The Backbone of Jewish-German Relations

By Peter Wittig

Fifteen thousand survivors – that is all that was left of the Jewish community in Germany in May 1945. A terrible figure, which, however, does not even come close to expressing the grim atrocities and barbaric brutality of the Holocaust; it does not even come close to capturing the millions of crimes committed by ordinary Germans during the Nazi reign of terror. The 12 years that encompassed this darkest chapter in our shared history have since shaped the centuries-old German-Jewish relations.

Against this backdrop, it is something of a miracle that German-Jewish relations have grown and flourished in the ensuing years: Berlin is today home to one of the most dynamic Jewish communities in the world and has become one of the most desirable places to live for young Israelis. Indeed, Germany as a whole is experiencing a renaissance in Jewish life – with a strong community organization, the Central Council of Jews in Germany, representatives from various Jewish denominations live here and actively participate in public life.

Past and present of German-Jewish relations bring special responsibility – a special responsibility for Jewish life and the State of Israel. This responsibility forms a cornerstone of our foreign policy. It is central to our cultural remembrance and reconciliation. And it remains a focal point of German historical and civic education. Anti-Semitism, however, has not been eradicated either with the fall of the Nazi regime or in recent years. On the contrary, resentment and violence against Jews are on the rise again. That is why we need to remain vigilant and actively fight against all types of anti-Semitism; we need to engage on a people-to-people level, in an exchange between Jews and non-Jews – so as to foster greater understanding of Jewish life.

I therefore welcome the extraordinarily lively and intensive exchanges, not only on the political level but also in the spheres of business, academia, culture, and civil society, which are the backbone of German-Jewish relations today. Part of my work here, too, in the United States is to foster deeper relations to the Jewish community. Our cooperation and joint events with the Holocaust Museum and various Jewish organizations are highlights for my wife and me. The recent celebration of 50 years of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel was one particularly important and moving event for me.

One central messenger for new Jewish life is the Jewish Voice from Germany. I commend this bridge between Germany and Jews all over the world for getting the message out through this unique publication. The projects and initiatives portrayed not only lead to a better understanding of Jewish life in today’s Germany but will also spark stronger interest around the world in the thriving Jewish community and culture in my home country.

Bridge over Troubled Water

For a long time after the Shoah, it looked as if the Nazis had at least achieved one lasting success: the extinction of the Jewish community in Germany. After 1945, only several thousand Jews lived in German cities, as discreetly as possible. Trapped in the ghetto of their fears. The Germans looked upon these Jews as mere survivors.

Yet, even before Germany’s reunification in 1990, a German-Jewish renaissance emerged. A new, independent German-Jewish culture and literature developed. And the German majority recognized that the Judaism they found in their midst was and is more than just a relic from the past. German Jewry represents a bridge between a great past and a promising future. This supplement aims to contribute to mutual understanding. We thank the Federal Foreign Office for its generous support.
Remembrance and Hope
A journey of Boston rabbis to Germany

By Ralf Horlemann

W e have seen the horrors of the past, the Jews of the present and the hope for the future. This account of David Lerner, rabbi at Temple Emunah in Lexington, MA, sums up perfectly both the aspirations and the results of this visit. He was one of twelve rabbis from the greater Boston area – Orthodox, Conservative and Reform; young and old; men and women – who went on a one-week trip to Munich and Berlin in July of this year to see and hear for themselves about the culture of remembrance as well as Jewish life in Germany.

When I took the initiative for this visit, I was all but certain how the response would be by the rabbis, some of whom had never visited Germany before, one being a child Holocaust survivor. Too present seemed the legacy of the Shoah, too disturbing the fact that anti-Semitism and xenophobia are not only a recurring but growing phenomenon across Europe, also in Germany. On the other hand, Germany’s dedicated efforts to face its own history, the thriving Jewish communities in Germany in recent years and Germany’s struggle with migration, and its role as a safe haven for refugees were convincing arguments to embark on this exciting journey.

“I went as a survivor, as a reminder to Germany of what it had wrought, and found that it didn’t need any reminders.” For Joseph Polak, rabbi at the Rabbinical Court of Massachusetts, as for all the other rabbis in the group, this journey was about building a bridge between the horrors of the past and hopes for a common future. Remembrance and hope was its motto, and it started with a visit to the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, where more than 40,000 Jews were killed and from where tens of thousands were deported to extermination camps and certain death. 800,000 visitors come to the memorial site every year, half of them youths from schools and universities from Germany and around the world. Just as education on the Holocaust is an integral part of the curriculum in German schools, a visit to a concentration camp is part of this education.

Besides other major memorial sites like the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe or the Jewish Museum, both in Berlin, the group could also witness how the culture of remembrance is deeply rooted in everyday life of Germans. “Stolpersteine”, which means “stumbling stones”, are a perfect example. These commemorative brass plaques, which are placed in the pavement in front of the last address of choice of victims of National Socialism, make passers-by stumble – literally and emotionally. There are now over 6,500 Stolpersteine in Berlin alone, where we saw many of them.

In Munich as well as in Berlin, the rabbis were struck by the vitality and size of the Jewish communities. Today, over 200,000 Jews call Germany their home. This number would not have been reached without the Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union starting in 1990. This was the beginning of a major influx. Until 2010, 212,000 people have come to Germany. Many of them went on to other countries like Israel or the United States, but many stayed. In recent years, an estimated 50,000 Jews – mostly younger people and families – have come from Israel to settle in Germany, about half of them in Berlin.

Jewish communities thrive in more than 100 German towns and cities. Munich is one of them, with more than 9,000 members of the Jewish community. Young and old; men and women; religious and secular; Jews and Germans, even and centers of Judaic studies including rabbinic training. While we visited the great city of Berlin – in Mitte, the Bavarian Quarter and many other places – we realized that it has once again become very common to hear Hebrew spoken in Berlin.

“I went to see Germany’s struggle with its present; its refugees, its role as a sanctuary for people who are lost politically and existentially, and I was deeply moved,” said one participant. Germany was the destination of choice for more than one million refugees last year, posing enormous challenges to the government, but also to society as a whole. And it’s the challenge and support of civil society that has made a real difference in society.

When we returned to Boston after one week of extensive traveling and intensive discussions, the rabbis realized that there is indeed a real opportunity to build this bridge between remembrance and hope. And between Germans and the Jewish community. If we face the legacy of the past and pass on the memory to future generations, there is hope that we can have a future together, in friendship and peace.

Ralf Horlemann is Consul General of Germany to the New England States in Boston.
By Franziska Knupper

Muhammad Ali had many faces. Professional boxer and American Olympian. Black rights activist, admirer as well as opponent of the Islamic Revolution. Humanitarian, rapper, poet, writer. Member of the Nation of Islam and devout Muslim. "I am a Muslim. God put me in 1977 during an interview in the United Kingdom. As one of the most celebrated, most versatile sports figures of the 20th century, Ali is remembered for many things, including his efforts as a social activist. Among his greatest philanthropic accomplishments was the foundation of the multicultural Muhammad Ali Center, a charity fund and museum devoted to humanitarian projects the sportsman carried out during his lifetime. Since 2013, the fund awards and celebrates social contributions from around the world that have proven to pay tribute to Ali's values and actions. During an annual awards ceremony, hosted in Ali's hometown Louisville in Kentucky, the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Awards publicly recognize outstanding individuals who pass on and keep the athlete's legacy alive.

This year, Navonel Glick, chief operating officer of the Israeli non-governmental organization IsraAID, has been selected to receive the praise at the center's recent annual gala dinner. Glick was among five other young professionals, age thirty and under, who have been serving as advocates for positive change in the world and as role models that might ultimately transform communities for the better. The six winners are supposed to embody Muhammad Ali's six core principles of Confidence, Conviction, Dedication, Giving, Respect, and Spirituality.

Global disaster-response missions

Prior to his current role, Glick served as IsraAID’s programs director, leading disaster-response missions across the world, including the Philippines, Typhoon Haiyan, Sierra Leone after the Ebola outbreak, and Northern Iraq since the emergence of the Islamic State. IsraAID's programs director, leading disaster-response missions across the world, including the Philippines, Typhoon Haiyan, Sierra Leone after the Ebola outbreak, and Northern Iraq since the emergence of the Islamic State.

"We have not had any negative experience assisting refugees of Muslim belief while being Israelis," says Noam-Alon, Media Director and Emergency Team Leader at IsraAID. In 2009 alone, more than one million asylum seekers made the journey from war and starvation seeking refuge in Germany. The vast majority arrived from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, with 80% of them under the age of 35 and with about one in five of them children. "This is a massive challenge for the German government and society to address," continues Noam Alon, IsraAID has thus agreed to send professional support. A lot of the people we chose are Arabic native speakers who are desperately needed to fill the current gap of misinformation and to assure efficient bureaucratic processes."

Relief in Germany's refugee crisis

In 2015, IsraAID responded to the request of the German government by deploying a team of Arabic and English speaking psychosocial specialists to help support the refugee resettlement. In cooperation with representatives of both the local government and the Federal Ministry of Health, local NGOs, Muslim and Jewish community organizations, the organisation quickly established a net-work of well-trained professionals and volunteers. "The NGO's main concern is both psychological first aid for asylum seekers as well as stress management training and peer supervision for aid workers," says Noam-Alon. Since April 2016, IsraAID has been instructing aid workers and volunteers with their Mobile Specialist Trauma Unit. Psychologists have been visiting refugee shelters in Berlin and Hanover and reporting to the German government and to local NGOs specialised in mental health. Additionally, IsraAID offers tools to combat gender-based violence for local volunteers, counselors, and other key stakeholders in order to address issues of cultural differences and mistreatment in refugee camps. Right now, IsraAID's members are preparing long-term sustainable support for ten different shelters all over Germany, focusing on hot spots, such as Berlin, Frankfurt, and Brandenburg with a total of 9,000 refugees.

The fact that a high amount of refugees are of Muslim faith apparently is of no concern, according to Noam-Alon: "We have not had any negative experience assisting refugees of Muslim belief while being an Israeli NGO. Or let me put it this way: If you are being pulled off a boat after several hours on the ocean and in constant fear of death, you do not care if the person carrying you is a Jew or a Muslim." Noam-Alon believes that IsraAID's involvement in the refugee crisis in Germany could possibly facilitate peace processes among the nations and faiths. According to the NGO's official statement, it could become "a game changer and serve as a key component in building trust and relations between Jews, Muslims, and Christians, Israelis, Germans, and Syrians, and by doing so reduce both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia." Probably just like Muhammad Ali would have wanted it. Or as he once said: "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth."
TRADE RELATIONS

From Rejection to Partnership – Hidden Champions for Israel
Chamber of Commerce and Economic Association as matchmakers

By Grisha Alroi-Arloser

Seen from a historical perspective, half a century is but the blinking of an eye – especially in the context of German-Jewish history, which spans two millennia. The bonds between Germans and Jews are so strong that they are not forgotten, but neither are the unspeakable crimes of the Shoah. Yet the pain ran so deep that diplomatic relations between the two countries were not restored until 1965. By that time, economic relations between West Germany and Israel were established, and the new Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), founded in 1948, and the new Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), founded in 1949, were, to begin with, out of the question.

A turning point came in 1952 with the reparations agreement signed in Luxembourg between West Germany, Israel and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. The agreement initiated some measure of material restitution and compensation for the material losses incurred by Jews under Nazi domination. Germany provided Israel with goods worth billions to improve its infrastructure. Israel upgraded its merchant navy, its railway, and other aspects of its infrastructure with high-quality German equipment and machinery. This was also a stimulus program for the German industry, because all those items would need spare parts and would eventually have to be replaced.

Thirteen years after the Luxembourg Agreement, the conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany was established in 1969. By that time, economic ties between the two countries were already flourishing. (jvg)

The key development in the first two decades of the past half century was the overcoming of barriers for Israeli agricultural exports, foodstuffs, plastics and textiles. The next two decades saw increasing interest in the growing Israeli market on the part of German companies such as Siemens, Volkswagen, Henkel and Daimler – developments in which the chamber was closely involved.

Over the past decade the chamber – also known as AHK Israel – has become increasingly involved in high-tech industries and technology transfer and has become a springboard for German industry in the start-up nation Israel. What fascinates official delegations and entrepreneurs about Israel nowadays is its high-tech, entrepreneurial spirit and modes of technology transfer, as well as the role of the military; they are interested in ways to co-operate and share in the astounding developments underway in Israel’s Silicon Wadi.

Mutual strategic investment

Against the backdrop of a decline in exports from Israel to Europe and in particular to Germany, co-operation in research and development and mutual strategic investment are of particular long-term importance. Many German technology scouts are out and about in Israel these days, looking for breakthrough technologies for their companies back in Germany. They are frequent guests at incubators, accelerators, joint workspaces, venture capital funds, university technology transfer offices, meet-ups, start-ups, and grown-ups, and have become an integral part of the system. The scouts represent not only pure tech firms such as SAP, Deutsche Telekom and Bosch, but also and increasingly finance, insurance and energy companies looking for new business models, new ways to work with big data, alternative models for enhancing customer loyalty, as well as solutions to urgent cybersecurity issues.

Our chamber has created a range of platforms to enable and enhance this exchange – in biosciences, software and hardware, and the potential to be found in Israel, help them identify possible partners, find the right technology, and develop the best business model.

The central task of the next decade will be to bring together German hidden champions and Israeli innovators. The range of themes is growing all the time: machine learning and machine vision, the internet of things, autonomous robots, big data analytics, simulation and augmented reality – topics that together fall under the heading of Industry 4.0.

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Train Made in Germany, 1956

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Identifying potential partners

The chamber still has a lot to do. While Germany’s Fortune 500 companies are already engaged in Israel and are in regular contact with our chamber, small and medium-sized firms need more assistance. The chamber can alert them to the potential to be found in Israel, help there is more: autonomous driving, unmanned vehicles, and the corresponding new models of mobility are also on the agenda, as are developments in the management of resources, particularly water and energy, that are urgently needed in the face of climate change.

At the same time, as a bi-national bilateral chamber, we also support Israeli firms seeking German business partners, helping them to overcome cultural barriers and find their way into the German market, the most important single market in Europe.

With its command of the German and Hebrew languages, intimate knowledge of the business communities and cultures in both countries, the German-Israeli Chamber of Industry and Commerce has become an indispensable facilitator and bridge-builder – bringing together entrepreneurs and matching ideas and individual businesses in such a way that one plus one yields much more than two.

Grisha Alroi-Arloser has been the managing director of the German-Israeli Chamber of Industry and Commerce (AHK Israel) since 2008 and has headed the German-Israeli Economic Association since 2002.
EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT GERMANY

How do young people in Germany spend their free time? What topics are important in German politics? How does the university system work? Find out more.

facts-about-germany.de/young-people

Handbook • Website • E-paper • E-book • Facts for young adults
Ambassadors of Diversity
New German-Israeli volunteer service

By Elena Witteck

When spring arrived Orel noticed a change in Germans’ behavior. Suddenly they smiled more, engaged in chance conversations, and were out on the streets more. Frankfurt became louder and livelier. Orel was fascinated, not being familiar with such mood changes from Israel: it’s astonishing how the weather can influence people’s love of life.

Orel had benefited from the third generation of the new German-Israeli Volunteer Service (DIFD) to work for a social and a Jewish organization in Frankfurt. She is particularly grateful for the first year of the program, which was launched in May 2015 to mark the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany. With this initiative the Federal Government aims to encourage above all young people from Israel to live in Germany for a time. There were ten participants in the first year. They worked for six months or a year in place-ments at charitable institutions in Germany and at the Federal Ministry for Education and Research. The Welfare in Germany (ZWST) on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Sen-ate Citizens, Women and Youth. There is a long tradition of German volunteering in Israel,” says Laura Cazes, who coordinates the program for the ZWST. “Until now we didn’t have a similar structure for volunteers from Israel."

Third generation

Diplomatically, the two countries have close relations and social exchange has also been promoted for some time. But as Federal President Joachim Gauck emphasized in his speech in May 2015 in Berlin at a ceremony marking the 50th anniversary, there is still scope for further involvement. He cited a study by the Bertelsmann Foundation which found that reservations had become ce-mented in Germany as a result of percep-tions of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian territories.

That is the starting point for the volun-teer program, which also sends Germans to Israel: personal and cultural exchange is intended to promote understanding and tolerance - across religious divides. Young people of all faiths from both countries can take part. The ZWST regards them as ambassadors. What is more, the program is also in keeping with the zeitgeist: young people from Israel see Germany as cool. The capital in particular, Berlin, consid-ered as the centre for creativity, has de veloped a magnetic attraction for Israelis turned to Israel. “I wanted to complete a circle by daring to come here,” she says. Orel opted for volunteer work in Frank-furt because she was curious to know whether the connection with the Ger-mans that is felt in Israel also exists in the opposite direction. And it is. Orel quickly found two language tandem partners for her German and Hebrew. Now the 23-year-old is happy to have been placed in Frankfurt, where she shares a flat with other young people and where her country of origin in terests people. She does admit however, that she “initially wanted to go to Berlin.” When she is not looking after children in a Jewish institution, Orel works in an art studio for people with disabilities. “Every-where there speaks German. I’m always surprised that I manage to have conver-sations with them.” Because of the new language, it took some time for her to get used to things. There were also the many cultural peculiarities of the Germans: ex-pected polite phrases, everyday rituals like waste separation, and a kind of demon-strative silence in lifts. Today, Orel feels at home in Frankfurt: “Because it is tolerant. Everyone can be as they are.”

The ZWST, which has contacts with large German charitable organizations because of its focus on youth and social work, places 18- to 27-year-old volunteers in various organizations, depending on their interests: all-day schools and youth education centers, Jewish communities, and social facilities. Many of the partici-pants work with refugees. Thanks to the new challenges, their placement is more relevant and interesting. Orel hopes that future volun-teers will also have perfect a stay as the one she had in Frankfurt.

Rising to the challenge

Roman belongs to the small group of ger mans who have so far been in Israel with the new DIFD. He completed a six-month care placement there in the context of his medical studies. The 19-year-old has been back in Munich since the end of March. At first, things in Jerusa lem were not easy for him: “Suddenly you are totally realized this meant rising to the chal-lenge. People’s mentality, open-mindedness, and everyday optimism impressed Roman greatly. In Israel the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs is responsible for the volunteers and also selects the participants for the visit to Germany.

In the first year, fewer Israeli volun-teers than planned came to Germany, so the ZWST aims to underscore the socio-political relevance of the ex-change even more. “Particularly now, when there is a tangible shift to the right among Germans, our volunteer service can achieve a lot,” says Laura Cazes. The participants have succeeded in highlighting the diversity in Israeli society: Druze and Muslim-Arab, sec-tural and traditional Israelis have been involved. In the second year, about 40 participants should be coming to Ger many. Orel hopes that future volun-teers will have as perfect a stay as the one she had in Frankfurt.

By Hannah Thiel

The long tradition of patronage is embedded, not being familiar with such mood changes from Israel: it’s astonishing how the weather can influence people’s love of life.

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Gilad Hochman was awarded the Israeli Prime Minister’s Prize for Composition – honoring a “fascinating, original and colorful creator”. In your early twenties, where do you go from there? “It was wonderful to win the award – but also a little tricky”, remembers Hochman. “You know – as does the music landscape in the country – that you are on a good level!”, as he charmingly puts it. Hochman decided to leave the path mapped out for him in Israel. “I needed a different perspective so I thought it would be best to go abroad for a while.” He turned down the offer of doing an American east-coast Ph.D. – and went to “check out Berlin instead”. What he found was a “spaceship, a bit like Tel Aviv – constantly work in progress and very different from the rest of the country”. Obviously Hochman wanted to learn more about German culture – “the culture that made such tremendous contributions to classical music and at the same time the culture that brought about such utter and ruthless destruction”.

It seems that this tension, this “dissonance”, as the composer calls it, which he experiences in Berlin serves as an inspiration. “The scope of Hochman’s work is impressive: chamber music, pieces for solo instruments like piano, (‘Pia-No!’) marimba (‘Berlin Beat’) or saxophone (‘90 Seconds’), vocal music (‘Night Winds’ for soprano), to name a few, and pieces for symphony orchestra like ‘Suspended Reality’, a haunting exploration of the feeling of nothingness and utter stillness.

“Every time I start a new piece, I start from zero. I feel as if I have never composed anything before”, he says. Steeped in Jewish tradition, Gilad Hochman also takes Biblical themes like the binding of Isaac (‘Akeda’ for solo viola) or the Song of Songs (‘Whom my Soul Loveth’) as a point of departure. “I am searching all the time. I dig deep inside of me to discover whatever there is, try to make it real and express it through my music.”

“I know that a piece works the moment when there is no sound, silence. When there is sound, people are with it, listening, some fall asleep – whichever way people absorb the music is fine by me – but the moment the music stops, usually at the end of the piece, but sometimes during the piece itself, there is this one instance of quiet inter-subjective experience … almost like in a synagogue.” After all, says Hochman, music is the closest thing to God.

*CONTINUED FROM PAGE VI*
SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION

The Transformation of German Jewry

With a new generation diversity unfolds

By Hartmut Bomhoff

Earlier this fall, the German media called to mind that ten years ago, for the first time after the Shoah, rabbis were ordained in Germany. The founders of Abraham Geiger College in 1999, the first rabbinical seminary in postwar Germany, were indeed a historical milestone. Together with the School of Jewish Theology and the Women’s College of Jewish Theology, the Abraham Geiger College in 1999, “made in Germany” have become the symbol of a significant revival of Jewish life. “Today, rabbis from all three large denominations of Judaism are trained again in Potsdam and Berlin,” explains Rabbi Walter Homolka, rector of Abraham Geiger College. “Thus we could successfully reconnect with the infrastructure of prewar Germany. A vision has come true.” These achievements, however, would not have been possible without the commitment of the federal government and German society at large.

With 28,000 affiliated members in 1990, the ageing German Jewish community faced an uncertain future. Then, the government of unified Germany opened its borders to Jews from the states of the Former Soviet Union. From 1991 to 2005, approximately 220,000 immigrants of Jewish origin (including a huge number of non-halachic Jews) were distributed all over the country according to a quota system. In 2005, a more restrictive immigration policy was designed in cooperation with the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Half of the immigrants were to be better managed the integration of individuals into the Jewish community. By that time, many small and medium-sized communities had already massively grown their membership rosters.

Funding to restore the community

Intended as the unified political voice for all Jews in Germany, the Central Council of Jews in Germany was established in 1990. It was while the approximately 15,000 Jews who had survived WWII were establishing Orthodoxy as the national congregational norm. The rise of progressive Judaism – once as part of a ruling on state funding of religious organizations, the Federal Constitutional Court conferred the responsibility for the distribution of public subsidies to religious organizations on the federal states, thus weakening the role of umbrella organizations in faith communities.

In addition to the public funds which come from a religious tax collected by the federal states, or Länder, Jewish communities throughout Germany rely heavily on subsidies for religious and other needs. Since 2005, a cooperation agreement between the federal government and the Central Council of Jews provides for supplementation of state subsidies for religious and other needs.

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In 2010, Alina Treiger was the first woman rabbi to be ordained in Germany for 75 years.