

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/AUNC_PED.2019.008

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**THE MAGAZINE “CHIDUSZ”
AS AN EXEMPLIFICATION OF THE POTENTIAL
OF THE YOUNG GENERATION
OF JEWS AND THEIR PUBLIC ACTIVITY**

ABSTRACT:

The article analyses the content of the Jewish magazine “Chidusz”. The journal was created from the transformation of the Jewish religious community the information bulletin of the Jewish religious community in Wrocław and has become one of the most recognised Jewish magazines within the Polish publishing market. The aim of the analysis was, inter alia, to determine the dominant contexts, whether they have a didactic and educational character, and whether they can constitute a valuable source of information for people with Jewish roots. To what extent does “Chidusz” respond to the needs of the young Polish Jewish community? In particular, will young readers obtain information and tips on how to build their Jewish cultural identity, as well as creating a family and bringing up children according to the model of Jewish tradition?

Key words: young Jews, Jewish magazines, “Chidusz. Jewish Magazine”, social and cultural identity, upbringing

STRESZCZENIE:

W artykule podjęto analizę treści magazynu żydowskiego „Chidusz”. Czasopismo powstało z przekształcenia biuletynu informacyjnego Żydowskiej Gminy Wyznaniowej we Wrocławiu i stało się jednym z najbardziej rozpoznawalnych magazynów żydowskich na rynku wydawniczym w Polsce. Celem podjętej analizy było między innymi ustalenie, jakie treści w nim dominują, czy mają one charakter dydaktyczno-wychowawczy, czy mogą stanowić cenne źródło informacji dla osób posiadających żydowskie korzenie. W jakim zakresie „Chidusz” odpowiada na zapotrzebowanie młodego środowiska polskich Żydów? W szczególności, czy młodzi czytelnicy uzyskują informacje i wskazówki na temat budowania swojej żydowskiej tożsamości kulturowej, jak również tworzenia rodziny i wychowania dzieci wedle modelu tradycji żydowskiej?

Słowa kluczowe: młodzi Żydzi, czasopisma żydowskie, „Chidusz. Pismo Żydowskie”, tożsamość społeczna i kulturowa, wychowanie

Introduction

For the author of this article, the development of the old and new media of this minority within the Jewish community deserves scientific attention. Jews in Poland successfully use the Internet to reach the widest possible audience. There are also websites for the most important Jewish foundations and associations operating in our country, for instance the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, the Jewish Forum Foundation, the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ), the Holocaust Children Foundation, the Association of Jewish Veterans and the Victims of Persecution during World War II, the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) in Poland, and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

Three elementary schools in Wrocław – Etz Chaim, Szalom Alejchem and Tikkun Olam – as well as Jewish kindergartens, sunday schools and youth clubs in Łódź, Kraków, and Warsaw also have attractive websites and Facebook profiles; furthermore, the Lauder-Morasha School in Warsaw operates as an e-school to educate online children

from all over the country. Lauder E-School offers classes in Jewish culture and Hebrew.

The Jewish community also boasts a diverse range of press and these resources are made available to the members and other readers via free social networking websites. In this context, it is interesting how the old media (especially the press) has identified a new social space and adapted to unavoidable societal changes. Here, the focus is on one of the most popular titles in the contemporary Jewish minority press in Poland, the “Chidusz” magazine, as it is an interesting voice of the young generation; on the one hand, it exemplifies how titles have adjusted to the new realities (through a wealth of topics for a demanding recipient and transforming to e-press via the Internet), and on the other hand is an important method of bringing together the young generation of Wrocław Jews.

As in other Polish cities, young people predominantly come from mixed families. Jewish traditions were not continued in the parental generation, which created a generation gap. Fortunately, now they can freely develop their identity through many Jewish social institutions and schools. The issue of modern family life is at the centre of my research interests, hence the search for helpful sources for this generation, outside the institutional background, is crucial.

In particular, this article concentrates on narratives about family life in the Jewish press. I ask whether the magazine “Chidusz” provides readers with family life patterns, Jewish family ideals and parental responsibilities. Will the reader find the rules that would help them set up a family? Does the magazine consider young Jewish families?

Chidusz: a youth monthly

The Jewish community of Wrocław is the second largest Jewish community in Poland (after Warsaw). The centre of life for the Jewish minority and the symbol of the rebirth of the Wrocław community is the White Stork Synagogue. Prior to its replacement by the magazine in 2013, the Religious Community issued a bulletin entitled “Chidusz. Magazyn Żydowski” [*Chidusz. Jewish Magazine*]. In May 2015, the Chief

Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, with the support of the ZGWŻ authorities, established the Jewish Foundation ‘Chidusz’ – the legal pillar of the magazine since January 2016¹.

The magazine was created by a group of Jewish intellectuals² specifically for a young audience, 20–30 or maybe 40 year olds, as they are the representatives of the third Jewish generation in Poland. “Chidusz” is yet another important link between young people of Jewish origin and Jewish identity, and indeed may be setting trends and paths for the Jewish people in Poland today.

The journal’s trademarks are an attractive graphic design, a cover that always attracts attention, neat appearance and regular issues³. The aim of the magazine is to reach the widest possible audience via Facebook and selected open-access articles and English-language issues summarising publishing cycles (12 carefully selected texts). Furthermore, the printed version can be subscribed to online and ongoing issues can be purchased in Empik chain stores throughout the country, at CIŻ Café, POLIN, and at the ŻIH’s bookstore in Warsaw. Initially, the magazine consisted of the following sections:

- The Jewish community of Wrocław. An interview of Chidusz. Pesach. Polish-Jewish relations. Society. Literature. Film. Health (February 2015);
- Culture. Israel. Between Judaism and Christianity. Literature. Anti-Semitism. Wrocław. The Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 2016);
- Wrocław. Jewish life in Poland. Raoul Wallenberg. Human rights. Literature. Yiddish. Israeli literature. History of music (April 2016).

¹ <https://chidusz.com/fundacja-zydowska-chidusz-gazeta-zydowska-magazyn-zydowski-chidusz/> (access 20.09.2019)

² Michał Bojanowski (Editor-in-chief), Katarzyna Andersz, Magdalena Wójcik, Mateusz Kamiński, Ula Rybicka, Dorota Kozłowska (Editorial Board). <https://chidusz.com/redakcja/> (access 20.09.2019)

³ <https://chidusz.com/> (access 20.09.2019)

In 2017, the rigid division into sections was abandoned. However, the general scope of the magazine can be grouped as follows:

- Polish-Jewish history
- The Jewish community of Wrocław: history and the present day
- Jewish identity
- The development of the Jewish community in Poland
- Israel and its politics
- Judaism
- Cultural events: cinema, theatre, conferences, books reviews, records and interviews with artists
- Social issues: in particular, refugees, protection of minorities and animal rights⁴.

Primarily, it must be noted that many texts (from 2014 to 2017) directly touch upon the problem of shaping Jewish identity. Particularly noteworthy are those of didactic nature, which, for example, contain instructions received from the Jewish community of Wrocław regarding the conversion process and a warm invitation to participate in community life⁵. Moreover, many short articles deal with particular aspects of religious life⁶, including discussions of Parshas, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' commentaries on the Torah. Every issue contains references to particular holidays according to the calendar. Some papers have an explanation of kosher principles, kosher recipes, Tzedakah and the Sabbath.

⁴ More in the article:...

⁵ T. Herberger, *Historia konwersji* ('The history of conversion'), "Chidusz" no. 1 (2014); T. Herberger, *14 kroków ku konwersji* ('14 steps to conversion') "Chidusz" no. 1 (2014).

⁶ Rabbi Herberger's educational text on the origins of Jewish holidays and their celebrations: e.g. Purim (March 2014); Pesach (April 2014), Shavuot (May 2014) and Hanukkah (December 2014); Informative and integrative texts enriched with photo reportage about the life of the community, such as: challah baking workshops; rabbis' stories about Hanukkah; photos from the children's party and performance at the Etz Chaim school (December 2014); the opening of the CIŻ Café (December 2014); the opening of the Small Synagogue in Wrocław (December 2015); and the Day of Mitzvah (the Volunteer Day at the Community) (November 2015).

Although the magazine represents the Orthodox Jewish religious community, it attempts to present a variety of views and forms of identification. For example, 'An interview with Irena Wiszniewska about her book entitled *My, Żydzi z Polski* [*We, Jews from Poland*]' by Jakub Berski concerns, among other things, the re-establishment of secular Jewish identity in Poland⁷.

Family life in "Chidusz"

Another important aspect to note is that the main topic of five magazine issues is – most generally speaking – modern Jewish family life. Their contents are characterised below.

Family life - the magazine's cover topics:

1. „Genderowe problemy” ('Gender issues'), the same title on the cover, author: Rabbi Tyson Herberger, February 2014 (No.4)
2. Żydowskie Wesele w Synagodze Pod Białym Bocianem ('A Jewish wedding in the White Stork Synagogue')
title on the cover, a series of articles, June 2014
3. „Jeden z dwóch ojców” ('One of two fathers'), an interview with an Israeli gay couple, author: Mateusz Kamiński, May 2015, pp. 12-16
title on the cover: "Gdzie rodzą się dzieci izraelskich gejów"
4. „In vitro po żydowsku” ('In vitro in the Jewish way'), the same title on the cover, an interview with the Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich, author: Michał Bojanowski, May 2016, pp. 4-6
5. „To samo od czterech tysięcy lat” ('The same thing for four thousand years') author: Katarzyna Andersz, an interview with Rabbi Michael Schudrich, pp. and „Małżeństwa mieszane – największy grzech judaizmu?” ('Mixed marriage: the worst sin in Judaism?') author: Rabin Seymour Rosenbloom, July 2017, pp.
title on the cover: **Małżeństwa mieszane – największe zagrożenie judaizmu?**

⁷ J. Berski, *Wywiad z Ireną Wiszniewską na temat jej książki My, Żydzi z Polski* ['An interview with Irena Wiszniewska about her book entitled *We, Jews from Poland*'], „Chidusz” no. 8 (2016).

1. Rabbi Herberger's article 'Gender issues' addresses issues related to contraception, the Jewish religion's approach to abortion, and women's participation and leadership in religious life. While it is didactic in nature, it presents a rather liberal approach to the issues discussed. Among other things, we read in it that "Judaism is a family-oriented religion. Be fruitful – this is one of the first commands directed by God to Adam and Eve (Bereszit 1:28) and our religion looks at the call to have children not only in the context of the first parents, but as a current commitment for us"⁸. This is exemplified in the attitude towards using contraception, which is explained as follows: "When for health reasons it is not advisable for a woman to become pregnant or have children at all, contraception not only can but should be used. The Talmud indicates the first months after the birth of the child and the period of breastfeeding, as two potential moments when contraception should be allowed, and in some cases indicated"⁹. Moreover, Judaism's position on abortion is clear: "If abortion can save a mother's life, everything must be done to save her life, even if it means losing a child. Deleting a pregnancy in this situation is not only acceptable but also necessary"¹⁰. The text has also been published in the English-language version of the magazine.
2. The second topic (June 2014) is a comprehensive reportage about the famous Jewish wedding of Katka Reszke and Sławomir Grunberg, which took place in June 2014, and includes an extensive biography of the couple („Kol Chatan we-kol Kala", 'just before the wedding'). There is also a poster announcing their wedding and the story of their relationship (June 2014). This was an important event for the entire Jewish community in Poland and it received wide media coverage. This issue also includes Michał Bojanowski's interview with a couple who married in 2000 ('Ellen Friedland about her wedding to Curt Fissel in Wrocław in 2000'). This

⁸ T. Herberger, *Genderowe problemy* ['Gender issues'], "Chidusz" no. 2 (2014), <https://chidusz.com/genderowe-problemy/> (access 20.11.2019)

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

couple – American documentarians – got married in Wrocław in order to draw global attention to the Jewish community in this city. It was a significant public event, gathering 600 people and a crowd of journalists. The newlyweds' dream was to see successive weddings and it came true only four years later. The issue also includes a didactic article entitled 'A Jewish wedding step by step' by Rabbi Tyson Herberger. While the problem of young marriages was highlighted in the May 2014 issue, it was no longer the cover topic. Subsequently, Danielle and David, a young Israeli couple, visited the community and decided to write a thank you letter for the nice reception they received; the young couple did not know much about Poland and were positively surprised at how well the Jewish community of Wrocław functioned. Two years later, Katarzyna Andersz wrote a lengthy interview with the same couple entitled 'From Jerusalem to Wrocław. The story of Danielle and David' (April 2016). It contains their warm and intimate memories about the period during which they met, as well as discussions of the work of *shaliyah* in Wrocław.

3. The article entitled 'One of two fathers' describes an alternative model of family life in Israel. This is a courageous and frank interview with an Israeli gay couple who have decided to use a surrogate in India. They share their experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, upbringing and their son's conversion, highlighting in particular the social and financial costs of their decision and describing the reactions of their families: "Every time something like this happens, the debate begins again. I am a pessimist, the previous government was supposed to do something, but after the election the matter died. I'm not even sorry, because the way they wanted to do it had so many restrictions that it could hurt surrogation abroad. I read this project, it was a bad law"¹¹. The interview can also be found in the special, English-language issue of the magazine.

¹¹ M. Kamiński, *Jeden z dwóch ojców* ['One of two fathers'], "Chidusz" no. 4 (2015), p. 14.

4. 'In vitro in the Jewish way' is the title of M. Bojanowski's interview with Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland. The rabbi reminds readers of the obligation to have children: "Hilel says there should be one girl and one boy. Shamaj that two boys and one girl. We should help everyone who wants to complete this mitzvah"¹². He further explains and discusses the issue of Judaism's consent to extracorporeal fertilisation, the use of another man's sperm and surrogacy. According to Judaism, life begins after birth and in vitro is not a waste of stem cells because of the importance of performing mitzvot. In all situations it is important to know who the mother is in order to prevent future incestuous relationships. The rabbi teaches that every case where there are problems having children should be analysed individually.
5. There are only a few traditional Jewish weddings in Poland each year and they are usually great events for the entire community. One of the latest issues of the magazine has been dedicated to mixed marriages. 'The same thing for four thousand years' is an interview with Rabbi Michael Schudrich, who represents the unchanging, negative attitude of Orthodox Judaism; in this view, Jews should be encouraged to marry Jewish partners and to persuade persons of non-Halakha origins to convert. In post-war Poland almost all marriages were mixed as many Jews married non-Jews because their origins were unknown, but now many people want to create a strong Jewish home. Rabbis should actively help young people find partners within the community; however, "responsibility lies not only with the rabbi, but also with the person who is looking for a wife or husband"¹³.

In the same issue, the editors have decided to present the opposite perspective. The article entitled 'Mixed marriage: the worst sin in Judaism?' has been written by the conservative Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom, who solemnised a marriage of a Jewish

¹² M. Bojanowski, *In vitro po żydowsku* ['In vitro in the Jewish way'], "Chidusz" no. 5 (2016), p. 4.

¹³ K. Andersz, *To samo od czterech tysięcy lat* ['The same thing for four thousand years'], "Chidusz" no. 5 (2017), p. 6.

woman and her non-Jewish fiancé and was therefore excluded from the Rabbinical Assembly. His arguments, which have been previously published in *The Washington Post*, centre around the fact that many children from mixed families choose Jewish identity. A couple will interpret a refusal to solemnise their marriage as rejection and will not continue to engage in the life of the Jewish community. Due to the growing number of exogamous marriages, the rabbi appeals for a more open and accepting attitude: “I believe that if a couple will have a Jewish wedding that will be run by a rabbi, it will increase the likelihood that they will build their home and family in the future, guided by Jewish values”¹⁴.

Attention should also be paid to three other articles that present different models of family life in Israel. ‘Invisible demons. What do ultra-Orthodox Jews believe in and how do they live?’ is an interview with a sociology professor about ultra-Orthodoxy, *chozrim be-tszuma* (lay people who become very religious), and the upbringing of children within this community¹⁵. A second article entitled ‘They were to be the future of Israel’ is an interview with Yael Neeman¹⁶, author of the book *We were the Future* and Ran Taz, author of the documentary *Children of the Sun*. It describes the traditional kibbutz education system and its educational ideals. Moreover, further information about Jewish family life can be found in a review of the film *The Trial of Viviane Amsalem*, which has become a pretext for Katarzyna Andersz¹⁷ to debate the divorce law in Israel, women’s powerlessness against jurisdiction and the concept of civil divorces.

¹⁴ K. Andersz, *Małżeństwa mieszane – największy grzech judaizmu?* [‘Mixed marriage: the worst sin in Judaism?’] “Chidusz” no. 5 (2017), p. 11.

¹⁵ K. Andersz K., *Wymyślone demony. W co wierzą i jak żyją ultraortodoksyjni Żydzi* [‘Invisible demons. What do ultra-Orthodox Jews believe in and how do they live?’], *Chidusz*, 7 (2015).

¹⁶ K. Andersz, M. Bojanowski, *Mieli być przyszłością Izraela* [‘They were to be the future of Israel’], *Chidusz*, no. 7 (2017).

¹⁷ K. Andersz, *Być kobietą w Izraelu – o filmie Viviane chce się rozwieść*, *Chidusz*, 3 (2015).

Summary

To sum up, "Chidusz" discusses important, current and courageous topics, including many that directly relate to family issues. Texts usually are written by members of the editorial board in rather informative and balanced or open style. It seems that young people who want to enrich and develop their identity will surely find 'signposts', while those looking for more detailed information about a Jewish wedding and how to set up a family according to the Judaic tradition will also find some tips.

"Chidusz" also considers some model marriages and the requirements of Judaism concerning family life. It does not shy away from alternative forms of family life and polemic topics (e.g. homosexual adoption, surrogacy), and attention is drawn to changes taking place in Orthodox Judaism (e.g. gender, divorces). The magazine also partakes in the crucial discussion about the contemporary family crisis of mixed marriages, highlighting two different and opposite sides.

Although family life as such is not the main topic (after all, the magazine's profile is very broad), it has featured on the cover several times. Of particular importance is that, although this would not be the case for every issue, young people of Jewish descent will certainly discover some interesting information about modern Jewish lifestyle and trends and they will expand their knowledge.

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