the early 'sixties, there was an influx of young American *Rabbis* to South Africa. They resented the English title "Reverend," and found the English custom of wearing canonicals, i.e. "cap and gown," strange and somewhat un-Jewish.

Slowly but surely, many ministers "defrocked" themselves of their former ministerial robes, though the *Chief Rabbi,* who hailed from England, retained his through the entire tenure of his office.

The title "Reverend" became a sign of inadequate status. As a result, numerous "ministers" enrolled in the *Rabbinical Seminary* in Johannesburg, headed by *Rabbi* Dr. Alter Hilewitz, a scholar of note. Another lecturer was *Rabbi* Shlomo Rosenzweig, the *Rosh Beth Din.*

Although I had covered the curriculum during my studies at the *Yeshiva Haramah* in Pressburg, I also gladly enrolled in the local *Rabbinical Seminary* for a *semicha* course, and after eighteen months of study, obtained my *rabbinical* ordination in August, 1963. My former title, "Reverend," became "*Rabbi.*" Subsequently, I received *semicha* from *Yeshivat Heichal Hatalmud* in Tel Aviv, and from *Rabbi* Israel Grossman, a member of the *Chief Rabbinate* of Israel in Jerusalem.

My late mother's wish had been realized!

For numerous years, Cantor Y. Herison had officiated at congregation services. He was well versed in the rendering

of Levandowsky's music and the *nusach* used by the congregation, and the members were satisfied with his services.

A year or so after my arrival, having realized my abilities as *ba'al tefillah*, some council members decided to try and get rid of the cantor who claimed to have a lyric tenor voice. One Friday evening, when I came to *shul*, I was told that the cantor had thrown down his cap and gown, and left.

Having no option, I conducted the service.

Investigating the matter after the service, I found that some council members had engaged in a conversation with the cantor, prior to my being there, and had told him:

"You do not have a lyric tenor, you have a baritone voice!" whereupon the cantor feeling insulted, had left.

After *Shabbat*, I called the council members and informed them resolutely, that I would under no circumstances take the cantor's position and that they had acted disrespectfully towards him. I asked them to go in a delegation to the cantor, tender their apology, and ask that he return to his post.

It was done, and the cantor returned, which was all for the better. We were six weeks before the High Holidays. Where could we get a *chazan* at such a late stage? Besides, I made it quite clear that I would never consent to deprive a person of his rightful position and livelihood.

Everything seemed to be rosy in the Etz Chayim garden. The synagogue was full during the High Holidays, and the services were inspiring. The cantor really did his best, and the ugly episode seemed forgotten.

After the service of *Simhat Torah*, however, some hotheads again approached the cantor and told him: "Well, you

should know that you are a baritone!" whereupon the cantor resigned, called the Council to a *din Torah* at the *Beth Din*, and was awarded a pension in compensation.

The council asked me to take the position with a substantial raise in salary, but I declined. Thus, the search for a new cantor was on.

During the search, I received a call from Cantor Moshe Kraus, Chief Cantor at Oxford Synagogue, and a personal friend. He told me about Cantor Singer and his family in Prague, Czechoslovakia, who were desperate to emigrate from there because of lack of Jewish education for their young children. They were presently in London, and only by getting a contract from a foreign congregation, would the Czech authorities grant them an exit visa.

"You, and you alone, are in the position to rescue this family."

When I inquired about Singer's cantoral qualification, Cantor Kraus told me:

"He is presently an opera singer. He reads music well, and I shall undertake to train him in Levandowsky's tunes and the *nusach* used in your congregation."

At that time, the Singer family was in London, and my congregation sent me to interview him. He made a good impression on me. On my return, he was granted a contract and thus succeeded in emigrating to South Africa.

Cantor Moshe Kraus kept his promise and for a month, trained him in conducting services. The first Friday evening, when Cantor Singer went up to the *bimah* and commenced the service, the congregation responded as if he had been our Cantor for years.

In the interim, I had been elected chairman of the *South African Rabbinical Association*. It was at a time of great conflict between the *Rabbinical Association* and the South African Board of Jewish Education. They had been bringing in teachers from The Jewish Agency who were Hebrew speaking and qualified to teach Hebrew, but could not and did not impart any religious education. We insisted on bringing Hebrew teachers from the *Torah* Department of the Jewish Agency. The battle was on. At the next conference of the Board, the *Rabbis* walked out, withdrawing their representation. *Chief Rabbi* Casper excused himself from the decision, claiming that he ought to serve the entire community.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies took note of our withdrawal from the Board of Education, and were startled by it: "why did the *Rabbis* withdraw? Our *Rabbis* are not zealots!"

The Board decided to investigate the matter and appointed a commission headed by Prof. E.H. Dub. For two years, the commission did its research and eventually came out with a devastating report. According to its findings, the matriculants of the Hebrew day schools were neither to be found in the Jewish youth movements, nor in the synagogues, and did not further their Hebrew studies at the universities.

Subsequently, the *Chief Rabbi* attended a meeting of the *Rabbinical Association* and announced that "you have won the day. From now on, the Board of Education will import Hebrew teachers only from the *Torah* Department of the Jewish Agency!"

We fought another "battle" with the Federation of Synagogues, the umbrella organisation of the synagogues throughout the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal. It was accepted procedure that any *rabbi* or minister who had fulfilled his contract with his congregation was free to

accept a call from another congregation. Consequently, congregations looked out for the services of such incumbents.

The Federation of Synagogues wished to curtail these rights, conditioning them on their approval and that of the *Chief Rabbi*. The *Chief Rabbi* had concurred but we rejected it outright. It did not hold water, neither *halachically* nor by long established *minhag*. Not having the cooperation of the *Rabbis*, the congregations disregarded the Federation's embargo and it died a natural death.

We had another "skirmish" with the Beth Hamidrash Hagadol *shul*. Their *rabbi*, *Rabbi* Dr. M. Kossowsky, who had served them with distinction for decades, had passed away, and they refused to pay a pension to his widow. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to settle the matter amicably, we decided to prohibit any *rabbi* from occupying this pulpit, and placed advertisements to this effect in local and overseas Jewish newspapers.

Rabbi Eugene Duschinsky had just returned from New York. It was a few weeks prior to the High Holidays, and he was approached by this synagogue to occupy their pulpit. As soon as he became aware of our prohibition, he declined the call, and so did a few other *rabbis*. Having no option to obtain any *rabbi*'s services, the congregation quickly went to the *Beth Din* and settled with the widow.

My sister, Gussie, had left our parental home for the U.S.A. in 1923, when I was two-and-a-half years old. We had not seen each other since. At the start of World War II, we had lost all contact with her, and it had been resumed only after the end of the war, in 1945.

We knew each other from letters and photographs only. The desire to be reunited with her grew stronger with the passage of time. Although I loved all my siblings equally, my attachment to Gussie was of a special nature.

My late mother had told me how she had nursed me and cared for me during my infancy, when I had been very sick. This, perhaps, explains my special feelings for her. I assumed that Gussie's feelings towards me were similar. Childless, she always regarded me as her "child".

Thus, in May, 1965, she, together with her husband, Irving Stein, undertook the long journey, and came to visit us in Johannesburg. The excitement was great. She had left me at home as a baby, and now I was a married man with a lovely wife and three darling children! She was overwhelmed and so was I. Soon, I felt as if we had never been parted.

Their visit and our reunion after forty-one years were reported in the local newspapers. Gussie and Irving were with us for a month and when they departed, we promised to reciprocate the visit. So, we started saving money for the trip to the U.S.A.

Rabbi Duschinsky, subsequently, was appointed National *Rabbi* to the Country Communities, with the head office in Johannesburg. He became friendly with us, and when returning from his tours of the country, was very often our guest.

Born in Hungary and having been *Chief Rabbi* of Rakospalota, he loved his mother tongue and gladly associated with Hungarian speaking people and colleagues. He introduced to us his cousin, Ben-Ari, who was the manager of Sabena Airlines in Johannesburg. Wishing to promote the airline, he offered a free flight and hotel accommodation to people in influential positions. It was this opportunity which made it possible to materialize our promise to my sister Gussie in New York, to reciprocate her visit.

On *chol hamoed Pesach*, 1967, my wife and I flew with Sabena to Antwerp and spent a lovely *Shabbat* there with

friends, Herschie Arenstein and family. On *motzaei Shabbat*, we flew to Brussels and were accommodated in a fine hotel at Sabena's expense. On Sunday, we flew to New York and were reunited with Gussie and Irving. It was the last day of *chol hamoed*, and Irving and Gussie had bought enough food and drink for a fortnight.

Although Judy and I were tired from the trip, we all went to *shul* on *shve'i shel Pesach*, and spent the day in conversation and resting. Early in the morning on *achron shel Pesach*, Irving woke me up, clearly in considerable pain. We found a doctor, who rushed Irving to a hospital where he underwent an emergency operation.

Rabbi David Hollander of New York, who visited Johannesburg annually, on behalf of our local *Yeshiva College* and was often at our home, called on *motzaei Pesach* and offered to take me to see the *Lubavitcher Rebbe*. I gladly accepted and at about 11 p.m., we arrived at the *Rebbe*'s headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway.

The *beth hamidrash* was packed with about two-thousand people who had come to participate in the *Rebbe*'s "*farbrengen*." Luckily, we met one of the *Rebbe*'s emissaries whom I had assisted in Johannesburg. He took us to a secret side door entrance, and soon I was introduced to the *Rebbe*. He greeted me with "*shalom aleihem*" and offered me a "*l'chayim*." Thereafter, he moved his hands like a conductor would, and the two-thousand *Hassidim* present began to sing a *nigun*. It was stirringly beautiful and lasted about twenty minutes.

The Rebbe then turned to me and asked in Yiddish:

"Can you do this in Johannesburg?"

"*Im yirtze ha'Shem*" ("If *ha'Shem* will want it"), I replied startled and unprepared.

"No, no," said the *Rebbe* in Yiddish, "*ha'Shem* surely wants it ... you have to want it."

Thereafter he delivered a message which lasted an hour. Without a note before him, he spoke fluently and inspringly. I felt most privileged attending this "*farbrengen*".

My brother-in-law, Irving, returned from hospital and was recuperating at home. *Rabbi* Hollander and his wife Fay offered to show us the sights of New York. They took us to *Yeshiva University*, Lincoln Center, Rockefeller Plaza, the Jewish Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, and to meet the *Satmerer Rebbe* in Williamsburg. Absolutely exhausted, we returned to Gussie and Irving that evening.

KEREN SHEM TOV

> *"Shimon the Righteous was among the survivors of the Great Assembly. He used to say: The world depends on three things: on Torah study, on the service (of G-d) and on kind deeds."*
>
> *Ethics of the Fathers I: 2*

> *"If there be among you a poor man, one of your brethren, within any of your gates, in your land which the L-rd your G-d gave you, you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your poor brother; but you shall surely open your hand unto him and shall surely lend him sufficient for his needs in that which he wants ...*
>
> *You shall surely give him, and your heart shall not be gireved when you give to him; because that for this thing the L-rd your G-d will bless you in all your work, and in all that you put your hand to."*
>
> **Deuteronomy XV: 7, 8, 10**

In 1972, I had decided to establish a fund for charity and interest-free loan named The Keren Shem Tov Foundation.

The many biblical and *talmudic* laws dealing with concern for one's fellow man point to one basic Jewish teaching; namely, that all we possess is G-d's, graciously given by Him, and it is He who has commanded us, the keepers of His wealth, to share it with our less fortunate fellow men. Not only does the law require that the poor be supported, but also that every effort be made to bring back the unfortunate person to his former station of dignity. Hence,

charity, from the Jewish point of view, is much more than a voluntary contribution or a form of generosity.

The Hebrew term for an act of charity is *tzedakah*, literally, righteousness. One is charitable because it is the righteous thing to do. A Jews shares a portion of his wealth because the Divine Father of all humanity has commanded it.

Therefore, it is our duty to feed and clothe the poor, to provide the needy with a decent burial, to provide for the widow, orphan and aged, the stranger, the needy bride, to support schools for *Torah*, to ransom a captive Jew, to maintain one's synagogue, and to attend to general Jewish welfare.

It is our duty, as decent human beings, to offer our assistance to anybody who may need it. Indeed, we should be kind and considerate to everybody.

If a person is poor, it is not sufficient that we give him *tzedakah* (charity), but we must also speak kindly and considerately to him, so that he should not feel hurt or embarrassed because of his unfortunate lot.

The Foundation has its income from free-will offerings obtained from donors and is registered with The Ministry of Interior in Israel, No. 11/2717. It is recognised by The Treasury of Israel as a "Public Institution" No. 4505771, thus it is not required to pay income tax. Transfer facilities were granted by The South African Zionist Federation and The Jewish Agency, Jerusalem. The management in South Africa consisted of: *Rabbi* J. Fogel, chairman; Mrs. R. Solnick, honorary treasurer; Mrs. F. Spira, honorary secretary; Mr. O. Getz and Mr. I.C. Shapiro, trustees.

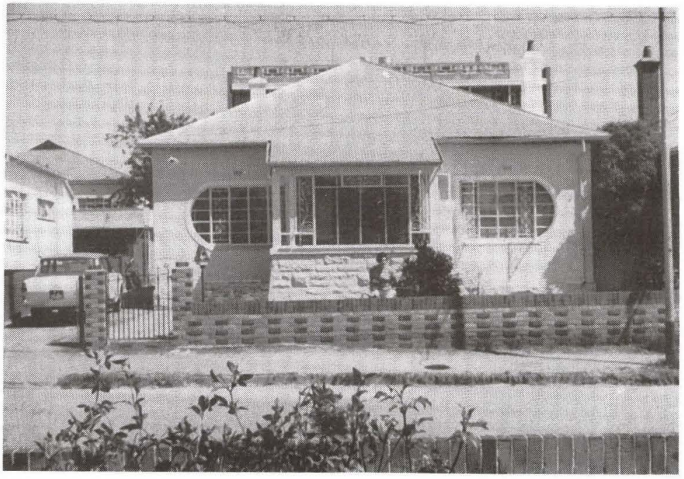
The management in Israel consists of: *Rabbi* J. Fogel, chairman; *Rabbi* E. Meller, honorary treasurer;

Rabbi I. Zwebner , honorary secretary ; Adv. B. Adler ; Adv . Z . A . Tal ; Adv . U . Messer ; Rabbi B . Zvieli ; (resigned) ; and Adv. N. Fruchter .

Many hundreds of needy families and individuals have benefitted from the Foundation and continue to do so. Grants are made in cases of illness , marriage , moving into a house or apartment , demobilising from army service , etc. Interest free loans are granted for establishing a place of business , trade , or other source of income and in any emergency situation .

Numerous kindhearted people established funds in their name at the Foundation . In 1983 a substantial sum of money had been obtained from the legacy of my late sister , Fanny Blobstein . And in 1995 , the S. A. Zionist Federation transfered a considerable sum from the legacy of the late Max & Rose Leiserowitz , of Sea Point . These legacies are being administered by the Ministry of Justice Legacy File 681 . Mr . Colin Shifrin of Kfar Sava is the honorary auditor .

The original headquarters were at 21 Hapisga Str., Bayit - Vegan , Jerusalem 96381 and are now at 6/18 Panim Meirot Street , Mattersdorf , Jerusalem 94423 . In 1995 , a branch office was opened at 25/4 Jabotinsky Street ,Netanya 42277, administered by: Rabbi J. Fogel, chairman ; Mr. Simon Silver honorary treasurer; Adv. Frank Colb , honorary secretary ; Mr. Basil Lotzof and Mr. Malcolm Gibor , members of the management .



Our house , at 38 York Str.,Berea, Johannesburg .



Our family at 38 York Str., Berea , Jhbg.
(l. to r.) Shulie , me , Judy with baby Ilan ,
Menachem - Oct. '61



The rusting setting of our original Shul ,
at Barnato Str. Berea , Jhbg. - 954 - '66.



Chief Rabbi Prof. L. I. Rabinowitz at my Induction Service at Etz Chayim - May '61



Delivering my Induction Sermon - May '61
(seated) Chief Rabbi Prof. L.I. Rabinowitz



The Etz Chayim Hebrew School (Cheder)
1962



First Bat Mitzvah celebration at Etz Chayim
1963



The imposing front aspect of our new Shul.
December '66



The lofty , inspiring interior of our new Shul



Our treasured Sifrei Torah in all their beauty in the Holy Ark



The Council of the Hebrew Congr. Etz Chayim at the time of the completion of the building of the new Synagogue and Community Centre. December '66 .



Our dear good friend , Mr. I. C. (Issy) Shapiro, one of the talented leaders of Jhbg. Jewry , conducts a Mincha Service at our new Shul .



Meeting my sister Gussie in Johannesburg , in May 1963, after 40 years ! : (left to right} : her husband, Irving Stein , Gussie , me and Judy

13

JUDY'S ORDEAL

"ה' אלהי שועתי אליך ותרפאני ..."
תהלים ל': ג'

"Hashem, my G-d, I cried out to You, and You healed me ...."

Psalm 30: 3

Judy went to take a bath and at once, called for help. She had put her one leg in the water and did not feel the temperature of the water.

"You may be just overtired. By tomorrow, everything will be all right," I said.

On awakening in the morning, both her legs felt as if there were pins and needles in them. Later in the day, she became paralysed from chest to toe.

On the advice of *Rabbi* Hollander, I contacted a neurologist, who admitted Judy to Parkway Hospital in Forest Hills. They began various tests. Judy complained of no pain and the doctors could not agree on the diagnosis. Each day, they told us something else - meningitis, brain tumour - leaving us frustrated and afraid.

I was devastated. Our vacation was turning into a nightmare, but I felt sure that with G-d's help, Judy would recover.

Increasingly frustrated, I inquired about the top neurologist in New York, and was told that he was Dr. Morris Bender. Meanwhile, Judy was put into isolation, with no visitors allowed to see her. Even I had to put on special protective clothing and could see her for only a few minutes at a time.

I approached Judy's attending doctor:

"What do you think, shouldn't we consult another specialist?"

"Yes, definitely, I myself was thinking of it, but I don't know if you could afford him. He charges five hundred dollars for a consultation."

"Well, if need be, I shall collect it from door to door. I wish to save my wife. Whom do you have in mind?"

"I was thinking of Dr. Morris Bender."

I drew the note from my pocket and showed it to him: Dr. M. Bender!

"Please, bring him!"

Dr. Bender came two days later, examined Judy for an hour, and said to her doctor:

"In my opinion, this is an attack of an unknown virus which will pass on its own. She doesn't need to be in isolation. As a matter of fact, she may be discharged immediately. She should have physiotherapy every second day, so that her limbs don't become stiff. She may recover pretty soon and continue with her vacation."

Hearing that I was a *rabbi*, on a visit from South Africa, he said;

"My consultation is free! Should you need my assistance further, do not hesitate to be in touch. I wish you happy touring."

I could not take Judy to Gussie's home, because she lived on the second floor, and Judy was unable to walk. I called my sister Fanika, and her husband Marci, who lived in a house in Toronto, and they accepted us with open arms.

I packed our bags, said good bye to Gussie and Irving, ordered an ambulance, and took Judy to the airport. During Judy's stay in hospital, Gussie had come with me daily to visit her, and Jarka Braun came to see us off at the airport. On our arrival in Toronto, Fanika and Marci were waiting with an ambulance, and had prepared a room in their house with a special hospital bed for Judy.

We spent *Shavuoth* in Toronto and I went with Marci to *daven* at the Shaarei Tephila *shul*. I cried inconsolably during the whole service and begged G-d to save my wife.

> ***"Rabbi Elazar had said: 'Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer have been closed, as it says, 'when I plead and call for help He shutteth out my prayer'.'"***
>
> **Lament. III: 8**

> ***"But though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of tears are not closed, as it says: 'keep not silent at my tears.'"***
>
> **Psalms 39: 13**

I engaged a physiotherapist and consulted the top neurologist in Toronto. He did not share the opinion of Dr. Bender and his prognosis was unfavourable. Meanwhile, numerous congregants, who had heard about Judy's ordeal, called and offered help. Some, who now resided in London,

suggested bringing Judy there and offered to undertake her care.

On Judy's request, I wrote a letter to the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* and his right hand man, *Rabbi* Joseph Wineberg, dispatched his reply:

"I do not advise you to move her until there will be considerable improvement."

"Do you hear, my darling," I said to Judy, "the *Rebbe* said, 'there will be considerable improvement'!"

We spent four weeks in Toronto, but there was no sign of improvement, in spite of the constant physiotherapy. Judy asked me to contact Dr. Bender.

"I thought you are already touring. Please, return to New York and check in to the Mt. Sinai hospital. I shall personally take care of you."

We thanked Fanika and Marci for their generous hospitality, and returned to New York. Before admitting Judy, the hospital required a deposit of 1,500 dollars, which I did not have.

I called my congregation in Johannesburg, and they transferred telegraphically 2,000 dollars. The transaction took about two hours, and all the time, Judy sat in a wheelchair, waiting. Eventually, she was admitted to a ward with four patients.

We were in constant contact with our children in South Africa, who were taken care of by our chairman, Guenther, and his wife, Doris Samson.

I was staying with Gussie and Irving.

Next morning, I came to visit Judy. She admitted that she had not eaten since yesterday, because the hospital did not supply *kosher* food. At the same time, *Rabbi* David Hollander came to visit Judy and, to my amazement, confirmed that there was no *kosher* food in Mt. Sinai hospital. *Rabbi* Hollander turned to me and said:

"*Voss shteyt ihr vie a leymener Geylom! Kummt lo mir brengen ihr epess tzu essen*!" ("Why are you standing there like a *Golem* of clay? Come, let's bring her something to eat!")

I would not have known where to turn, but he escorted me, and soon we found a *kosher* butchery nearby, which had fresh, grilled chicken. I bought one, divided it into eight parts and bought some fresh bread and pickles. We hid it in our pockets, for the hospital did not allow food to be brought in from the outside. Judy was quite famished by now, and had her "brunch" with great gusto! Thereafter, I managed to arrange a regular supply of *kosher* food.

Soon Dr. Bender came and told us that some time ago, he had a similar medical case. His treatment of Judy was six injections into the spinal cord, each to be administered at an interval of three days, as in his earlier case, where the patient had been restored to comparatively good health.

Gussie and I visited Judy daily. The injection she received caused her great discomfort which, by the third day, gradually abated. She received her second injection and another three days passed with no visible results. On the sixth day, after her third injection, a nurse on her floor, seeing me, declared:

"*Rabbi*, we have wonderful news for you! Mrs. Fogel has moved her toe!"

I did not grasp the implication of what was so wonderful about it. Dr. Bender, with another six doctors who accompanied him, had just come from Judy's ward and on seeing me, said with great excitement:

"*Rabbi*, we have broken through! There is movement! I am confident that your wife will recover sufficiently and you will be able to take her home with you."

He went on to explain to me the implications. He was greatly excited, beaming with joy at his achievement. Coming along with me to Judy, he said to her:

"Darling, you are a nice girl. I assure you, you will walk by *Shivah-Asar be'Tammuz*. Just continue to be as brave as you have been until now."

Shivah-Asar be'Tammuz (17 *Tammuz*, a fast day) came. Judy had progressed somewhat and could move her one leg a little. However, it was still a far cry from walking and she complained to Dr. Bender.

"My darling girl," he said apologetically and affectionately, "so you will walk on *Tishah b'Av*!"

Mrs. Jozsa Weldler (Rella Zwebner's sister) and her husband, Moritz, of Forest Hills, New York, proved to be good and loyal friends, ever since our arrival in New York. They befriended us, entertained us at their home, and inquired constantly about our well-being. When they became aware of Judy's predicament, they were exceptionally supportive. Jozsa came to visit often, and in order to enable me to be more mobile, lent me her car, which was a great help.

Dr. Bender continued with his treatment, and Judy responded to it well. After the sixth injection, she was able to stand up, but could not walk yet.

Turning to me, Dr. Bender said:

"You and I know that the Almighty can do much more. This is, however, all I can do. As far as my fees are concerned, they are on the house. I charge neither colleagues nor *rabbis*. I am most confident that with continued treatment, she will start to walk, and I wish you both the best of luck. You may now take her home."

I made the necessary arrangements, said farewell to Gussie and Irving, to the Weldlers, and to *Rabbi* and Mrs. Hollander, and ordered an ambulance with a wheelchair. We drove to the J.F. Kennedy Airport, where Judy was wheeled to her seat on the plane. She stood up from the wheelchair and managed to take the one step which was necessary for her to be seated in her seat.

"You see, my darling," I said to her, "you have already made one step. I am sure that others will soon follow."

How wisely our sages taught us to recite daily the benediction: "*Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, who firms the steps of man*," enjoining us not to take our walking for granted.

We had a smooth and uneventful flight to Johannesburg where our children, with our chairman, Guenter Samson, and his wife, Doris, Max Ledermann, and some other good friends came to welcome us at the airport. They drove us home, to our house abloom with flowers and edibles sent by numerous congregants, friends and well-wishers.

After a few days' rest, Judy was admitted to the Brenthurst clinic under Dr. Ronnie Joffe's care. She made good progress and started to take a few steps with the aid of a walker.

A few days later, I received an urgent call to see Dr. Joffe. On arrival at his office, he said to me:

"This morning, I noticed a sudden, significant deterioration in your wife's state of health. Things don't look well at all. I called you urgently, in order to make you aware of the grave situation. I am afraid that I have to inform you that within twenty-four hours, your wife may be here no more."

Intently, I listened to what he had to say, and after a moment's hesitation, said:

"Doctor Joffe, you have G-d's permission to heal people, but you have no permission to pass death sentences. I tell you that my wife will recuperate and live."

Hastily, I left his office.

Later in the day, I was informed that Judy's situation had turned to the better and the danger had passed.

Judy recuperated steadily and began to walk, first with the aid of a walker, thereafter with a four-pronged stick, later with an ordinary stick, and one fine day, she just threw away the stick and managed to walk without it.

Judy was now at home and attended to the management of her household. *Rosh Hashanah* was approaching and she invited Dr. Ronnie Joffe and his wife to dine with us on the first *yom tov* night. When I opened the door to welcome them in, Dr. Joffe said:

"*Rabbi*, I am extremely happy that you were right and that I was not."

Dr. Joffe continued to attend to Judy and we remained good friends. It took Judy about a year to recover comparatively. May it be recorded in her honour that for all the time of her ordeal, she never uttered a word of complaint, but endured it bravely and stoically, accepting

her lot with a constant smile. And she has continued to do so, up until today.

14

THE SOUTH AFRICAN YAD VASHEM MEMORIAL

"ונתתי להם בביתי ובחומותי יד ושם ..."
ישעיהו נ"ו: ה

"Even unto them I will give in mine house and within my walls an everlasting memorial ..."
Isaiah 56; 5

During my tenure at Etz Chayim, I had envisaged a memorial commemorating the six million martyrs of the Holocaust in an artistic and in a traditional way. It should portray artistically the Tragedy and the Rise of the Jewish people in our time.

In the Memorial would be a *Holy Ark with two Torah scrolls rescued from the Holocaust, and a desk with a Yizkor* book containing the names of the martyrs whose nearest of kin live in South Africa. The martyrs would be commemorated by studying *Mishnah* and reciting *Kaddish* on the day of their *Yahrzeit* for the repose of their souls. A befitting "*matzevah*" for all those - including my saintly mother and members of our families - who perished and did not merit having a grave and a tombstone.

The Congregational Council approved of the plan and I was advised by Mr. Helmut Hirsch to contact Mr. Ernest Ullmann, a renowned South African artist of German origin, to interest him in this project.

"How can we afford him?" I asked.

"You just try to get him, we shall worry about the money later," said Mr. Hirsch.

"I might do it. ... I want to do it ... I shall be privileged to do it!" was Mr. Ullmann's reply.

Mr. Ullmann himself had fled Germany after the Nazis came to power, and the idea of creating in art a Jewish national monument in South Africa for the martyrs of the Holocaust, captured his imagination. He devised eighteen huge wooden panels, on which were depicted the tragedies and the rise of our people, in wood carving.

The Memorial being in a synagogue, prevented the artist from using human images, in order not to transgess the Second Commandment. It was decided to call the Memorial "*The South African Yad Vashem Memorial*", the artist took the literal meaning of the Hebrew words "*yad va'shem*", "a hand and a name", and used the figures of a hand and a tree, the name of the congregation, Etz Chayim, "a tree of life", whereby to express the mentioned theme.

Mr. Ullmann drew up the plans, consulting me on numerous occasions. He employed Mr. Bela Varga, an excellent wood carver, to execute them, and to his credit, a magnificent job was done.

Time and again, I gently inquired about Mr. Ullmann's fees, but he evaded answering. At the end, he said: "This is my humble contribution towards your inspired and magnificent project."

In the meantime, the building of our new synagogue centre progressed according to plan. The congregation released me from my teaching duties, so as to allow me to devote my free time to fund raising. Funds were urgently needed to meet our commitments to the builders and, also, for the art work of Mr. Varga for *Yad Vashem*.

As *Yad Vashem* was about to become a national institution, it was expected that it should pay its building costs to the congregation. In this connection, I recall a noteworthy episode. I had made an appointment with Mr. Julian Schlesinger, a member of the Oxford Hebrew Congregation, known to be one of the more charitable Jews on the Rand. Mr. Samson, the chairman, and Mr. Ledermann, the treasurer, accompanied me to solicit from him a contribution.

Mr. Schlesinger received us very graciously. On my suggestion, we drove to Mr. Varga's studio where he viewed some of the wood carvings he had already made.

"I am very impressed!" he said. Returning to his office, he asked: "What are the costs of this project?"

"About 100,000 rand," I replied.

"So, what is your problem, gentlemen? You need twenty persons to give you 5,000 rand each. I shall be the first. Thank you!"

He took out his chequebook and presented us with his generous contribution.

Seeing us to the elevator, he said:

"*Rabbi*, you don't need an appointment to see me. You may come any time, and I shall be at your disposal. Your work for maintaining our heritage is more important than mine. Thank you for coming to see me."

On our way home, the chairman asked:

"*Rabbi*, how do you do these things?"

"Spiritual matters are different from business deals. They are matters of eternal value and there are people who appreciate them," I said.

I took up Mr. Schlesinger's idea, and offered patronage to those who would contribute 1,000 rands or more. In this way, I obtained about thirty patrons.

We organised a successful fund-raising dinner for *Yad Vashem* at the Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg, with the world famous heart surgeon, Prof. Chris Barnard as guest speaker and guest of honour. Six hundred guests were present.

In his address, Prof. Barnard made the comparison between the number of years of study and the scores of heart surgeons needed to perform the first heart transplant in history - in order to save one human life - whereas *Yad Vashem* was built to commemorate the lives of six million martyrs whose lives had been extinguished with unthinkable barbarism and cruelty, hitherto unknown in the annals of human history.

Eventually, the project of *Yad Vashem* had been completed and hundreds of names were included in the Yizkor Book. Dennis Diamond had volunteered to write them in beautiful calligraphy. The official opening ceremony took place at our synagogue in the presence of the *Chief Rabbi*, members of the *Beth Din* and the *Rabbinate*, ministers of the Jewish Reform Congregation, clergymen of Christian churches, the administrator of Transvaal, most of the accredited ambassadors in South Africa, including the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, representatives of the army and the police, representatives of all national Jewish organisations and local Hebrew congregations, lodges, organisations and societies.

The guest of honour was Mr. Katriel Katz, chairman of the Board of Directors of *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem.

The Jewish Ex-Service Mens' League together with members of the Jewish national youth movements, Betar, B'nei Akiva, and Habonim, formed a guard of honour. The service at the synagogue was conducted by Cantor Alexander Singer, himself a Holocaust survivor, and the Memorial was officially opened by my wife, Mrs. Judy Fogel, a survivor of Auschwitz.

After the official opening, the Memorial was open to visitors. One day, a visitor, after having viewed it, came to my office and introduced himself:

"I am Michael Florance, a Christian Irishman, and photographer by trade. What I have seen here is awe-inspiringly beautiful, and should be seen by as many people as possible, including those who do not live in Johannesburg. I am prepared to make an audio-visual slide production which could be presented to audiences everywhere."

Mr. Florance made a fine impression on me, and his offer was extraordinarily generous. I reported to my committee, who gave the project the green light.

Having received explanations of the panels and other items in the Memorial, Mr. Florance produced an audio-visual pesentation of over one hour's duration. His powerful, most pleasing voice and choice of text, interspersed with selected, soft music, were inspiring and convincing. Presenting us with the complete set of slides, Michael said:

"This is my free will offering to your magnificent Memorial."

We decided to show this presentation at as many venues as possible. Michael Florance volunteered to join me, and together, in his car and with his equipment, we visited scores of congregations, schools, lodges and societies.

I used the opportunities to recruit members for the *Yad Vashem* Memorial Foundation and succeeded in enlisting hundreds. Later, I used my annual leave from the congregation and visited congregations in Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, and towns in the vicinity. In Port Elizabeth, a viewer was so impressed that he provided us with funds to produce two copies of the production, which were deposited in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town respectively, and shown to different audiences.

Expressions of humility, reverence and sorrow after visiting *The South African National Yad Vashem Memorial* in Johannesburg were recorded from distinguished Jewish leaders and ordinary men, women and children moved by the memories of the Holocaust and the terrible toll paid by the Jewish people.

Here follow merely a select few.

Ernest Ullmann, designer and honorary artist of The South African Yad Vashem Memorial:

"I believe that most of us are conscious of our need to communicate, to explain ourselves to ourselves and others. To seek confirmation for our actions, find motivations for what we did and intend to do. Our bewildering world forces us to find out where we stand and what we, as individuals, should and can do. Life becomes more of an ethical issue as our awareness increases.

In my meditations, I pray that my work as an artist may add to the beauty and glory of creation, and that it also may bring inspiration and happiness to others. That, I believe, is what I am meant to do in this life. There is too much ugliness and pain already in the world, therefore, I do not wish to add, but to do the little I can do to contribute towards the quality of life, as I am compelled to do.

It is not fashionable today to say so. Artists most often play the role of social critics and hope to express the universal crisis in the world, as stark and brutal as they see and feel it. And why, they say, should our global strife and confusion not be mirrored pictorially? Should loneliness, despair over economic insecurity, poverty, fear, danger, violence, brutality and boredom, the callous rape of the earth and the retreat of nature before the machine and man's drift towards self-extermination, why should all these man-made evils not form the very subject which Art today must bring home to us? Why should the starkness of realism, fortified by a camera indifference, not document the happenings of our time?

I must confess that in my younger days as an artist, I did just that and felt obliged to illustrate evil. The First World War, Revolution, Terror, Inflation and Hunger, created in my

generation a state of confusion, rebellion, despair and, finally, apathy that was not very different from the breakdown of human values against which today's youth has to struggle and try to come to terms with.

It is sad to reflect that Evil on a grand scale robs us of the capacity to act against it.

But how, otherwise, we say, could we survive individually? How can we read a daily newspaper full of disasters and human suffering and still carry on with our daily tasks as if we had only dreamt such nightmares? How indeed?

We should hang our heads in shame before our moral impotence. Humbly we should ask forgiveness for the evil in this world for which we are partly guilty, because we are too weak to have prevented it. That is our curse and also, perhaps, the only meaning evil can have for us. Each of us must in his own conscience find atonement for the sins of the Human Race.

I feel strongly the necessity to atone through my work. It was given to me to create and therefore to love. I have been blessed, like others, with the power to add to beauty through art. That is where pure Aesthetics and Ethics can meet.

We Jews have a very personal relationship with our Creator. He expects us to be worthy of it.

In my struggle with my Angel, I feel I may not release him till he has blessed me."

* * * * *

Bennie Struck, President of The South African Yad Vashem Memorial:

"There are certain occasions when words seem superfluous and even out of place.

On the other hand, I only think it proper to explain briefly the details of the South African Yad Vashem Memorial Foundation.

Inspired by the idea of its tireless spiritual leader and National Chairman, Rabbi J.J. Fogel, Yad Vashem has been erected to commemorate the victims of man's inhumanity to man for the benefit of the entire South African community.

Thanks to the imaginative personal contribution of the eminent South African artist, Mr. Ernest Ullmann, who gave years of careful thought and attention to design and execution, and to the skilful craftmanship of the outstanding woodcarver, Mr. Bela Varga, this Sanctuary of touching beauty purports to interpret in a most artistic manner the profound sentiments of every Jew and Jewess.

It is a place for spiritual meditation and religious uplift - a place for prayer, solace and the shedding of an occasional tear; a place of hope for healing of wounds that are deep and painful."

* * * * *

Michael H.A. Florance, producer of the Yad Vashem Audio-Visual presentation:

"The role of the interpreter is a perilous one.

In seeking to provide a supplementary communication on behalf of the originator, he may well diffuse (by the colorations of his own emotions or predelictions) the purity of the basic purpose and intention.

In endeavouring to interpret the artist's concepts that are embodied in the Yad Vashem Memorial Hall, I also tried not only to give audio-visual expression to Ernest Ullmann's unique vision and inspiration but, with it, to combine something of the spirit and devotion of all those many other people who were and are concerned in the project of conceiving and sustaining the elegaic beauty of this Memorial.

To those perils of interpretation there should be added a further requirement - anonymity. I feel the words of Montaigne therefore express my own feelings: -

J'ay seulement fait un amas de fleurs
estrangieres, n'ayant fourny du mien
que le filet a les lier.

I have made only a collection of other men's flowers,
and have provided nothing of my own
but the ribbon to bind them together."

* * * * *

Mrs. Henia Brazg, a survivor of the Holocaust and a member of the Council:

"It is my privilege to bring this message as one of the survivors of the concentration death-camps - having witnessed the unforgettable past of the six million Jews, who were so tragically slaughtered to death by the Nazi murderers.

Notwithstanding the horrors beyond description of inhuman suffering, slavery, hunger, cold, dirt, pain and deadly fear, degraded and helpless, an overpowering will to live pulsed in their hearts - tortured, defenceless men, women and children, who have done no wrong. Each one of them with soul and feeling had the right to live with ambitions and hopes. Despite their pride, courage and heroism they were brutally exterminated. They took with them to the mass graves the dreams and unlived experiences of future generations.

The great powers of the world did nothing to help them. The mass murderers should have been tried and punished for the greatest crimes in human history, but the majority escaped free. They should never be forgiven.

Amongst the miraculous survivors one can still find human values, morals, understanding and compassion. Their purpose is not mere existence, but to bring a living message to others, who could have been amongst the corpses.

Our bounden duty is never to forget and not allow the world to be passive - never again shall there be a recurrence of a Holocaust.

By perpertuating the memory of the martyrs who perished, it is our moral obligation to strengthen traditional values, to alleviate the problems of mankind and ensure a safer and happier future for coming generations.

We shall strive for human rights, which is the foundation of a better world and its existence.

The rise of the State of Israel is a collective achievement - a passage into freedom, in which the Six Million, too, had a share, by challenging the conscience of the world to right the wrong done to them.

The heroic literature should be widely studied and the story of the Holocaust kept alive in the hearts and minds of men everywhere.

May Yad Vashem be the continuous source of respect and remembrance of our beloved - victims of the fatal catastrophy. Our tribute to them is remembering their martyrdom."

* * * * *

Poems by Mr. Arieh Bustan, Consul-General of Israel:

"Your last remaining shield

Your last remaining shield was shattered
that day they took away your name,
replacing it with a number.
How then could you find a refuge
where all the walls had been demolished?

Where could you rest? -
the sky was blind,
the earth was deaf,
the world was ash;
and yet, beneath your loving touch,
the polluted meadows revived
and the berries ripened again.

G-d saw -
and seeing, He envied you!

Within your hands

Within your hands,
seared by the green sun of anguish,
you stifled the pain
and arose
to look on the stars.

Your questions were heavier far
than all the spheres of heaven,
the while you awaited an answer.

The insatiable furnace,
you gently begged for patience -
for one moment longer -
one moment
allowed you from time's timeless store,
to change into grace and compassion
infinite injustice.

Your dying glance
read letter like demonic warnings
within that blaze,
fuelled by children -
one million children!

* * * * *

By the time the building was completed, everything was paid. The builders had done a magnificent job, and the new synagogue and community centre was duly consecrated at 20 Barnato street in Berea, Johannesburg, by *Chief Rabbi*, M.D. Casper and myself, on Sunday, December 4th, 1966 (21 *Kislev*, 5727). Cantor Moshe Stern, of the Bet Hamidrash Hagadol in Doornfontein, conducted the service movingly, befitting the festive occasion.



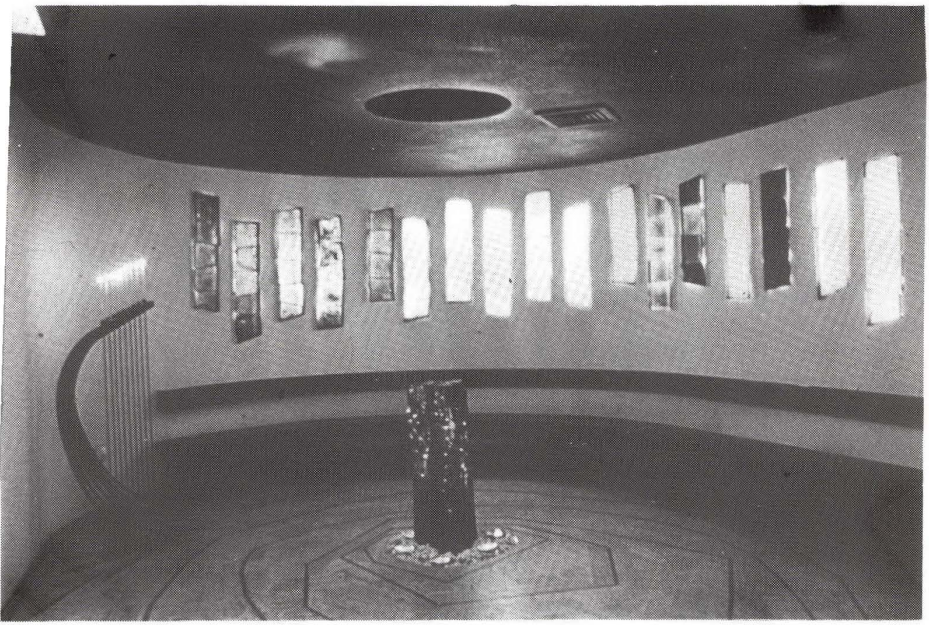
Ernest Ullmann's striking rendering of Jacob and the Angel



Prof. Christiaan Barnard surrounded by an enthusiastic audience at the Yad Vashem banquet. (l. to r.) Prof.Barnard, Mr.L.Schwarz,chairman Etz Chayim congr.,Mrs Lucie and Mr I.C.(Issy)Shapiro



The impressive interior of the South African National Yad Vashem Memorial



Th Menorah , with the 17 illuminated glass slabs and the "cut down tree trunk" in the center of the Memorial .



Mrs Judy Fogel, a survivor of Auschwitz, honoured with officially opening the Memorial



Mr David Ben Gurion and Mr Ernest Ullmann at Yad Vashem in Johannesburg



Mrs Henia Brazg, a survivor and Yad Vashem Council member , lecturing on the Holocaust to pupils of the King David High School at the Yad Vashem Memorial in Johannesburg .

15

BACK TO DAILY ROUTINE

During the building of our new *shul* and the *Yad Vashem* Memorial, it dawned upon me that whereas the congregation had provided us with free housing, at the end of my term of office, my family and I would remain with no house whatsoever. Hence, I applied and obtained the congregation's approval to buy from them the house in which we lived at 38 York Street, Berea, Johannesburg, and pay it off with the rental the congregation was obliged to pay me in lieu of free housing. Thus, eventually the house was paid for and became ours.

To show my gratitude to the congregation for their generosity, I had been successful in collecting sufficient funds for *Yad Vashem* to purchase two houses adjacent to the synagogue, 14 and 16 Barnato Street in Berea, which eventually became the property of Etz Chayim.

* * * * *

In 1968, *Rabbi* Joseph Wineberg, Head of the *United Lubavitcher Yeshivot* in New York, visited Johannesburg on behalf of that Institution. He called to inquire about Judy's welfare. At the same time, he said to me:

"I have been visiting here for many years now, and have never worried you. Now, however, I feel *dos ich hob bei eich a tzad beim tisch* (I am entitled to request your assistance)."

"Definitely and with pleasure," I said, remembering him for his intervention with the *Lubavitcher Rebbe*, when I had needed him. "What would you like me to do for you?"

"If you could help me to obtain 2,000 rands for our institutions, I would be grateful."

"I can be at your disposal by tomorrow afternoon and we shall try our luck."

I contacted our good friends, Mendel and Taube Baskind in Wepener, and their response was positive.

Next afternoon, *Rabbi* Wineberg and I went in my car on our mission.

Near Vereeniging, we developed car trouble, and pulled in to the nearest garage. There we found that the repair would take about three to four hours. I suggested that we return to Johannesburg, because we would only arrive in Wepener late at night and that would not be an opportune time for our mission.

But my friend and colleague said to me:

"*Tzurick geht men nit!* One doesn't go back!"

While waiting at the garage, he reported to the *Rebbe*'s headquarters and received his blessing.

Eventually, at 6.30 p.m., the car was fixed and we were on our way. During the whole journey, while I was driving, *Rabbi* Wineberg entertained me with *divrei Torah*, most fascinating sayings of the sages, and *Hassidic* stories. At about 10 p.m., we reached Brandfort and booked into a hotel for the night.

Next morning we were up early, *davened*, and went on our way. At about 9.30 a.m., we reached Wepener. Mendel and

Taube were busy in their store. They could not spend time with us as they would have, if we had arrived at night. Nonetheless, Mendel called us aside and inquired about our mission. *Rabbi* Wineberg told him what it was about and Mendel wrote a cheque for 2,000 rands as requested. He added that he was making this contribution in my honour.

We thanked him and his wife, Taube, for their generosity.

On our way back to Johannesburg, we stopped at Lurie brothers in Tweespruit. They gave us 300 rands, thus covering some of our travel expenses. Arriving home, *Rabbi* Wineberg said to me:

"Well, you see I told you that we won't go back."

I was very satisfied with the outcome of our trip and happy that I could be of service to him.

* * * * *

Judy and I celebrated our silver wedding on May 1st, 1971 (*Rosh Hodesh Iyar*, 5731). In honour of this occasion, we were inscribed in the Golden Book of the Jewish National Fund by the South African *Rabbinical* Association "for selfless services rendered by the *Rabbi* for numerous years as an outstanding chairman." To mark the occasion, I bought Judy a silver candelabra in Israel. Arriving with it at Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg, the customs officer asked me:

"Have you got anything to declare?"

"Yes, a silver candelabra."

"Have you an import licence?"

"An import licence? This is a religious item used for lighting candles for our *Shabbat.*"

"Have you got a letter from your priest?"

"I am the priest!"

"*Wag'n bietjie asseblief!*" "Please, wait for a while!" he said and went to call his superior.

The officer looked at me and said to his subordinate:

"*Ag man, kan'jy nie sien, nie, hy is'n Joodse dominee.*" "Oh man, can't you see, he is a Jewish minister."

* * * * *

I returned to daily routine in the congregation. The three daily services were by now well established. My Friday evening sermons, the reading of the *Torah* and the sermon during the weekly *Shabbat* morning services, a *d'var Torah* at the *seuda shlishit* on *Shabbat* afternoons, the bi-weekly *shiurim* in *Tanach*, the *bar mitzvah* class three times a week, and the occasional funeral and *shivah* services or wedding ceremonies - more seldom - constituted my general duties.

However, there was one field of my ministry which occupied a singularly important role in my activities. It was the pastoral work, "*Hausbesuch*". Not only visiting the sick, but visiting the homes of healthy congregants, mainly of German origin, who expected a visit on every opportune occasion. To them it was most important, although greatly time-consuming.

Generally, I tried my best to accommodate the "needs" of my congregants and maintained a very good relationship

with most of them. On occasion, these visits took us further afield.

Once a year, Judy and I visited the Heilbrunn and Kahlberg families in Sannieshof, Southern Transvaal. They were members of our congregation in spite of their distance from it. They always looked forward to our visit and entertained us in their generous and hospitable manner. We discussed the educational position of their young children for whom facilities for any Jewish tuition were lacking. As a result of our discussions, they enrolled their children at the King David schools in Johannesburg. One of their sons, Philip Heilbrunn, celebrated his *bar mitzvah* in our *shul*. He continued with his Jewish studies, obtained *semicha* and is serving as Rabbi of a large congregation in Australia.

Another "*Hausbesuch*" worth mentioning was to David Gresham's father, a member of our congregation. David's father lived in Mbabane, Swaziland, and was in possession of a *Sefer Torah* there. Occasionally, he used to come to our *shul* for services and invited us to visit him at his home. Besides himself and the Diamond family, there were another two Jewish families in that small town.

We arrived there on a Thursday and ascertained that at the Royal Casino there were numerous Jewish visitors from Johannesburg. I applied all my organisational abilities to organise a *minyan* for *Shabbat*. The effort proved successful with a good attendance of worshippers on Friday eve and *Shabbat* morning at the Diamonds' residence, where they kept a *kosher* home and where Judy and I were accommodated.

Mr. Justice David Cohen, the Attorney General of Swaziland, and Mr. Diamond, became the two honorary *gabbaim* who were standing at the *bimah* and distributing the *aliyot*. I conducted the whole service, including the reading of the *Torah*, and included in the service a "special prayer for the well-being of King Sobhuza II and his royal

family" - for the first time in the history of Swaziland! It was thus reported in the English and Jewish newspapers.

* * * * *

Rabbi Eugene Duschinsky was, at that stage, the National *Rabbi* to the Country Communities, with his headquarters in Johannesburg. He, too, was an alumni of *Pressburger Yeshiva*, and no sooner had we met than there was a natural friendship between us, which grew stronger as the years went by. When in Johannesburg, he would spend almost every *Shabbat* with us.

Rabbi Duschinsky was now married to Greta Stern who lived in Cape Town. One day, we received an urgent call from her. She had been trying to contact him but could not trace him on his travels in the country. She told me that his mother had died and asked me to communicate it to him.

From his office at the Board of Deputies, I ascertained that he was due to be in Standerton, about 100 km from Johannesburg. I reached him by telephone, and asked him to wait there until I arrived, because I had a most important message to deliver. About two hours later, we met, and on our way back to Johannesburg, slowly and gently I told him.

He came to our house to sit *shivah*, where we had regular morning and evening prayers. His wife Greta arrived on the next day and stayed with us for the following six days of the mourning period.

* * * * *

We had congregants with us for the evening, when I received a frantic call from the Head Sister at the General Hospital in Hillbrow:

"An elderly Jewish lady wishes to speak to a *rabbi* urgently!"

I apologized to our visitors and drove immediately to attend to the patient. On my arrival, I ascertained that she had been in pain with a broken hip, was 84 years old, and was a member of the Orange Grove Hebrew Congregation.

She turned to me: "*Ihr zent a Rov?*" ("Are you a *Rabbi*?")

"*Ya, mein tayere, wos kenn ich ton far eych?*" ("Yes, my dear, what can I do for you?")

Whereupon, for two hours, she told me her life story. She told, among other things:

"*Ich bin eychet a gute kucharke, fir mein mann, soll leben. Er is alt 86 yohr. Far breakfast mach ich ihm tea mit toyst; far mittog mach ich toyst mit tea, und far dinner wieder tea mit toyst.*" ("I am also an accomplished cook for my husband who is 86 years old. For breakfast, I prepare tea and toast, for lunch toast and tea, and for dinner, again tea and toast.")

For two hours, I attentively listened to this sick old lady. Eventually, I asked her:

"Un far dem hat ihr mich gerufen azoy dringend cu kummen eich zehn in shpitol?" ("Is it for this that you have requested me to come urgently to see you at the hospital?")

"*Nu zicher azoy, ich hab gedarft a Rov!*" ("Surely so. I had to unburden my heart, and to whom if not to a *rabbi*!")

I assured her of my best wishes and prayers for a speedy recovery, took her home address and left.

Deducing from her story the penury they were in, I called our grocer, Mr. Adler, and sent a parcel of edibles and goodies to the husband, whom I visited next afternoon, reassuring him of his wife's recuperation. Before I left, he said:

"A parcel of food and delicatessen was delivered to me, which I never ordered!"

"Don't worry, it was *Eliyohu Hanovie* (Elijah the Prophet) who sent it to you. Open it and enjoy it."

Later, I reported the case to the Transvaal Jewish Welfare Council and to Mr. Oscar Getz, Chairman of the *Chevra Kadisha*, and they took care of this family.

The Johannesburg *Chevra Kadisha* handles the dead with love and honour, but also dispenses charity to the living, unparallelled in scope, volume and tact anywhere in the world.

* * * * *

Our daughter, Shula, had received her B.A. and M.A. in Social Work at the Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg. There, she had met Cyril Meyerowitz, a top dental student, originally from Klerksdorp. He is the son of Yetta and Max Meyerowitz. Max was a former president of the Klerksdorp Hebrew Congregation, and the Meyerowitz's were highly respected business people in Klerksdorp.

Shula and Cyril were married in the garden of Gunther and Doris Samson in Saxonwold, Johannesburg, on July 4th, 1971. *Rabbi* Eugene Duschinsky and Cantor Alexander

Singer co-officiated with me under the *chuppah*. The reception was held at the Simon Kuper Hall and hundreds of guests attended, among them *Chief Rabbi* Bernard Casper and thirty other *rabbis*. Soon after their wedding, Cyril obtained a student exchange award from the University of Rochester, New York, and in 1973, they arrived there.

* * * * *

Throughout the years in which I was Chairman of the South African Rabbinic Association, there had been many complaints against *rabbis* for not visiting the sick in the various hospitals in Johannesburg. Although rabbis regularly visited members of their respective congregations, those not belonging to congregations were not visited by religious leaders. An aggravating factor was the Christian clergy who regularly visited all patients in hospitals, including patients of other faiths, and those who adhered to no faith at all.

On one of my hospital visits, I happened to meet a clergyman of the Anglican church.

"To which congregation do you belong?" I asked him.

"I belong to no congregation whatsoever. I am appointed as chaplain to the hospitals and have no other duties."

His reply gave me the key to solving our problem. Whereas we could not impose on the congregational *rabbis* to visit those not belonging to their congregations, we ought to appoint a hospital chaplain and entrust him with this task.

I called a meeting of the various Jewish welfare organisations. Most of them were against the idea, for it would involve financial expenses. Mr. Oscar Getz,

indefatigable and wise chairman of Johannesburg's *Chevra Kadisha*, rose and said:

"We have to be practical and positive in solving this acute problem. Those not belonging to congregations are also our brethren, and we ought to provide them with spiritual solace when they are on their sick bed. *Rabbi*," he turned to me, "you find the incumbent and appoint him as chaplain, and I shall be responsible for the budget."

The other representatives felt most uncomfortable, but the die had been cast.

The Rabbinical Association appointed *Rabbi* Kwiatkowsky-Kaye of Roodeport as hospitals' chaplain. He performed his task with distinction and we received numerous articles of praise in the Jewish press, both from patients and from local and regional organisations.

* * * * *

Time and again, I was called upon to assist various Israeli emissaries in their fund-raising efforts for their important institutions in Israel. Usually, *Rabbi* Shlomo Rosenzweig, *Rosh Beth Din*, would call me up, saying:

"*Ess iz do in shtot a zeyer choshever rosh yeshiva. Ich bet eich, gibt ihm a hand.*" ("There is in the city a very important head of a *yeshiva*. I ask you, please give him a hand.")

When *Rabbi* Mordechai Shulman, the illustrious head of *Slobodka Yeshiva* in Bnei Brak, came to South Africa, I called on him. He told me that he wished to see a *landsman* of his from Slobodka in Lithuania, who had a cinema in Germiston.

"What would you like to get from him?" I asked.

"If he will give me 500 rands, I shall be happy," he replied.

I made an appointment, and upon arrival, introduced the *rosh yeshiva* to the prospective donor. He was moved by his visit and related that his father had been a student at the Slobodka *yeshiva* in Lithuania.

After some initial small talk, I took over the negotiation.

"*Reb* Chaim," I said, "you remember, no doubt, that in the '*alte heim*', *yeshiva* students used to '*essen taeg*'. Nowadays, we have a hostel attached to the *yeshiva*, where the students obtain board and lodging and those who cannot afford to pay for it, are supported by kindhearted donors. Now, the *rosh yeshiva* is asking you to undertake to support one poor student to defray the cost of his upkeep in this hostel."

"That's fine, I shall gladly do it," he said. "How much is it?"

"Well, you have sons at the university, you know the costs," I said.

"Never mind, how much is it?"

"It costs 500 rands per month."

"That's fine," he said.

"Now, *Reb* Chaim," I said, "how long should a student study in the *yeshiva* so that he should become a somewhat learned man?"

"I suppose, five to six years." I confirmed this.

"Be so kind then, and write out a bank stop order for six years for a monthly payment of 500 rands," and I handed him the stop order for his signature.

He signed the stop order, and afterwards, he requested that we come to his home to make a "*l'haim*" and to receive a blessing from the *rosh yeshiva*. When thanking him for his generosity and taking our leave from him, he turned to me and said:

"You may call on me whenever you need help."

I invited the *Rosh Yeshiva* to our home for *Shabbat*. After the meal, I said to him:

"Often, I have pangs of conscience that I am wasting my time here. After all, my congregation makes few demands on me, and my days have become routine and unexciting."

"You should never think on those lines. When the biblical Joseph's brethren were about to kill him, we are told:

> '*... and Reuben heard it, and delivered him out of their hand; and said: Let us not take his life. And Reuben said unto them: Shed no blood; cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him ... that he might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father.*' And the *Midrash* elaborates: If Reuben would have known that the *Torah* will record his intention for posterity, he would have carried Joseph upon his shoulders."

And he continued:

"You, my young friend Joseph, have been sent here by Providence to occupy this position in this far-flung Jewish community. I have been told about your manifold activities.

I understand that you have *kashered* numerous homes in your former congregation and here, as well. Do you appreciate what you have achieved? Perhaps you have rescued those families from total assimilation. There is no command in the *Torah* to 'achieve'! Each one of us has to try to do one's best, and with heaven's help, the results will not fail to come. Be happy in your work and you will earn the Almighty's blessings."

He consoled and inspired me - and at that time, I needed it.

My next mission was with *Rabbi* Kahaneman, the saintly *rosh yeshiva* of Ponevezh in Bnei Brak. Having spent a successful day with him collecting funds for his *yeshiva*, I took him to his hotel. Before parting, he turned to me and asked:

"*Harav Fogel, vos bin ich eich shuldig?*" ("*Rabbi* Fogel, what do I owe you?")

"*Rebbe, gibt mir a broche!*" ("*Rabbi*, bestow upon me a blessing!")

Whereupon he placed his hands upon my head and said:

"*Ich bensh eich ihr zollt zoyche zein zurick zu kummen kein Eretz Yisroel!*" ("I bless you, you should merit to return to the Land of Israel")

His blessing reduced me to tears and I added a prayer for its fulfilment.

* * * * *

Irresistibly drawn to Israel, we were determined to purchase an apartment for ourselves in Israel, thereby launching our eventual return. I bought the apartment at 25 Jabotinsky street in Netanya. It had not yet been built, so it was bought "on paper." It was within walking distance of Gussie and Irving.

But I had no money.

On my return to Johannesburg, Mr. Issy Shapiro lent me 5,000 dollars and so did our dear good friends, Mendel and Taube Baskind of Wepener. Mr. Bennie Struck, President of *Yad Vashem* in South Africa, signed a guarantee at my bankers, where I obtained an unlimited overdraft.

In 1974, the apartment was built and paid for, and it took us ten years to pay off the overdraft.

* * * * *

In August, 1975, a visitor entered our *shul* just prior to the *Mincha* service. I went to greet him and inquired from where he came.

"I am on an official mission from Israel."

"May I ask with whom I have the pleasure?"

"My name is Shmuel Ben-Ami."

"May I invite you to have dinner with us?"

"No, thank you. I stay at a hotel in Hillbrow."

After the service, I turned to him and asked:

"You said your name is Ben-Ami, are you perhaps related to the mayor of the city of Netanya?"

"No," he said, "Ben-Ami is my new, Hebrew name."

"What was your name before?"

"Reichmann."

I had a good look at him. "Mityu! Reichmann Mityu!"

"Yes!" he said, considerably surprised.

"Who are you?"

"Don't you recognize me? Both of us studied at *Yesodei Hatorah* in Pressburg. We sat next to each other on the schoolbench. I am Yossi Fogel from Tornala."

"Yossi Fogel!" He embraced and kissed me. "Yossi Fogel, we have not seen each other for thirty years! Of course, I shall come with you and not go to my hotel."

He came with me and stayed with us for two days, during which we reminisced about all we had been through during the last thirty fateful years.

Shmuel had become an expert in cattle husbandry and had been sent by the Government of Israel to advise the appropriate governmental departments in Basutholand and Zambia. He was in Johannesburg, waiting for a flight to Zambia, and had decided to look for a nearby synagogue - with this most exciting and thrilling result for both of us.

* * * * *

We drove to Cape Town during December, 1975, for our holiday and we rented a furnished apartment at Worcester road in Sea Point.

Cape Town made a great impression on us by its natural beauty and by the friendliness of its people. We were in daily contact with the Duschinskys and we also renewed our friendship with *Rabbi* Lionel and Freida Mirvis, formerly of Benoni, whom we knew from Johannesburg. We often went to Muizenberg to swim, to Cape Point for the scenery, to Kalk Bay for the auctioning of fish just brought ashore, and to Kirstenbosch to marvel at the variety of flowers and plants.



Israel's Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren visits the South African Rabbinical Association in Johannesburg, in '73 . Seated :(l. to r.) Rabbi S.Barron, Rabbi I.Aloy, Dayan , Chief Rabbi B. M. Casper, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, Rabbi Dr. A. Hilewitz , Head Rabbinical Seminary , and Rabbi J. Fogel , Chairman of the Rabbinical Association . Standing: Rabbis B. Zaychik , M. Kurtztag , D. Hollander, N.Y., M. Broder , M. Kwiatkowski , S. Katz , B. Susser , Z. Rachman, I. Klewansky , E. Kaye , J. Blum , O. Werner , J. Bronner , A.H. Tanzer , S. Goldfein , L. Oshry , G. M. Engel , Dr. I. Goss, M. Sher , S. Suchard , A. Menachemson .



With Chief Rabbi Lord Dr. Immanuel Jakobovits of the United Kingdom , on visit to Our Parents Home ,Johannesburg . (l. to r.) Mr. W. Saenger , President, Rabbi A. Epstein , Chief Rabbi Lord Dr. I. Jakobovits and me



With Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Rabbi Yitzchak Kolitz, on visit to Yeshiva College of S. Africa in Johannesburg (l. to r.) : Rabbi J. Buxbaum, Rabbi B. Bender , Chief Rabbi Y. Kolitz , me and Rabbi A. H. Tanzer , Rosh Hayeshiva .



" להושיבי עם נדיבים עם נדיבי עמו "

" To seat them with the nobles -
with the nobles of His people."
(Psalm 113.)

TRIBUTE TO COMMUNAL WORKERS

A plaque in honour of leading personalities who have given many years of service to the community in general and to the Selwyn Segal Hostel in particular, was unveiled at an impressive ceremony at the Hostel. Those listed on the plaque are: (l. to r.) Mr & Mrs S. Jackson, Mrs& Rabbi A. H. Tanzer, Rabbi & Mrs J. J. Fogel, Mrs A. Rohald, Mr Oscar Getz, Mr. Abe Rohald, Mrs & Rabbi I. Aloy. Johannesburg, June '75.



With Rabbi Joseph Wineberg , Head of the United Lubavitcher Yeshivot, New York - '73



With Rabbi Eugene J. Duschinsky ,Av Beth Din Cape Town - '76

16

THE FAIREST CAPE

"כי הוא על ימים יסדה ..."
תהלים כ"ד: ב'

"... for He founded it upon seas."
Psalms 24: 2

Within a very short time, our dear friend, *Rabbi* Eugene J. Duschinsky, *Av Beth Din* of Cape Town, called to inform me that there was a position available at the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation; Associate *Rabbi* with *Rabbi* David Rosen, and *Dayan* on the Cape *Beth Din*. Having obtained a mandate from *Rabbi* David Rosen, three committee members of the Sea Point Congregation came to see me in Johannesburg and outlined the proposal that they were offering me.

Subsequently, I flew down to Cape Town and a contract was arranged for a period of two years. Whereas I wished to commence my services in January, 1977, they insisted that I take up my duties over *Rosh Hashanah* 1976, to show the congregation their find.

Rabbi Rosen, whom my wife and I had befriended while he was in Johannesburg, when asked about me, told them:

"What, *Rabbi* Fogel! I would grab him with two hands!"

So, we spent the High Holidays with our new congregation in Sea Point and made acquaintance with our new congregants.

Our short stay was mutually satisfying and after the *Succoth* festival, we returned to Johannesburg to wind up affairs.

Our son, Menachem, who finished his studies and army service in Israel, met Michele Moskovitz in Jerusalem (daughter of Ruby and Sylvia Moskovitz of Emmarentia, Johannesburg). After a short while, they announced their engagement and were married on December 5th, 1976 (13 *Kislev* 5737), at the Emmarentia Synagogue, Johannesburg, where Michele's father was the senior warden and immediate past president of the congregation. *Rabbi* Baruch Zaychik, *rabbi* of the *shul*, Cantor Michel Dawidowitz and myself officiated.

The reception was held at the Capri Hotel, Savoy, Johannesburg, with some hundreds of guests attending, among them the *Chief Rabbi*, B. Casper, *Rabbis* Aloy, Engel, Tanzer, and many dignitaries.

We celebrated the wedding of our children and returned on January 1st, 1977, to Sea Point where I assumed my duties as the Associate *Rabbi* of the congregation.

These were: *maggid ha'shiur* (lecturer) of the *Chevra Lomdei Torah* - daily; *chazan rishon* - during the High Holidays; *chazan sheni* and *ba'al koreh* - during the year; delivering a sermon once a month; attending to funerals, consecrations and *shivah* services; pastoral work: visiting the sick at hospitals and homes; deputising for the *rabbi* and the cantor when absent.

Before leaving Johannesburg, a public farewell was arranged by the South African National *Yad Vashem* Foundation, attended by representatives of many national Jewish

organisations - and also of the Etz Chayim congregation. A loyal personal friend, a council member of Etz Chayim, told me after the reception:

"*Rabbi*, I am so happy for you that you have been appointed to the largest orthodox congregation in this country and *Dayan* of the Cape *Beth Din*."

Our ten year's stay in Sea Point proved to be mutually satisfactory, as right from their commencement, my services were appreciated. Our home was open to all. We acquired numerous friends, both within the congregation and wider afield.

At the *Beth Din*, I became the right-hand man of the *Av Beth Din* and was entrusted with all the administrative work. The members were: *Rabbi* Eugene J. Duschinsky, *Av Beth Din*; *Rabbi* Dr. Lionel Mirvis, Conversion Program; and *Rabbi* David Rosen, Honorary Secretary, and myself, *Rabbinic* Administrator.

Apart from the *Av Beth Din*, who received a meagre remuneration from the United Council of Orthodox Congregations in the Cape Province and South-West Africa, the other members of the *Beth Din* worked in an honorary capacity.

The work at the *Beth Din* required supervision of *shehitah* and maintaining proper facilities for *kosher* slaughtering at the municipal abbatoirs; *kashrut*, including inspection at factories, wineries, bakeries and other manufacturers of edibles manufactured under supervision; marriages; the appointment of duly accredited marriage officers and maintaining a central marriage register; divorces, writing of bills of divorce (*gittin*) and delivery, obtaining permits for divorce by proxy, appointing *halachically* valid witnesses, etc. and maintaining a central divorce register; conversions, accepting candidates for conversion and maintaining a course for studies of Jewish law and customs for

prospective converts, performing the *halachic* acts of conversion, declaration of *kabbalat mitzvoth* for every convert, plus *brith milah* and ritual immersion in a *mikveh* for males and the *mikveh* ceremony for females and maintaining a central register of converts; *dinei Torah*, litigation between disputing parties and rulings according to Jewish law; *dinim u'minhagim* (rulings on law and customs) in synagogues, at weddings, public functions, funerals and cemeteries.

The *Beth Din*'s authority extended to the Cape Province, South-West Africa and the city of Harare (Salisbury) in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia).

After the first year, the Green & Sea Point Hebrew Congregation presented me with a car, in appreciation of my services.

The first two years passed quickly and the congregation extended my contract for another three years.

In due course, our dear friends and colleagues, *Rabbi* Isaac and his wife Rella Zwebner asked us whether there would be a position for them in the Cape. They were amongst our dearest friends, and we were keen on having them nearby. Through *Rabbi* Duschinsky's intervention, he was appointed *Rabbi* of the Somerset West and Strand Hebrew Congregation, situated about seventeen miles from Cape Town.

In a short while, *Rabbi* Zwebner joined the *Beth Din* where we met twice weekly and we visited each other frequently.

* * * * *

One Friday afternoon, while on my way to *shul*, I met a number of congregants also on their way to the service.

Noticing the many people emerging from the small streets nearby and walking to *shul*, I remarked:

"What a wonderful sight - Jews walking to *shul*. I think our *shul* is the second best in the world, after the *shuls* in Israel!"

Whereupon one of the group turned to me, saying:

"*Rabbi*, please, how can you make such a statement? Where in Israel do you have a *shul* like ours? Every Friday eve, we pride ourselves with an attendance of a thousand worshippers. And with a *Rabbi*, Cantor and choir like ours, I think our *shul* is the best in the world!"

I replied: "Please, forgive me and let me explain myself. It is said that Mr. Ford of Ford Motors of America claimed that his cars were the best in the world. Someone asked him: 'Sir, if that is the case, why do you drive a Cadillac?' He replied: 'For my customers, the best! For myself, the second best.'"

* * * * *

Throughout our years of service, there was a good and friendly relationship between *Rabbi* Rosen's family and mine. *He*, although highly popular and respected in Cape Town, decided to relinquish his position and left South Africa early in 1980.

Subsequently, he was appointed *Chief Rabbi* of Ireland, and eventually, made *aliyah* to Israel.

***Rabbi* Rosen was replaced by *Rabbi* Dr. Elihu Jack Steinhorn from New York. His contract with the congregation was for four years but he relinquished his position earlier.**

During these years, we lost two very dear friends, Freida Mirvis and Grete Duschinsky. Their passing was a very great loss to us, for both had been very dear and cherished friends.

My contract with the congregation was renewed for a further five years and *Rabbi* Steinhorn was replaced by *Rabbi* Selwyn Franklin, of Durban.

We also had a very good relationship with Cantor Philip Badash, and the congregation prided itself on the friendly cooperation of their officials. During our term of office, we joined a *Shabbat* morning "*Brocha* Club" established earlier with about a dozen couples gathering each week at a different home for *kiddush* and a light meal. All the participants would lustily sing *zemiroth* (*Shabbat* table-songs) and I would deliver a *d'var Torah*. This event became the highlight of the week and the envy of many.

Rabbi Eric Kaye was appointed *Rabbi* of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation Gardens synagogue, succeeding *Rabbi* Lapin, and eventually joining the *Beth Din*.

The *Beth Din* now consisted of: *Rabbi* Duschinsky, *Av Beth Din*; *Rabbi* Fogel, *rabbinical* administrator, and *Rabbi* Franklin, Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation; *Rabbi* Kaye, Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Gardens; *Rabbi* Dr. Mirvis, Claremont Hebrew Congregation and *Rabbi* Zwebner, Somerset West and Strand Hebrew Congregation.

Towards the end of 1985, *Rabbi* Duschinsky and *Rabbi* Zwebner were visiting Israel, and I was left in charge of the *Beth Din*.

* * * * *

In December, 1985, I reached my 65th year, my retirement age. Having lost so many members of our families, Judy and I decided to return home, where we could be of assistance to our elderly siblings in Israel.

We notified the congregational leaders, who tried to persuade us to remain and offered me a contract for a further five years.

We were, however, determined in our decision. A farewell function was held by the *chevrah lomdei Torah* of our *shul*, where I had been the *maggid hashiur* for the last ten years. Mr. Gabriel Sacks, chairman of the *chevrah*, paid tribute and made a suitable presentation.

Finally, on Sunday, March 30th, 1986, the congregation arranged a public farewell at the Louis and Leah Waynik Hall adjacent to the *shul*. Tributes were paid by *Rabbi* Selwyn Franklin, *Rabbi* Eric Kaye of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Mrs. Queenie Sacks, chairperson of the synagogue's Ladies Guild, and by Mr. Geoffrey Breskal, president of the congregation, who presented us with a "golden handshake" cheque of a very handsome sum, in appreciation of our services over the past ten years and of my being the longest serving *rabbi* of the congregation.

In my reply, I thanked all present for the privilege afforded us to be of service to Cape Jewry in general and to our congregants in particular. We had become greatly enriched through this privilege and acquired hundreds of dear and loyal friends, whose friendship we cherish far above rubies.

I concluded my address with a song composed by the renowned *Rabbi* Shlomo Carlebach of blessed memory:

"למען אחי ורעי, אדברה נא, שלום בך.
למען בית ה' אלוקנו אבקשה טוב לך!

"'Cause of my brothers and friends,
Please, let me ask, please let me say, peace to you!
For this is the house, the house of the L-rd, we wish the best for you!
This is the house, the house of the L-rd, we say *shalom* to you!"

The atmosphere was charged with emotion and tear-filled eyes. With hugs of friendship and kisses of affection, hundreds of congregants lined to bid us farewell. The same late afternoon, we left for Johannesburg, where a public farewell was given to us by the South African *Yad Vashem* Memorial, during which I was accorded the title of "Honorary Life President".

All in all, my recollections of my three decades of service in the *rabbinate* of South Africa afford me great satisfaction - with only two notable exceptions. The first, unhappily, was connected with my decision to leave the Etz Chayim Congregation and involved a leading member whom I had considered an exceptionally loyal and good friend. The second concerned a nasty intrigue over representation in the Cape *Beth Din*.

But nothing, for good or bad, happens haphazardly!



The Green & Sea Point Hebrew Congregation's impressive Shul, at 10 Marais Rd., Sea Point.



The Council of the Green & Sea Point
Chevra Lomdei Torah - Av 5742 - Aug.'82

Back row: (L. to r.) M. Shatz, S. Yankelowitz, C. Schlosberg, I. Melamed , M. Polliack
Front: S. Greenblo, L.Waynik, A. I. Maisels (Chairman) Rabbi J. J. Fogel (Maggid Hashiur) G. Sacks (Vice - chairman) C. Dorfman (Hon.Treasurer and Secretary).



The Shabbat " BRACHA KIDDUSH CLUB "
1976 - '86

Top row (l.to r.) Abe Roberts, Issy Sachar, Mathew Israelson, Dr Hymie & Chana Ehrlich , Lovelle Israelson
2nd row: Sonia Kirsch , Ethel Sachar, Sylvia Walt, Lily Kessler , Rolene Segal
3rd row: Dr.Ernie Kirsch, Eddy Segal, Abe Margolis, Dr. Sonny Walt , Judy and me, Gershon Maze .
Front row:Beryl Margolis, Madelaine Ehrlich,Wolf & Greta Berkman, Cyla Maze,Solly Kessler,Ethel Roberts.



Walking in procession after the Sefer Torah - written for my sister, Gussie, - is being carried to the Great Synagogue in Netanya. (l. to r.): Rabbi Prof. J. Newman ,Jerusalem, Rabbi I. Aloy, Johannesburg, Rabbi E. Meller, Jerusalem, and me.

17

HOMECOMING

"... ונתתי רוחי בכם וחייתם והנחתי אתכם על אדמתכם ..."

יחזקאל ל"ג: י"ד

"... And I will infuse My spirit into you, and you shall live, and I will set you onto your own land ..."

Ezekiel 33: 14

We left Johannesburg on an El Al flight on Sunday evening, April 5th, 1986, together with our friends, *Rabbi* Isaac and Rella Zwebner, and on Monday morning, we landed safely in Israel.

Our children, Menachem and Michele, and grandchildren, Chanan and Na'ama, met us at Ben Gurion Airport and drove us to our apartment in Netanya. Without delay, we called on Gussie and Meir, and on Jeno and Frida.

There was great rejoicing in the family. We were finally at home. The blessing the saintly Ponevezher *Rav* bestowed on me in Johannesburg has materialised!

Quickly, we settled down, as it was two weeks before *Pesach*. We invited the whole family to our home for the *Seder*. Having been away from them for thirty years, we felt a strong urge to be reunited with them as soon as possible. We went shopping and *shlepping*, and having yet

no car, the task was quite formidable. But it was heart work and for the *Seder*, we were twenty-eight people altogether with our joint families.

Soon after *Pesach*, I obtained the position of *"ba'al keriah"* at the Great Synagogue, the seat of *Chief Rabbi* Israel Meir Lau. This position came handy, for the pension I receive from South Africa is very small, absolutely insufficient to live on. With this additional income, we somehow manage to make ends meet.

I held this position for five years and officiated there to the satisfaction of the *Chief Rabbi* and all the worshippers. The *Chief Rabbi* also appointed me as marriage officer, and I officiated at many weddings of English speaking couples who preferred an English address under the *chuppah*. Time and again, I was also called upon to officiate at numerous funerals and tombstone consecrations.

We joined the "English-American" *shul* "Agudath Achim" in our street, headed by *Rabbi* Eliezer Cohen, a scholar of repute. He proved to be a wonderful colleague and asked me to deputise for him whenever he was out of town or otherwise occupied. Very frequently, I had to give the daily *Talmud shiur* and attend to all his other *rabbinical* duties.

For the first High Holy Days, we were recalled to Sea Point where I conducted the services. At this time, *Rabbi* Franklin had left for Australia and was replaced by *Rabbi* Baruch Rackowsky from Israel, formerly of Canada. He and his wife Ruth, a charming couple, became our good friends.

We suffered a severe loss with the passing of our dearly beloved friend and colleague, *Rabbi* Eugene J. Duschinsky, formerly *Av Beth Din* of Cape Town. He had retired in 1985, and settled in Netanya. Since our arrival in Netanya in April, 1986, he had been with us almost daily. It had been a close friendship of over two decades, and his sudden

passing left a great void in our lives. A large crowd of mourners, colleagues, former congregants, pupils, friends and admirers attended his funeral. *Rabbi* Prof. Yaacov Newman - also a very close friend and colleague - delivered a moving eulogy. *Rabbi* Duschinsky was laid to rest near his father's grave at the Givat Shaul Cemetery in Tel Aviv, on Friday, December 19th, 1986 (17 *Kislev*, 5747).

Whilst still in Sea Point, I had discussed with numerous colleagues the vexing problem of adequately preparing the young boys for their *bar mitzvah*. It seemed to me that the Rabbinate was tolerating an intolerable situation. The children were little more than taught the recital of *maftir* and *haftarah*, primarily because of a lack of suitable teaching material. As a consequence, they learnt little, if anything, of their Jewish heritage.

My colleagues agreed with me and, challengingly, suggested that "if you feel so strongly about it, why not develop the curriculum yourself."

On my retirement, I decided to undertake the task and three years later, published a book, "My Guide for *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*" sponsored by the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation.

The book obtained high recognition of and recommendations by *Rabbi* Dr. Gerald Mazabow, Head of the Hebrew Department of Witwatersrand University; *Rabbi* A.H. Tanzer, Head of Yeshiva College of South Africa; Mr. Mark Cohen, Director, South African Board of Jewish Education, Mr. Ian Mann, Director of *Judaica*, Herzlia Schools, Cape Town; *Rabbi* Dr. Y. Vainstein, President, Ramot Shapira Educational Center, Jerusalem; *Rabbi* David Rosen, *Chief Rabbi* of Ireland (formerly *Rabbi* of Sea Point), now in Jerusalem; *Rabbi* Irwin E. Witty, Executive Director, Board of Jewish Education, Toronto, Canada; *Rabbi* Dr. Abner Weiss, Beth Jacob Congregation, Los Angeles, United States; Prof. Leila L. Bronner, Institute of

Bible and Jewish Studies, Los Angeles; and *Rabbi* Dr. Jeffrey M. Cohen, Stanmore and Canons Park Synagogue, London.

The first edition of the book was printed in Johannesburg and the second edition was reprinted in Jerusalem.

Numerous schools have adopted the book as their text-book, among them the Hebrew School of *Rabbi* David Rogut of Sydney, Australia, formerly Johannesburg.

We were invited to Switzerland over *Pesach* in 1987 and in 1988, to conduct the *Seder* at the Hotel Silberhorn in Grindelwald. The owner of the hotel, Mr. Meir Wagner, had formerly been a Hebrew teacher at the Adath Jeshurun congregation in Johannesburg. Now he and his wife Ruth wished to reciprocate the hospitality we had frequently shown them in South Africa. It proved to be a most pleasant experience.

During 1989, I was called to conduct the High Holiday services at the "Canadian-English" *shul* in McDonald Street, Netanya, and in 1990, I conducted the High Holiday services at "our" *shul* in Jabotinsky Street.

18

FAMILY TIES

"לכל זמן ועת לכל-חפץ תחת השמים: עת ללדת
ועת למות; עת לבכות ועת לשחוק ..."
קהלת ג': א'-ד'

"Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything under the heaven: A time to be born and a time to die. A time to weep and a time to laugh ..."

Eccl. 3: 1-4

At this juncture, I want to place on record where the members of the family were and how they had fared.

*

My sister, Cilka, had married Pali (Avraham) Politzer, originally from Zilina, Slovakia, and they lived in Ramat Gan.

*

Judy's brother, Shlomo Zelmanovitz, had married Marika (Miryam) Hertzog, originally from Lucenec, Slovakia, and they, too, live in Ramat Gan. They have two sons, Menachem and Yoav.

*

Judy's sister, Helenka, had married David Slutzki, originally from Mir, Poland. They had emigrated to Toronto, Canada, and have a daughter, Lori, and a son, Menachem. They made *aliyah* in 1989 and live now in Jerusalem.

*

My sister, Miryam, who had been divorced from Menush Beck, was remarried to Gershon Kogan, originally from Hanover, Germany. They live in Kiryat Ata near Haifa, and have one son, Moshe.

*

My brother, Yitzchak, and his wife, Helen, were still living in Tel Aviv. They have two daughters, Poriya and Nurit.

*

My elder brother, Jeno, and his wife, Frida, had emigrated to Melbourne, Australia, where they established the *kosher* restaurant "Zion". Ten years later, they had returned to Israel and live in Netanya.

*

My sister, Gussie, and her husband, Irving, of New York, had retired, had made *aliyah* in 1970, and had settled in Netanya, whilst Fanika and Marci had stayed in Toronto.

*

Our older son, Menachem, had matriculated at Yeshiva College in Johannesburg at the end of 1970, and had enrolled for the following six years at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh in Israel. Keren B'Yavneh is a *hesder yeshiva*, combining army service with higher Jewish studies.

In 1973, Menachem had come home to us in Johannesburg, for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. On the holiest day of the year, our Arab enemies began a war against us. On *motzaei Yom Kippur*, Menachem, who was a tankist, returned to Israel and served on the Suez front and then on Mount Hermon and on the Golan Heights.

*

On July 14th, 1974 (24 *Tamuz* 5734), my beloved brother-in-law, Marci Blobstein of Toronto, suffered a heart attack and passed away. My sister, Fanika, was heartbroken and I brought her over to spend some time with us in South Africa. Judy and I surrounded her with love and special attention.

Fanika stayed with us for three months and recuperated sufficiently to return to Toronto. There, however, she felt very lonely, so a year later, I flew to Toronto, helped her to liquidate her assets, packed her belongings and brought her over to Netanya, Israel, where she settled.

*

On February 14th, 1975 (3 *Adar* 5735), our first darling granddaughter, Talya, was born to Shula and Cyril in Rochester, New York. Judy and I flew over to celebrate this great event in our lives. Survivors being vouchsafed to see the continuity of their third generation! We spent two weeks with Shula and Cyril and enjoyed the *nachas* of their firstborn child.

*

Our family suffered another grievous loss on September 3rd, 1975 (*Hoshana Rabba* 5737), with the passing away of our dear brother-in-law, Irving Stein, the husband of my sister, Gussie. They were away for *Succot* in a hotel in Kfar Sava, where Irving still attended the festive morning service. On his return from the service, he brought with him a bunch of willow branches (*hoshanot*) for Gussie. Soon thereafter, he suffered a severe heart attack and passed away.

Irving was laid to his eternal rest at the Shikun Vatikim Cemetery in Netanya. Gussie couldn't cope with her sudden loss and was in a severe depression. I flew over to Netanya and brought her to us in Johannesburg. Judy and I tended her with love and care for three months, whereafter she, strengthened, returned to Netanya. My oldest brother, Jeno, and his wife, Frida, were there and took care of her.

*

The following year was a happier year.

On January 10th, 1978 (2 *Shvat* 5738), Michele gave birth to her and Menachem's firstborn son, Chanan Yishai, in Johannesburg. He was our first darling grandson, carrying the Fogel family name. Judy and I flew to Johannesburg for the *brith milah* which took place at the Emmarentia Synagogue. This was an especially happy occasion for us and for our dear *mechutonim*.

The *pidyon haben*-ceremony took place in Cape Town, on the 31st day after Chanan's birth, although baby and mother remained in Johannesburg. The ceremony took place at our apartment in Sea Point, and the officiating *Cohen* was the venerable Mr. David Rechtman, a 94 year old leading member of the *Chevra Lomdei Torah* who regularly attended my daily *Talmud shiur*. I had bought a special set of five silver *shekalim* in Israel, and these I gave to Menachem to perform the *pidyon* with, by giving them to the *Cohen*. After the ceremony we had a festive reception at our apartment, and I asked the *Cohen* if he would be willing to sell the *shekalim* he had just obtained.

"Yes, for 200 rand."

I paid him the required sum, whereupon he called Menachem and said to him:

"Here, my young friend, 200 rand. Please, open a savings account for your son, to provide for his Jewish education."

*

On *Rosh Hodesh Adar*, 5738 (February 8th, 1978), Gussie married Meir Ze'ev Jeshion, a widower, formerly of New York, then residing in Netanya.

My brother, Jeno, had met him at the Great Synagogue in Netanya and had introduced him to Gussie. Although both Gussie and Meir were well advanced in years, it was "love at first sight".

Meir was a former businessman and, in spite of his advanced age, his mind was most alert. They were mutually proud of each other and Gussie entrusted him with the management of her financial affairs.

*

April 25th, 1978 (17 *Nisan* 5738) was another very happy day in our family calendar, with the birth of our darling second granddaughter, Aviva, to Shula and Cyril. Soon after *Pesach*, we flew to Rochester and spent two weeks with her happy parents and sister, enjoying together G-d's gracious blessings.

*

In 1978, our younger son, Ilan, matriculated at Herzlia High School in Cape Town, with an "A" result, and enrolled at the medical school of the University of Cape Town, and later, at the University of Witwatersrand.
He graduated with an M.B.B.Ch. degree, on November 29th, 1984.

*

On April 12th, 1981 (8 *Nisan* 5741), Michele and Menachem became parents to their second child, their first daughter, born in Vancouver, Canada, where Menachem served as *rabbi* at the Shaare Tzedek Congregation. She was named Na'ama-Pessil, after my saintly, martyred mother of blessed memory. Obviously, she became very precious to us.

*

On April 13th, 1982 (6th day of *Pesach* 5742), Cilka and Pali were visiting our siblings in Netanya and on their way home, Pali suffered a heart attack while waiting in line for the bus to Ramat Gan. He was rushed to Laniado Hospital, but it was unfortunately too late. He was buried the day after *Pesach*, at the Shikun Vatikim Cemetery in Netanya. Cilka became deeply depressed.

Rachel, beloved mother of our dear friend Diana Bearman, was critically ill. I visited her often, trying to strengthen her spirit. Her doctors confided to Diana the inevitable outcome of her mother's illness and she asked me to promise that I would accompany her mother to Blackpool, England, where she had a reserved grave. She was spared further suffering and I flew with her earthy remains to Blackpool where I delivered a moving eulogy and in the presence of her loving family and friends, she was laid to eternal rest, as she had wished.

On my way back to South Africa, I flew via Israel and brought with me my dear sister Cilka to Sea Point. She stayed with us for three months, during which she received medical treatment, besides the loving care of Judy and myself. She then returned much improved to her home in Ramat Gan.

*

Our belowed sister-in-law Marika, wife of Shlomo Zelmanowitz, suddenly became ill with leukemia, and passed away a week later, on June 25th, 1983 (14 *Tamuz* 5743), at a comparatively young age. She was laid to rest at the Kiryat Shaul Cemetery in Tel Aviv. She was a darling wife and mother and she is sorely missed by all of us.

*

My sister, Fanika, suffered from circulatory problems in her legs, and was advised to have surgery. In the interim, a doctors' strike had begun in Israel, so I arranged for her to be operated on in Cape Town. She was about to fly down, when the doctors' strike was suddenly called off. Against my advice, she decided to have the operation at the Hadera Hospital.

The operation was not successful and she remained in pain for many weeks. On *Kol Nidre* eve, she was rushed to Beilinson Hospital in Petach Tikva, and following emergency surgery there, she passed away on September 17th, 1983 (*Yom Kippur* 5744). Cilka was with her all the time during her ordeal.

Fanika is buried in the Shikun Vatikim Cemetery in Netanya. In her last will - of which I was nominated executor - she instructed that the remains of her husband, Marci, who had passed away ten years earlier in Toronto, be reinterred next to her. Her wish was fulfilled, and by the end of her *shloshim* mourning period, they were next to each other once again. In her last will, she bequeathed a considerable legacy to the Keren Shem Tov Charity and Gemilat Chesed Fund.

*

On February 6th, 1985 (15 *Shvat* 5745), our beloved sister-in-law, Helen, wife of my brother, Yitzchak, passed away after a short illness. They had retired three years earlier and come to live with their daughter and son-in-law, Poriya and Tuli Sheinfeld, at Kibbutz Kfar Etzyon.

The *kibbutz* had provided the elderly couple with an apartment of their own, and they had made themselves useful at the *kibbutz*.

Tuli is the secretary of the *kibbutz* and Poriya a kindergarten teacher. They have six children, and Helen and Yitzchak enjoyed the *nachas* of their offspring.

A year after Helen's death, my dear brother Yitzchak suffered a stroke and passed away at the Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital in Jerusalem, on February 16th, 1986 (*7 Adar* 5746). They are both buried at the Kibbutz Kfar Etzyon cemetery.

*

On August 17, 1986, my sister Cilka, who lived in Ramat Gan, married Shlomo Jakab, a widower of her age, from Kiryat Gat. The wedding was at our home, and *Rabbi* Isaac Zwebner was the marriage officiant. Cilka sold her apartment in Ramat Gan and bought one in Netanya, near us. They live alternately in Kiryat Gat and in Netanya.

*

The passing after a short illness of our beloved sister-in-law, Frida, wife of my brother Jeno, on June 19th, 1989 (16 *Sivan*, 5749), was a severe loss to us. We had loved her very much and during the six years, when our son Menachem was at the yeshiva in Kerem B'Yavneh and in the army, Frida had been like a substitute mother to him. Whenever on leave, he had stayed with Frida and Jeno, for they regarded him as "their son".

At her funeral, Frida was movingly eulogised by Menachem and laid to rest at Har Hamenuchot Cemetery in Jerusalem.

*

On Monday, January 8th, 1990 (11 *Tevet*, 5750), Michele and Menachem were blessed with a darling girl, our fifth grandchild. She was born at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, and was named Shlomit after our dearest Frida (Frida meaning peace = Shlomit).

*

Soon after Frida's passing, my brother Jeno suffered a stroke and was hospitalised for a while at Laniado Hospital, Netanya. When discharged, he was unable to care for himself and stayed for a month with Gussie and Meir, Judy and I being at that time on a visit to South Africa.

After our return, I obtained accommodation for Jeno at the Beth Avot, Kiryat Sanz, where he had his own private room. He liked it there, as he could attend *shiurim* daily, and where the on-site *shul* afforded him the opportunity of three *minyanim* every day.

Jeno was well liked by both the staff and the other residents. I visited him every other day and brought him whatever he needed. Occasionally, I brought him to us for a meal, and at other times, he was the guest of Gussie or Cilka.

Months later, Jeno suffered some minor strokes and had difficulty in caring for himself. I hired a person working on the premises to attend to his every need.

Jeno suffered a severe stroke on the morning of November 6th, 1990 (18 *Cheshvan*, 5751), while preparing for *shul*, and passed away while still in his room. He was movingly eulogised by the *Rabbi* of the Bet Avot, and was laid to rest next to Frida at Har Hamenuchot Cemetery in Jerusalem.

*

***Shabbat Parashat Bo*, in January, 1991, was the *bar mitzvah Shabbat* of our eldest grandson, Chanan. Everyone in the family was very excited about it. Michele's parents, Ruby and Sylvia Moskovitz and her brother, Leslie and family arrived from Johannesburg, and the entire family eagerly awaited this great *simcha*.**

However, during that very week the war between Iraq and the Gulf states broke out, and *scud* missiles were falling in Israel. In every part of the country, the population, young and old, was confined to "security rooms" with gas masks at hand. The celebratory dinner had to be cancelled, yet on Friday night, over fifty people made their way to Menachem and Michele's home.

***Rabbi* Riskin, Chief *Rabbi* of Efrat, had just begun his *d'var torah* when the sirens were sounded, and everyone ran for cover. That was to be the first of those *scud* attacks that took place that night.**

On *Shabbat* morning, Chanan excelled himself in conducting the service and reading the *Sidra*. Again, the sirens sounded and the congregation had to disperse quickly. His "*bar mitzvah*" will be remembered by many for a very long time.

*

During the same year, we suffered a severe loss with the passing of my dear sister, Miryam Kogan, on August 24th, 1991 (14 *Elul*, 5751), after a short illness at the Rambam Hospital in Haifa. She was laid to eternal rest at the new cemetery in Kiryat Ata. Her husband, Gershon and son, Moshe came to sit *shivah* in our home where daily *minyanim* were held.

*

Ever since our return to Netanya, I had taken special care of Gussie and Meir attending to all of their needs, taking them to doctors at Kupat Cholim, buying medicines for them, and taking Meir to the *shuk* (market) where he liked to buy fruit, vegetables, fish, meat and poultry. Every Wednesday morning I dedicated for this purpose and they appreciated this special attention. Being well advanced in years, my care for them gave them a feeling of security.

As the years went by, they needed more and more help. Gussie, although fully occupied in her household, had not been feeling well after a fall from a ladder in her flat. Meir, who had heart and prostate trouble, was not well either. I was with them daily, attending to their needs.

Gussie suggested that they move to a home for senior citizens, but Meir was not in favour of it. Subsequently, Gussie suffered a stroke which affected her right hand and right leg. I booked them in to a first class hotel for seniors, Galei Zahav, on Nitza Street, Netanya.

I was most fortunate in obtaining two kind-hearted nurses, Maya and Rima, new olim from Moldavia, who were with them twenty-four hours every day, and attended to all their needs. I wanted them to have the very best available care in the sunset of their lives.

Gussie often said: "My Yossele, he makes me live like a lady!"

I visited them often, taking care of mail, accounts, doctors, medication, etc. Every Friday, I brought them flowers, candles, biscuits, fruit and whatever they desired. They enjoyed life and made some very good friends there.

However, the health of Meir deteriorated and I notified his children in New York, who came to visit and flew him to their home in the United States.

In New York, Meir's health deteriorated and he passed away there on August 27th, 1992 (28 *Av*, 5752), aged 93. His children flew with his remains to Israel and he was laid to rest next to his first wife at the Shikun Vatikim Cemetery in Netanya. He was eloquently eulogised by *Rabbi* Moshe Chaim Lau. Gussie and I attended his funeral.

After Meir's funeral, Gussie was back at Galei Zahav where she had every comfort and attention.

Slowly but surely, her health deteriorated and she had to be transferred to the Laniado Hospital. I visited her daily. After a couple of weeks, on March 18th, 1994 (6 *Nissan*, 5754), she passed away peacefully, aged 92 years.

At her funeral, on the same day, Gussie was movingly eulogised by *Rabbi* Eliezer Cohen of the Agudat Achim Synagogue and was laid to rest next to her first husband, Irving Stein, at the Shikun Vatikim Cemetery in Netanya.

*

Luckily, happy events change things in one's life, and such was the *bat mitzvah* celebration of our darling grandaughter, Na'ama-Pessil, in Efrat, in April of 1993 (Nissan, 5753). Her parents arranged a beautifully catered party in a hall, where both sets of grandparents and numerous uncles, among them Shula and Ilan from the United States, cousins and relatives attended, as well as Na'ama's numerous school friends and friends of Menachem, Michele and Chanan. It was a beautiful, joyous simcha and Na'ama radiated joy. Both sets of grandparents, Ruby and Sylvia and Judy and I were presented with an album of pictures commemorating this happy family event.

* * * * *

LAST SEARCH FOR MY BROTHER MOISHIE'S GRAVE

As I recorded earlier, my brother Moishie, performing compulsory labour in a camp in Satoraljaujhely, Hungary, was shot dead for handing a piece of bread and an apple during working hours to an acquaintance who was passing by. Permission was granted, however, to burry him at the local Jewish cemetery. After the hostilities of the Second World War ended in May 1945, my surviving siblings and I erected a tombstone on his grave.

About twelve years ago, we succeeded in transferring the earthly remains of our late father, of blessed memory, from Tornala, Slovakia, to Netanya, Israel. We wished to do the same to the remains of my late brother Moishie. However, the cemetery in Satoraljaujhely was so overgrown with grass that entry to it was impossible.

Since then, I kept contact with the Town Office in Satoraljaujhely who referred me to a Mr. Laszlo Tarr, the person in charge of the Jewish cemetery there. Mr. Tarr advised me that a group of Jews in Brooklyn, New York, who had their relations buried in Satoraljaujhely, had provided the necessary funds for making the cemetery accessible. He would give me every possible assistance in locating the grave of my late brother, exhuming his remains and making all the necessary arrangements for their transfer to Israel. I sent him the necessary documentation and provided him with the size, shape and the inscription of my late brother's tombstone which reads:

אני המצבה מעידה
שתחתי נקבר בחור כארז, הקדוש
משה אריה ב"ר מנחם פוגל הי"ד
שנהרג בידי רוצחים בעד קיום מצות
"ואהבת לרעך כמוך"

מאוד כיבד חוריו ולא ארכו ימיו
שה פזורה להושיע אף בלילות עמד
הלכן הרגוהו רוצחים בדמי ימיו

אל ישקוט ה' לשפיכת נקי דמו
רחום יסתירהו בסתר צל כנפו
ימיו ארוכים בעדן עם אבותיו
הנאהבים בחייהם לא נפרדו במותם

נפטר בש"ט ז' במרחשון ה' תש"ד
ת' נ' צ' ב' ה'

FOGEL MOSES TORNALJAROL

Mr. Tarr was unable to decipher the Hebrew inscription nor could the only surviving Jewish resident, an elderly Jewish widow. I decided, therefore, to undertake the search by myself. My only surviving sister Cilka and our younger son Ilan offered to join me in the search.

Thus, on August 27th, 1996, the three of us boarded an El Al plane to Budapest, slept over there and next day, early morning, we caught a train to Satoraljaujhely. We arrived there at 11 a.m.. Mr. Tarr waited for us at the railway station with a taxi and we travelled with him to the Jewish cemetery, with great expectations.

The cemetery was accessible and the three of us, assisted by Mr. Tarr, commenced our search. Many tombstones were in disrepair, some of them crumbling or half-sunk into the ground, others fallen and broken. About seventy graves were left without their former tombstones. It took us about four hours until we managed to examine each and

every tombstone in this cemetery - but we could not find my late brother's tombstone. The Town Office has no plans of the cemetery, hence we could not even attempt to find my late brother's grave. I cannot describe our heartache and disappointment at not being able to fulfil the compassionate *mitzvah* of transferring his earthly remains to the Holy Land. His unknown grave remains our only and last possession in the countries of the European Holocaust.

I found, however, a modest monument erected at this cemetery for the Martyrs of the Holocaust, carrying the Hebrew and Hungarian inscription:

"ובכל זאת שמך לא שכחנו נא אל תשכחינו."

"But despite all this, we have not forgotten Your Name - we beg You not to forget us."

At this holy spot, we recited the prayer for my late brother ת"ח משה אריה בן מנחם הי"ד, including his name among all the other Martyrs of the Holocaust.

We retired to Mr. Tarr's home where he runs a pension for visitors. To our utter surprise, he told us that his wife has been converted to Judaism, he himself is in the process of conversion and that they intend to make *aliyah* to Israel where they have two converted daughters already living.

Examining the map, we realised that we were some 300 km from my birthplace in Slovakia. I hired a car with a driver and on the next morning, we crossed the Slovak border at Satoraljaujhely and drove through Kosice, Roznava and Plesivec to Tornala. There we found two Jewish widows in their eighties - in a town which had some 200 Jewish families before the Holocaust. Nothing much has changed in this town for the last fifty years. But it had become "*Judenrein*." In the place of the "great" synagogue, we found a four storey block of flats erected and the same was the case with the house where my late

parents had lived. From there, we visited Kralik, my birthplace where we found the house in which I was born and the building of my school where I attended my first two elementary classes. We also found there Margo Bato, nee Friedmann, with whom I had attended school in Kralik. For the last twelve years, she is a widow and lives there with her son Stefan. We had not seen each other for over fifty years, and the excitement was great. She informed us that her two siblings had also survived and live in Israel. My sister and I were very sad and depressed but for Ilan it was a most memorable experience. After half an hour, we bade Margo farewell, crossed the Hungarian border and returned - through Miskolc - to Budapest and a few days later, to Israel.

The resting place of my dear, unforgettable, martyred brother Moses - like that of his biblical counterpart - remains now unknown for all eternity.

"ולא ידע איש את קבורתו עד היום הזה".

"And no man knows his burial place unto this day."

Deut. 34: 6

* * * * *

November 6th, 1994, marked Judy's seventieth birthday. Our children, Shula, Nachi and Ilan, threw a lavish party for this occasion, and combined it with my seventieth birthday, which had not been celebrated because of the *scud* attacks. The party was held at our home and attended by over fifty people whose messages and photos they presented to us in an album.

GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Some fifteen months later, in 1996, our children decided to celebrate our golden wedding anniversary in style.

First, all our children and grandchildren from Rochester, New York, from Efrat and Jerusalem, came for *Pesach* and for the *Seder* to our home. This was a unique event, long to be remembered.

Thereafter, they organised a festive dinner at the Blueweiss Hotel, Netanya, attended by one hundred and fifty guests from near and far. The presence of our dear friends and colleagues, *Rabbi* and Mrs. Eliezer Cohen, Netanya; *Rabbi* Prof. Yaacov and Zelda Newman; *Rabbi* Isaac and Rella Zwebner; *Rabbi* David and Sharon Rosen; Cantor Moshe and Cipora Stern, all of Jerusalem; and Cantor Philip and Doreen Badash of Sea Point, added special lustre to the celebration.

Menachem was the master of ceremonies. He elaborated with a thoughtful *Midrash* on the fifty blessed married years of these two survivors of the Holocaust - and of the remarkable contribution they had been privileged to make to the Jewish community in Czechoslovakia, Israel and South Africa.

***Rabbi* Isaac Zwebner, a devoted friend for the last forty years, spoke movingly about the Fogels, their dignity and sense of duty with which they enriched the South African Jewish community.**

Rabbi **Israel Meir Lau,** ***Chief Rabbi*** **of Israel, came specially from Jerusalem to bestow his blessings on the "bridal couple". In his eloquent address he reminisced on his visit to South Africa twelve years ago for the jubilee of B'nei Akiva, when he was the guest of the Fogels in Sea Point. There, he had witnessed** ***Rabbi*** **Fogel "in action" at the synagogue and in the community and Mrs. Fogel as the gracious** ***Rebbetzin*** **whose home and hospitality earned for them international repute. He also referred to his and the Netanya community's good fortune in having enjoyed for over five years** ***Rabbi*** **Fogel's exceptionally skilled and beautiful** ***Torah*** **reading at Netanya's Great Synagogue.**

Shula, our elder daughter, and Talya, our elder granddaughter, led the gathering in community singing with songs they had written for the occasion. Ilan made a delightful, witty speech, whilst our youngest granddaughter, Shlomit, sang two Hebrew songs enjoyed by all.

Unbeknown to us, our children had contacted many of our friends from all over the world in connection with this celebration. They had sent all sorts of letters, pictures, drawings, songs and memories of times spent together with us. All these were bound in a voluminous "Memory Book" which Shula, Nachi and Ilan then presented to us.

In my reply, I thanked the Almighty for having blessed us with this milestone in our married life and paid glowing tribute to Judy, the competent and gracious wife and ***Rabbanit*****, for her support and loyalty in all my endeavours. I thanked the speakers, friends and all the guests for honouring us with their presence and paid tribute to our children for arranging this celebration and for their thoughtfulness at all times.**

Judy and I declined to accept any gifts. In lieu of gifts, generous donations were made to the following charities: Laniado Hospital, Netanya; Bet Issie Shapiro, Raanana; Beth Protea, Herzlia; Yeshivat Chaye Moshe, Jerusalem; Telfed South African Zionist Federation, Tel Aviv; Keren Shem Tov, Netanya; Hadassa Hospital, Jerusalem; Hava'ad Lema'an Hechayal, Tel Aviv; Jewish National Fund, South Africa; Magen David Adom, Canada; Jewish Family Service and Beth Sholom Synagogue, Rochester, New York; and Highland House, Cape Town.

It was a successful, memorable evening enjoyed by all, not least of whom, the "*chatan*" and "*kallah*"!

Following are a few of the scores of congratulatory messages on our golden wedding anniversary:

MAZAL TOV TO OUR DEAREST FRIENDS,
JUDY & JOSSI.

We are very pleased to contribute some thoughts to your wedding anniversary, which is not an easy task as we went through so many episodes.

Jossi, we met in Petervasara forced labour camp on Oct. 1st, 1941. I am sure you will remember, as I was teaching our compatriots from Podkarpatska Rus, singing: 'Oj Szajles az utca, a honved utca', and we were together in Jolsva, Miskolc, Losonc, and finally sent to the Russian front.

The few of us who lived through those barbaric times, where 90% of our young comrades never returned. After that, we met in the Czech Legion, fighting against the German Army till the end of the war.

Our next and pleasant meeting was in Litomerice, in 1945, if our recollection is correct, on Rosh Hashana, and we introduced you to a beautiful girl who became your wife. BUT YOU NEVER PAID US SHADCHUNES GELT.

1949-1951, we met again in Israel, where we met a little girl, Shula.

Many years later, you came from South Africa to visit relatives in Toronto. We met at the cash in a liqueur store, where we bought wine for Friday kiddush at Helenka & David.

We stared at each other - amazed - and kissed each other (stopped the sales for twenty minutes), all the customers looking at us, wondering ???

Dearest friends,

We celebrated our 50th on May 24th, 1995, and looking back on all our suffering, it was well worth, when we see our wonderful children and grandchildren.

HOW LUCKY AND RICH WE BECAME,
TO HAVE SUCH A WONDERFUL FAMILY

Please attach our army photos sent to you, and wishing you continuous good health and nachas from your family, for many more years,

Fondly,

Luska & George Karlin
Montreal, Canada

* * * * *

MAZEL TOV, RABBI JOSEPH and Mrs. JUDY FOGEL

So many friends, from so many places, representing so many varied connections, will be furnishing their random recollections of Joseph Fogel and his wife, Judith - and their children, Shula, Menahem and Ilan - that we are perhaps making a bold claim that ours may be unique! Are there likely to be any others, however, from a one-time, long time President of a Reform congregation (Kedem, Tel Aviv) in Israel, from a couple who married in Temple Israel (reform) in South Africa?

Nevertheless, Marion and I have enjoyed a thirty year old association and friendship with Rabbi Fogel and his wife which is a tribute to their heartfelt "ahava for k'lal Yisroel".

Our first intimate encounter was on a sad occasion, the death of our beloved Opi Benno, Marion's wonderful father, Benno Kahn, who came with his loving and lovable wife, Freidl, and three young children, as refugees from Germany in the '30's. Like so many German refugees, Benno was a member of Etz Chayim, but hardly a committed one. Eric went as a Hashomer Hatzair halutz to Eretz Israel and Wally and Marion were active youth members of Rabbi Weiler's Reform movement in Johannesburg.

When he was needed, Rabbi Fogel proved to be a true comforter and, over many years, a true friend. In due course, we also joined his congregation, belonging both to Temple Israel and to Etz Chayim, and it was in Etz Chayim that our older son, Julian, was called up to his bar mitzvah.

We enjoyed countless regular and special services over which Rabbi Fogel officiated and were glad to be guests, with our children, in their home and in their succah in Berea. Love, warmth and fun permeated the atmosphere.

At an early stage in the conception of the beautiful Yad Vashem Memorial within Etz Chayim's precincts, I was privileged to share some thoughts on it with Rabbi Fogel, whose noble idea it was, and with Ernest Ullmann, who designed it so imaginatively. When it was consecrated, in July, 1970, we were already living in Israel.

Friendships born out of mutual respect and tolerance are those which are cherished most and we are very happy that now that they are resident in Netanya, Israel, we have resumed that friendship and personal relationship.

Harold and Marion Blumberg
Haifa, Israel

The friendship that Sharon and I share with Yossi and Judy goes back to the commencement of our married life together almost twenty-three years ago, when we arrived in a new land to assume a new role.

Setting up home in Berea, in new surroundings, we were soon and swiftly welcomed into the Fogel home with all the warmth and affection for which Judy and Yossi enjoy their deserved, international reputation.

Little did I imagine then, that this friendly, senior colleague and I would become partners - only a few years down the line - in ministering to the spiritual needs of the largest Jewish congregation in South Africa (if not of the whole Jewish world!).

At that time in Johannesburg, however, the Fogels friendship and hospitality integrated us into the local community and introduced us to many who have remained our very close friends, in particular, Jacky and Denis Diamond.

One of my vivid memories from that time is the birth of our first daughter, Yakarah, and of the kiddush-bracha we held in our home on the Shabbat of her naming, at which Yossi gave the d'var Torah.

Judy and Yossi sent us on our way when I was appointed Rabbi of Sea Point, not anticipating that in a couple of years, we would be sharing this responsibility. The years in Sea Point were a wonderful period in our lives, greatly enriched by Yossi and Judy whom we consider as family. Undoubtedly, it was this relationship that made our professional partnership as successful as it was.

I must also make mention of our beloved colleague and mentor of blessed memory, the late Rabbi Yaacov Duschinsky, with whom and under whose authority both Yossi and I served on the Cape Beth Din. This was a remarkably rich and rewarding experience in which I was able to learn from them both, in theory and in practice, for which I am eternally grateful.

On this special occasion in their lives, we wish Yossi and Judy very many years ahead together in good health and happiness, enjoying their children and grandchildren who testify to the love of the Creator, His Torah, People and Land, that they have demonstrated in their lives and continue to instill in others.

Sharon and Rabbi David Rosen
Jerusalem

* * * * *

THE FOGELS

קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה

When the Rabbi and Judy came to Sea Point, our lives underwent a transformation, and we remain Fogel-lovers to this very day.

From the start, they joined our Brocha Club, and what a contribution they made to it! Always hospitable, generous, good and warm friends, encouraging and inspiring us, they provided us with memorable times, in Sea Point and in Israel, that we shall cherish to the end of our days.

What wonderful kiddush-brachot we enjoyed with them at their home and ours. And Rabbi was always ready with a d'var Torah, with a poignant message, full of learning, wisdom and an insatiable love for Israel. No shaliach, specially delegated to promote Israel, can match the Rabbi and Judy in their obvious and fervent attachment to the Holy Land.

And how can we forget the songs the Rabbi taught us. 'Because of my brothers and friends ...' automatically comes to mind whenever our group recalls our happy times with the Fogels, and this song still serves as our toast to them.

Yossi and Judy, we really do love you.

Solly and Lily Kessler and family
Sea Point, South Africa

* * * * *

The Rochester Connection
wishes Judy and Yossi
a hearfelt
MAZEL TOV
on this wonderful occasion.

Thank you for sharing your family with us!
Through the Meyerowitzes we have all become mishpacha ,
and although we are far away
your wonderful simcha
is being remembered and celebrated
in Rochester ... your home away from home.

We are honoured to know the Fogels
and your incredible personal history,
only making this milestone that much more significant .

With all our respect and love
we wish you
a joyous anniversary
and look forward to a continued celebration together!

Isobel, Jennie, Talli and Jonah Goldman
Ruth Goldberg
Rochester, New York

* * * * *

Dear Rabbi and Mrs. Fogel,

MAZAL TOV to you both on achieving your fiftieth wedding anniversary. 50 years ago, when you got married, did you anticipate that things would turn out the way they have?

My memories of the two of you go back to your coming to Etz Chayim shul. My earliest memory of you, Rabbi Fogel, is that you played soccer with the boys! I had never known a Rabbi who could be so human. I remember my wonder and my father's pleasure in that action.

Chiefly, Rabbi Fogel, I remember you as my teacher for four years. I loved that afternoon class. I had you to myself and cherished the time and the learning and the stimulation.

Today, I look back with admiration and respect at your patience and your perseverance. Cheder was from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Then you taught me from 5 p.m. to 5.30 or 5.45 p.m. when Mincha began. I am sure that there were times that you would have loved a break.

I also remember with pleasure listening to your speeches every Shabbos and Yom Tov and for a long while commenting to you 'like speechy'. I remember the seuda shlishit every Shabbos, your good humour, your smiles, your stories, your pleasurable teaching, always your warmth.

Mrs. Fogel, I associate you with 38 York Street. The lovely smells in your home, especially on Yom Tovim. Always eating at you at least once on Succoth because we never built a succah. Bringing you kitkah and cakes from my mother, and always your appreciation.

I remember you dieting, and Rabbi Fogel laughing indulgently, saying: 'I love her through thick and thin.' Do you remember sewing for me? I got an 'A' for the blouse (?) dress (?) you made in my name - the only 'A' I ever got for sewing!

I remember you both particularly when my father died. My mother sent her maid to get you, Rabbi Fogel, and you, Mrs. Fogel, kept sending food. I associate you both with nurturance, physical, emotional, spiritual.

I remember other sad times. Mrs. Fogel, I remember your being ill. I remember especially Nachi's pain at your struggle to walk. I remember Ilan as a baby. On Pesach, wanting, if not toasted cheese, then French toast. And Shula, skipping Form 3/4. Studying and eating with Naomi Shapiro. Always Shula's excellent results. Her sociable nature. And more recently, having lunch with you two and Shula and your Ilan and my Ilan, in Rochester.

I remember your house always being full of people. Rabbi Duschinsky. The Zwebners. Eva Emmanuel. Esther Engel. Anita Orelowitz. Avi Waks. You were both always so warm, so hospitable, so generous, so welcoming, so wonderful.

As we look back on those years, I wish you to feel the warmth you always radiated out. May your years ahead together be filled with the same warmth and good cheer. May you both have health and contentment together bis zu 120.

MAZAL TOV & love,
Helen
Helen Metz
Hamilton, Canada

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SANZ MEDICAL CENTER - LANIADO HOSPITAL
KIRYAT SANZ, NETANYA

Dear Rabbi & Mrs. Fogel,

The Board of Trustees wishes to recognize the many years of untiring effort which you have dedicated to our hospital.

Even though you are now unable to travel the distance, we want you to know how much we appreciate what you have done for us in South Africa and also what you have donated personally to Laniado. We are sure that we will continue to have a place in your hearts 120 עד.

May I, at this time, take the opportunity to congratulate you on reaching your 50th wedding anniversary. My wife and I have also been married for 50 years so I know what a wonderful experience that can be. I think, Rabbi Fogel, that we both did extremely well with our choice of wives (and maybe they didn't do so badly either!). May you continue together in good health for many more years to come.

Our best wishes for a חג כשר ושמח *and I hope that you and your family will enjoy the enclosed Haggadah.*

Very sincerely yours
SANZ MEDICAL CENTER
S. Freedman
for Rabbi Meier S. Eisemann

NB: Dictated before Rabbi Eisemann left for the States.



With our children. (from left to right):
Michele, Menachem, Ilan,
Cyril and Shula.



Israel's Chief Rabbi ,Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, addresses the gathering at our Golden Wedding Celebration .



Surrounding me are: (l.):
Rabbi Prof. J. Newman and Rabbi David Rosen ,
both now of Jerusalem , formerly also Rabbis
of the Green & Sea Point Hebrew Congregation,
Cape Town , South Africa .



Rabbi E.Cohen, of the Agudat Achim Congregation in Netanya exchanges greetings with Rabbi I. Zwebner, now living in Jerusalem .



With my only living sister, Cilka,
at our Golden Wedding Celebration



Our family, our children ,
their spouses and our grandchildren,
in our home , in Netanya .



Judy and I
at our Golden Wedding Celebration
in Netanya ,April '96



Surrounding us are :
(l.to r.) Rabbanit Rella Zwebner, Cipora and Cantor Moshe Stern , and Rabbi Isaac Zwebner , all now of Jerusalem, formerly of Johannesburg,South Africa



(l. to r.) Wolfie and Greta Berkman , Jerusalem , Cantor Philip and Doreen Badash , Sea Point and Inge Sachs , Jerusalem, formerly of Sea Point.



Judy with Efraim and Gitta Gruenfeld our good friends and neighbours in Ramat Pinkas since 1949 !



Judy with (l. to r.) Joyce Levinson, Marion and Harold Blumberg, the editor of this memoir, at our Golden Wedding Celebration .



With Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Israel Meir Lau and our good friend and neighbour Mr Adi Fuchs at our Golden Wedding Celebration

TO MY MOTHER

Your silent, still slippers
Found resting place
At my bedside;
How I watched your feet
Always in haste
To aid, to ease, to heal;
As in a dance
That lovely rhythmic pattern
I can find only
In the ever-moving waves
Of a calm sea
That fascinate and spell
Ease and peace.
The ones in need
Know you --

Mother, you just give
And give -
The hidden tear no one
Could conceal in front of you:
You name no price
For the pearls
You reveal;
You share your gifts
So free --
You feel the hurts.
Like Mother Earth
With your Motherly Love
You care
And relieve.

But, alas!
Your wounds I have not
Learned how to heal.
I'm sure.

You
Still serve, relieve,
And have the power
To love and teach.

My Love of Truth
And Beauty
I owe to you.
In thanks and love
I bend my knee.

Nachi
6.11.69

* * * * *

I must admit that even now, and whenever I read this poem, my tears flow freely in gratitude for having been blessed with such an outstanding, compassionate son.

* * * * *

As to my dear wife Judy, I say in the words of *Rabbi* Akiva about his beloved wife, Rahel (*Ketuboth*, 63 A):

> ***"Whatever I have become or have been able to impart to you, - is hers!"***



Judy .

Judy and I feel greatly blessed by G-d's grace and are indebted to Him forever: for our lifespan; our wonderful children; talented grandchildren; our numerous friends; for the privilege of living in Eretz Yisrael; and of being in His service. Hence it is our ardent prayer:

> *"On High, may merit be pleaded upon us, to assure the contentment and peacefulness of our home. May we receive a blessing from Hashem and kindness from the G-d of our salvation, and find favour and good understanding in the eyes of G-d and men."*

E R R A T A

Due to regrettable human error, the undermentioned pages are to be corrected thus:

Page 36 *ending with*: **Sudetenland was ceded and incorporated in**
should continue **the German Reich. In March 1938, the Czech Government was induced to "seek German military protection" from**

Page 39 *should commence*: **My father passed away on January 1st, 1940 - Teveth 20, 5700 at 1.30 p.m. (*when my watch stopped*), in the presence of his family, the**

Page 43 *should commence*: **On our "home front", in the towns and villages, the situation became increasingly grave. Several Jewish**

Page 44 *ending with*: **We had to commence work**
should continue: **at 6 a.m. Some of us rose an hour earlier, to wash, put on *tefillin*, and to recite the Morning Service.**

Page 46 *end with*: **until the twenty-five lashes had been**
should continue: **administered, with the lieutenant and the whole company looking on.**

Page 99 *to be replaced with the enclosed page* **99**

Page 101 *to be replaced with the enclosed page* **101**